Multiple Understandings of Executive Coaching:
An exploratory study of Irish experiences

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2010

Acknowledgements

Structure of this Document

Multiple Understandings of Executive Coaching: an Exploratory Study of Irish Experiences (Document 5), was the thesis document defended at the viva voce. As such, it is the major component of this DBA and possibly of most interest to readers; therefore it takes pride of place in the order of presentation. Preceding documents (1-4) and the final reflective journal (Document 6) follow on from Document 5.

Abstract

This research study explores executives' perceptions of factors that impede and facilitate the effectiveness of a coaching intervention designed to enhance leadership skills. It also explores research participants' perceptions of the effectiveness of the intervention. Because research studies have rarely given prominence to the voice of the executive (Kilburg, 2004, Lowman, 2005, Turner, 2006; Styhre, 2008), this aspect of coaching is still largely unexplored, thus the purpose of the research is to bring the voice of the executives to the fore via an instrumental case study whose focus is the experiences of the executives.

A large indigenous Irish company facilitated the research, which took place in Dublin. The research design is a series of in-depth, semi-structured interviews with a cohort of four executives who had engaged in a pilot coaching programme, with the HR Director who initiated the coaching intervention, with the Coach, and with the Divisional CEO whose budget paid for the coaching. The executives' stories are told via a 'montage' of rich descriptions of their views on the organisation, their leader, and their coaching experiences. The views of the other players, (HR Director, Coach and CEO) are presented independently.

A review of current literature on executive coaching discusses recent research studies and notes the dominance of North American research and the dearth of studies that address executives' perspectives. The literature reviews salient inputs to the coaching process: the role of the organisation, the skill sets of the coach, and the readiness of executives to be coached.

The research found that coaching yielded a number of positive outcomes for all executives, although perceptions of gains varied across all research participants; the most significant evaluation discrepancy was between the HR Director and the CEO. While the Coach had many strengths, which were acknowledged by all executives, his description of his 'structured' approach was at variance with that experienced by the executives, some of whom were frustrated by lack of continuity and by his failure to measure progress. The CEO, who had also taken part in the coaching programme, was particularly frustrated by what he saw as the lack of engagement by the Coach. Neither the executives nor the CEO challenged the Coach to change his approach. A key finding was that neither the Coach nor the Organisation (as represented by the HR Director and the CEO) managed the process to produce a satisfactory results oriented experience for all the executives.

The findings from this research study inform a conceptual framework that highlights the facilitators and inhibitors of executive coaching as articulated by the stakeholders to the coaching programme. The findings have practical implications for coaches, HR professionals and executives on how to behave in a coaching situation and the study adds to the body of knowledge on what facilitates and hinders the success of executive coaching and the factors that influence executives' evaluation of the coaching process.

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Chapter 1:   The story so far…

1.1   Introduction

This DBA is concerned with the topic of Executive Coaching. Executive coaching could be described as a series of one-to-one interactions between a coach external to the organisation and an executive, with a view to holistically enhancing the functioning ability of the executive, for the benefit of the company. My interest in Executive Coaching as a topic for the DBA came from my academic interest in the area of personal development, which was fuelled by attending a hands-on Executive Coaching Diploma Course. A HR Director of a major Irish company, C&C, a cohort of mine on this course, had introduced executive coaching as part of the effort to broaden the perspective of his top team and prepare them for the company going public. The HR Director had a keen interest in executive coaching as a developmental tool and although he was not particularly interested in measuring the results of coaching, he agreed to facilitate my research.

1.2   Documents 1 and 2

For Document 1, my initial research proposal was concerned with the barriers and facilitators of executive coaching, but this subsequently changed to an interest in how executives experienced the coaching process. The change in direction fell out of the critical literature review (Document 2) where eminent authors (Kilburg, 1997, 2000; Lowman, 2005; Stevens, 2005) called for the voice of the executive to be heard, in addition to the more dominant voices of practitioners.   (A brief overview of Document 2's critical literature review is included in an update of the literature presented in Chapter 2).

The conceptual model overleaf, formulated as part of Document 2's critical literature review, was theoretically derived from a synthesis of research findings and viewpoints proposed by scholars who suggested that several inputs influenced the effectiveness of executive coaching (Hall et al., 1999; Knudson, 2002; Joo, 2005). These inputs included qualities of the coach, qualities of the executive, the nature of the coach/coachee relationship, aspects of the coaching process, and organisational support. When these inputs were in place, executive coaching was likely to yield positive outcomes, which were represented in the Ideal Outcomes column of the model.

Figure 1: Document 2's Conceptual Framework

Critical Inputs		Ideal Outcomes

Critical Inputs

Qualities of the Coach:
- Coaching skills
- Business acumen
- Psychological Insight

Qualities of the Executive
- Motivation
- Expectations
- Responsiveness to feedback

Dyadic Relationship
- Mutual respect
- Trust

Coaching Process:
- Contracting
- Challenging feedback

Organisational Support
- Learning climate
- HR and Superior support

→ IMPACT ON EXECUTIVE COACHING →

Ideal Outcomes
- Positive Affect
- Self-Awareness
  ▼
- Learning
  ▼
- Behavioural Change
  ▼
- Organisational Performance
  ▼
- Career Success

1.3 Document 3

Based on the conceptual framework formulated from the critical literature review, Document 3's research study sought to explore executives' perceptions of the inputs that affect a successful coaching intervention and to identify the outcomes that executives associated with coaching. A series of six propositions based around the critical inputs, e.g. 'A high level of support from HR and senior management will encourage executives to apply new learning and experiment with new behaviours', shaped the thrust of the interview questions.

Interviews with seven Dublin based executives followed a-priori themes reflected in the conceptual framework. An interview with one of the coaches working in the organisation and an interview with the HR Director himself provided a context within which to place the executives' experiences. The research, with its emphasis on understanding how executives experienced coaching, took an interpretative approach. Subsequent to engaging in executive coaching, several of the executives had also taken part in another leadership development programme designed to enhance emotional intelligence. Unfortunately, it was difficult for

them to separate the impact of the leadership development programme that focused on emotional intelligence from the impact of executive coaching. Thus, although the interest of the research study was in stand-alone executive coaching, aspects of the findings reflected executives' assessments of an emotional intelligence leadership development programme that was supported by coaching.

Briefly, Document 3's research found that Executives' perceptions largely validated the concepts in the conceptual framework. The pilot coaching programme within C&C, entitled executives to three coaching sessions (what the coach described as 'just a taster'). All coaches were trained psychologists, the company had contracts in place, but did not attempt any formal monitoring of the coaching process, and no feedback went from the coach to the company. This finding was at odds with the strong contention that HR personnel should structure and monitor the coaching process (Knudson, 2002). The majority of executives enjoyed the coaching experience and attributed a range of positive outcomes to the coaching, although only one executive acknowledged a quantifiable performance related outcome and he tended to credit this to a better understanding of negotiation skills gained from an on-line aspect of the emotional intelligence course. None of the executives associated coaching with career promotions.

1.4 Document 4

Document 4 was a piece of quantitative research based on the results of an employee climate survey issued by C&C in 2006, which was a follow-on to a survey issued in 2004. In the interregnum between 2004 and 2006, the top team had been coached with a view to changing their management style. Document 4 sought to identify whether direct reports of coached executives experienced more job satisfaction, greater organisational commitment and advocacy and were better satisfied with their managers' and leaders' behaviours than the rest of the work force. While the conceptual framework did not address third-party assessments of change brought about by coaching, it seemed reasonable to assume that the evaluations of direct reports should reflect enhanced leadership skills that resulted in higher levels of satisfaction, commitment and advocacy. A review of leadership theory informed this research. At the time of the survey, the company employed 1760 people and seven hundred and sixty two (762) surveys were returned (a 43% response rate). Survey questions addressed areas of task efficiency (transactional leadership) and human relation processes associated with emotional intelligence and transformational leadership, which are some of the

possible outcomes from executive coaching. The survey also included a section that addressed visionary and strategic leadership, concepts associated with transformational leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1990; Jones & George, 2007).

Limitations of the research

This particular survey, although relevant in many ways, was not designed specifically for eliciting outcomes from executive coaching or gauging the extent of transformational leadership processes. In addition to the subjective nature of managerial evaluation, design flaws such as the structure of questions and the nature and range of responses militated against the survey's effectiveness. Another confounding issue was the veracity of the response set, e.g. eighty staff designated themselves as E Band, more than twice the number of actual E Band executives. Thus all responses from E Band executives were suspect and had to be discarded.

Findings

The research found that, for all workers (n=762), the most important job factors were pay, job security and career development; managers scored well on transactional aspects of leadership and on some transformational aspects, e.g. they were at their strongest in terms of supportive leadership. The findings from Document 4 did not support the hypothesis that direct reports (S1 managers) of coached executives (E Band managers) would exhibit greater job satisfaction, more commitment and more advocacy than the rest of the workforce. While managers differed significantly from other staff in their evaluations of managerial and leadership behaviour, there were no statistical differences in evaluations among categories of managers. Senior management shone in one area – 70% of workers thought they had a clear vision of where the company was going. This is ironic in view of what subsequently happened to the company following poor strategic decisions.

A stumbling block

Post Supervisors' feedback on Document 4, I made contact with the HR Director of C&C Group Plc. to offer him a summary of Document 4's findings and to enquire about pursuing the relationship between direct-report sentiment and executive coaching. Unfortunately, between receiving the survey results and completing Document 4, the company structure had changed radically and only a single division remained. Staff numbers, circa 1760 at the time of the survey, were now down to 650. The climate was one of suspicion and antagonism and it was the view of the HR Director that people would not be interested in facilitating research at that time. In October 2008, following disastrous financial results, the Group CEO resigned

to allow a successor to devise a fresh strategy for the company (by this time the company's share prices had fallen from a high of almost €13.90 to a low of €1.02, and the value of the company had fallen from €4.5 billion to €400 million).

1.5   Document 5

Following some successful networking, I was invited to pursue my research within a Division of another indigenous Irish company, to which I have given the pseudonym M&V. Because this company had recently introduced an executive coaching programme at Director level, I now had a second opportunity to give voice to executives' perceptions of coaching, a perspective for which writers continued to call (Turner, 2006; Styhre, 2008).

This research study presents the coaching experiences of senior executives within a Division of M&V. It also presents the views of the Division's CEO and HR Director, and the philosophy and approach of the external Coach who was employed to coach at Director level. During interviews with Directors of the Division, I was made aware that coaching had been cascaded through the Division and that middle and junior managers had had the benefit of coaching provided by coaches external to the organisation. Thanks to the good auspices of some of the Directors, and the co-operation of staff and coaches, I had the opportunity to interview four staff at middle management level and their coach, and four staff at junior management level and their coach. While I was tempted to compare and contrast the experiences of staff within the Division and the different coaching approaches, I was also aware that only the Directors met the true meaning of executives in the extent of their influence within the company and the autonomy of their decision taking (Olson, 2008). Thus this particular research study focuses on the experiences and evaluations of stakeholders to an executive coaching programme.

While the conceptual framework developed from Document 2 (Figure 1) had served me well in providing *a priori* themes that guided the research for Documents 3 and 4, for Document 5, I wanted to take an approach that would be open to recognising fresh themes that might emerge from the research (Charmaz, 2006). Thus, although the *a priori* themes were inevitably in my consciousness, I took an open approach to the interviews and the subsequent data analysis (Chapter 3 expands on my approach) with a view to developing an inductively conceived framework that would reflect the findings from Document 5's research.

The Structure of Document 5

Following on from this introductory chapter, Chapter 2 provides a review and update of the executive coaching literature and a context for the research questions that seek to:

- Explore executives' perceptions of the factors that impeded and facilitated the effectiveness of the coaching intervention
- Explore research participants' perceptions of the effectiveness of the coaching intervention

As the research questions suggest and the methodology Chapter 3 details, my research approach fits within the interpretivist paradigm. Research is based on a series of interviews with a quartet of senior executives who experienced coaching as part of a leadership development programme. In addition to the voices of the executives, the context is enriched by interviews with the HR Director who initiated the coaching, the Coach who coached all the executives, and the Divisional CEO whose budget paid for the coaching.

Chapter 4 presents the perceptions of all research participants via 'thick descriptions' (Stake, 1995) of their experiences and their evaluations of executive coaching. The Discussion Chapter relates the interviews to theory and practice as documented in the literature and concludes with a revised conceptual framework that reflects the coaching experiences of M&V's research participants. The final chapter offers conclusions, recommendations and implications for practice that should inform all parties to the coaching process.

Chapter 2   A Review of Executive Coaching Literature

2.1   Introduction

This literature review is concerned with providing an update and critical review of executive coaching literature. Its focus is on literature written since 2006. The Chapter starts by briefly revisiting the critical literature review undertaken for Document 2. This provides a context for considering recent trends within the literature and for commenting on a number of (mainly North American) research studies. Many of these studies continue to gauge the impact of executive coaching.

Because this research study is concerned with the coaching experiences of executives, and also with how parties to the coaching process influence its impact, the final sections of the Chapter suggest an appropriate definition for executive coaching within the context of this study, and consider how the roles and characteristics of this coaching triad (HR, Coach and Executive) impact on the coaching process.

2.2   Revisiting Document 2's Literature Review

The critical literature review undertaken for Document 2 found that writings on executive coaching tended to be practitioner dominated (i.e. written by coaches, many of whom were psychologists) and the majority of articles appeared in practice journals (Joo, 2005). Authors who reviewed the extant literature (Kilburg, 1996; Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001; Kilburg, 2004; Feldman & Lankau, 2005; Joo, 2005) commented on the rise of executive coaching as a topic for practitioner articles. They agreed that the focus tended to be on definitions and distinctions of executive coaching, on the purpose or rationale for executive coaching, on coaching competencies, on recipients of executive coaching, and on practitioner case-studies that illustrated coaching in action.

Research studies provided data that supported different aspects of the efficacy of executive coaching (Gegner, 1997; Hall et al., 1999; Laske, 1999; Kampa-Kokesch, 2001; Paige, 2002; Thatch, 2002; Luthans & Peterson, 2003; Smither et al., 2003; Wasylyshyn, 2003; Blow, 2005; Stevens, 2005) but commentators, generally, were disappointed with the nature and quality of this empirical research (Kilburg, 1996, 2004; Lowman, 2005; Grant, 2005);

furthermore, many writers contended that little empirical research had been conducted on the practice of executive coaching *per se* (Kilburg, 1996, 2004; Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001; Orenstein, 2002; Sherman & Freas, 2004, Joo, 2005). Both Stevens (2005) and Lowman (2005) made the point that practitioners can be mistaken in their interpretation of interventions and called for more research into client perspectives. The case study presented in Document 3 went some way to answer that call.

2.3   The literature from 2006 to early 2009

Themes in the literature

This section provides an update on the review presented in Document 2. Three databases, Business Source Premier, Emerald Management Review, and PsycINFO were used to source articles on executive coaching. Pertinent references from articles found on these databases were sourced and read. There was considerable overlap across databases and the final screening yielded fifty (50) articles of variable depth and quality, e.g. viewpoints, literature reviews, conceptual papers, and research studies. Two journals produced special editions on executive coaching (*Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, Volume 60, Issue 1 and *Development and Learning in Organizations*, Volume 22, No. 4). Authors of recently published books on coaching include O'Neill, (2007), Underhill, McNally & Koriath (2007), Stern, (2008), and Garvey, Stokes & Megginson (2009).

Opinion papers were concerned with: succession planning (Hill, 2009); distinctions between coaching and mentoring (Clutterbuck, 2008); the benefits of executive group coaching (Ward, 2008); myths about coaching (Battley, 2007a); when to call in an executive coach (Battley, 2007b); executive 'complexes' that coaches can expect to encounter (Kets de Vries, 2007); how to measure the effectiveness of executive coaching (MacKie, 2007); executive coaching and cross cultural contexts (Peterson, 2007; Donnison, 2008); how coaches who specialise in psychology need to be cognisant of business issues (Berman & Bradt, 2006); coach certification and selection (McCleary, 2006) and the role of executive coaching in performance management (Kaufman, 2006). Most of these articles offer advice to either HR or coaches on how to improve the coaching process, although Battley's (2007a) focus is on the executive and how he/she needs to behave to get most benefit from coaching.

Conceptual papers addressed the question of ontology, reflection and double-loop learning (Duffy, 2008); the role of feedback in executive coaching relationships (Gregory, Levy & Jeffers, 2008); understanding implicit models that guide the coaching process (Barner & Higgins, 2007); how coaching enhances sense-making (Du Toit, 2007); how an integrated model of executive coaching can enable the coach to work seamlessly at multiple levels: behavioural, cognitive, and unconscious (Passmore, 2007); how understanding the impact of positive and negative emotions on intention can enhance coaching (Howard, 2006); how a model of transformational learning can underpin and inform the coaching process (Gray, 2006); how the assessment coaching interview can be adapted to different coaching requirements (Barnes, 2006). Perhaps unsurprisingly, all of these conceptual papers target practitioners. Four interesting papers (Duffy, 2008; Du Toit, 2007; Howard, 2006 and Gray, 2006) propose coaching approaches that enhance reflexivity and raise self-awareness. These articles raise the possibility of comparing these approaches with the approach taken by the M&V coach.

Views on executive coaching research

Recent commentaries suggest that research into executive coaching still falls short of expectations (Passmore & Gibbes, 2007; Olson, 2008; Stewart, O'Riordan & Palmer, 2008; Garvey et al., 2009). Garvey et al's (2009: 40) review of coaching research studies (not specifically executive coaching) found them to be 'fragmented, partisan, and impressionistic'. Olson (2008:156) contends that while the evidence may look impressive, and 'most of us assume that what we read is true', there is 'considerable reuse of anecdotal evidence'. He references Kilburg's view (2004:207) that coaching practitioners are becoming 'permanent residents of the empirical realms of Dodoville' because irrespective of the coaching approach, 'positive, non-specific effects' are achieved. Kilburg suggests that this happens because 'The majority of humans who welcome the influence of other people in their lives appear to achieve more or less permanent positive results' (Ibid). Olson's view is that 'Unfortunately, much of the research has serious methodological flaws'. He goes on to mention concerns about construct validity, spurious correlations and insufficient visual data inspection and refers to Passmore & Gibbes's (2007) view that executive coaching research is not yet ready for a meta-analysis (Olson, 2008:156). Interestingly, in this article titled 'A Review of Assumptions in Executive Coaching', Olson does not explicitly disclose his own assumptions but he emphasises the relational role of executives who leverage whole system through their relationships with others and the need for executive coaches to take a

systemic approach. He also takes a benevolent view of particular pieces of qualitative research (Orenstein, 2006; Turner, 2006; Kilburg & Levinson, 2008) which he suggests provide 'an interesting break from anecdotes and correlations' (Ibid).

Passmore & Gibbes (2007) note that the research published since Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson's literature review in 2001 has helped to build a wider literature base about the efficacy of coaching. In a manner similar to the earlier reviews, they describe and comment on this executive coaching research and on some life coaching research. They make three 'generic criticisms' of the 16 studies they reviewed: sample size was small, most failed to use a control group and they lacked a random allocation to groups (Passmore & Gibbes, 2007:122). They go on to suggest that: 'If real progress is to be made, the research needs to be with samples of 100+ participants in randomised control studies and this may be achieved through the involvement of professional bodies' (*Ibid:* 125). Such research falls within the 'scientific' positivist paradigm and is unlikely to focus on the voice of the executive, which is where my interest lies. Furthermore, in the real world of business, it would be difficult to engage in trials that control for all variables (MacKie, 2007).

Eighteen (18) research studies are summarised in Table 1, overleaf, and a thumbnail sketch of these, plus some further research studies, are presented in Appendix A.

Table 1: Summary of a selection of recent research

Focus of Research	Author	Sample Size	Methods	Findings
Aspects of Coaching outcomes	Orenstein (2006) **US Study**	One senior exec. and 20 raters	Statistical analysis of Empathic Organic Questionnaire +	Coaching outcomes match coaching agenda
	Turner (2006) **US Study**	Not specified. Uses excerpts from 3 interviews to illustrate findings.	Semi-structured interviews	Executives identify five benefits, 4 limitations and 3 critical success factors
	Wasylyshyn, Gronsky & Haas (2006) **US Study**	33 coached execs. and 44 line-managers	Coaching programme followed by survey	Sustained learning and behavioural change in aspects of emotional competence
	Libre & Kemp (2006) **Australian Study**	One 30 year old male	Single case study	Cognitive-Behavioural Coaching Programme enhanced core self-evaluation, and global self-ratings of performance
	Schlosser, Streinbrenner, Kumata & Hunt (2006) **US Study**	Total respondents: 140	On-line survey plus some follow-up interviews	Coaches, coachees and managers differ in their targets for coaching. Managers are sceptical about results. Voice of manager needs to be heard in the coaching process.
	Jones, Rafferty & Griffin (2006) **Australian Study**	Published results concern 11 leaders who completed all surveys	Repeated measures design – pre, during, and post coaching surveys	Self-reported flexibility increased throughout the duration of the coaching
	Bowles, Cunningham, De La Rosa, Picano (2007) **US Study**	59 US Army recruiting managers at middle and executive level	Pre and post evaluation	Coached managers outperformed uncoached, but experienced counterparts. Strongest impact was on middle managers.
	Cortvriend, Harris & Alexander (2008) **UK Study**	36 senior mgrs. on leadership development programme	Pre-and post coaching surveys, plus 10 semi-structured interviews	Coaching enhances well-being and reduces stress, as well as fostering a more transformational style of leadership
Aspects of coaching out-comes contd.	Kombarakaran, Yang, Baker & Fernandes, (2008)	114 executives, 42 experienced coaches took part in	Post coaching, two separate web-based research instruments were	Coaching improved people management, relationships with managers, prioritiza

		programme to support executives during an acquisition	used to capture the perceptions of coaches and coachees.	-tion, engagement , productivity and communication. The study found a need for greater participation and support from managers for the coaching process.
	US Study based on Multinational Corporation			
	Styhre (2008) **Swedish Research**	6 site managers and coach	Managers were interviewed 3 times during the coaching; Coach was interviewed mid-way and at the end of programme.	Managers were given fresh ways of looking at problems (second-order observations). Managers appreciated having someone with whom to discuss their problems.
Coaching Relationship	Alvey & Barclay (2007) **US Study**	27 senior executives	Interviews	Trust was influenced by the interplay of relational, situational, and behavioural factors.
	Baron & Morin (2009) **Canadian study**	73 managers; 24 coaches; yielding 31 coaching dyads. Coaches were internal managers who had been 'certified' as coaches.	One group pre-test, post-test design; data collection via questionnaires	Coach-coachee relationship plays a mediating role in development of coachees' self-efficacy. Other influencing factors are coach's self-efficacy, coachee's motivation, perception of supervisor support, and number of coaching sessions.
HR professionals' perceptions of executive coaching	Dagley (2006) **Australian Study**	17 participants located in Melbourne, Australia	Face-to-face structured interviews based on 20 page questionnaire	All programmes at least moderately successful; many benefits for executives, some for organisation.
Coaching needs of high achievers	Jones & Spooner (2006) **UK Study**	7 Coaches; 14 high achievers from sport and business	Semi-structured interviews in person and by phone	High achievers are demanding. Coaching relationship must be built on trust and respect. Coach must be challenging and add value quickly.
Coaching practice	Liljenstrand & Nebeker (2008) **US Study**	2231 usable surveys from coaches (an estimated 25% of sample)	Web-based survey to discover how a coach's academic background is related to other coaching characteristics and practices.	Coaches from five different groups approach coaching differently and offer their services to different target markets.

	de Haan, 2008(C&C) **Netherlands**	60 relatively inexperienced coaches	Coaches 'reported' 56 critical incidents as part of coaching course assignment	Coaches experience doubts (instrumental, relational and existential) during the coaching process. Coaches learn from critical moments. CPD and supervision may help coaches deal with doubts.
	de Haan (2008c) **Netherlands**	47 experienced coaches responded	78 critical incidents reported	Quality of the experienced coach's work is influenced by ability to tolerate tension within the coaching relationship
	Bono et al. (2009) **US Study**	428 coaches	Surveys	There are as many differences between psychologists of different disciplines as between psychologist and non psychologist coaches.

As Table 1 illustrates, the majority of research studies originated in North America, two in Australia, 6 in Europe, of which two originated in the UK. No Irish research came to my attention. Authors were a mix of coaching psychologists, consultant coaches, academics and academic consultants.

De Haans's 2008 C&C papers report on the same research project which covers four years of critical coaching moments related by sixty (60) Dutch coaching course participants. Because the critical incidents were translated from Dutch to English, it is possible that some nuances were lost. Concerning the methods used in the studies, four studies used mixed methods (Wasylyshyn et al., 2006; Schlosser et al., 2006; Cortvriend et al., 2008; Kombarakaran et al., 2008); six relied on statistical analysis (Jones et al., 2006; Orenstein, 2006; Bowles et al., 2007; Liljenstrand & Nebeker, 2008; Baron & Morin, 2009; Bono et al., 2009). The remaining eight studies used a qualitative approach (Dagley, 2006; Jones & Spooner, 2006; Libre & Kemp, 2006; Turner, 2006; Styhre, 2008; Alvey & Barclay, 2007; de Hann, 2008 C&C, 2008c). Thus it would appear that the majority of studies used some element of qualitative research. No research study met Passmore & Gibbes (2007) call for a control group, although quite a few provided measurable outcomes via pre-coaching benchmarks and post-coaching evaluations (Jones et al., 2006; Orenstein, 2006; Wasylyshyn et al., 2006;

Bowles, et al., 2007; Cortvriend et al., 2008; Styhre, 2008; Baron & Morin, 2009). Very few (perhaps three) studies gave any worthwhile voice to the executive (Turner, 2006; Wasylyshyn et al, 2006; Styhre, 2008). Although Turner's article failed to provide a sample size, it did contain many instances of executives giving voice to how they felt about aspects of coaching. However, taken as a unit, the research gave little insight into the practice of executive coaching from the executive's perspective.

Despite de Haan's (2008a: 528) contention that there is a 'diminishing interest' in outcome studies, the majority of recent studies focused on aspects of positive executive coaching outcomes. Stewart et al. (2008) suggest that coaching evaluation should have two broad aims; one is to explore the effectiveness of the coaching intervention, and the second is to explore how coaching works and what factors influence its effectiveness. This research study recounts the coaching experiences of five executives and documents the factors that influenced their perceptions of its effectiveness, thus adding to the scarce supply of articles that bring the voice of the executive to the fore.

Conclusion

The body of empirical research supporting executive coaching as a positive intervention is growing (Passmore & Gibbes, 2007), although scholars and practitioners continue to lament about aspects of its quality (Passmore & Gibbes, 2007; Olson, 2008; Garvey, et al., 2009). While Olson (2008) is positive about particular pieces of qualitative research, various methodological shortcomings have led to calls for more rigorous research that focuses on large numbers and control groups (Passmore & Gibbes, 2007). It could be argued that this approach reflects a positivist philosophy that there is an external reality waiting to be captured via statistical analysis. This view is at odds with the interpretivist methods that underpin this research study where my objective is to give voice to research participants' subjective multiple realities, and not to privilege any one viewpoint.

What is most noticeable about recent research studies is the dominance of North American perspectives and the role of consultants and practitioner coaches in conducting this research. What is most noticeable by their absence are studies that give voice to executives. Within the review of recent research studies only three provided access to rich descriptions of executive coaching.

The remainder of this literature review proposes a definition of executive coaching that approximates how the process worked within M&V. It revisits three salient determinants of executive coaching effectiveness: the role of HR in deploying executive coaching as a leadership intervention strategy, qualities of the coach and qualities of the executives.

2.4   Defining Executive Coaching

As part of the original critical literature review, Document 2 explored definitions of executive coaching (Kilburg, 1996; Peterson, 1996; Executive Coaching Forum Handbook, 2004) and also explored the difficulty of establishing executive coaching as a concept distinct from other helping relationships such as counselling, therapy and mentoring (Kilburg, 1996; Stern, 2004; Feldman & Lankau, 2005). Perhaps unsurprisingly, these themes are still prevalent in recent publications (Olson, 2008; Garvey et al, 2009; Hamlin, Ellinger & Beattie, 2009).

I would agree with Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson's (2001) contention that Kilburg's (1996) much cited definition of executive coaching is a fair representation of what much of the literature describes as executive coaching:

> Executive coaching is a helping relationship formed between a client who has managerial authority and responsibility in an organization and a consultant who uses a wide variety of behavioural techniques and methods to help the client achieve a mutually identified set of goals to improve his or her professional performance and personal satisfaction, and, consequently, to improve the effectiveness of the client's organization within a formally defined coaching agreement.
> (Kilburg, 1996:142)

In the context of the ongoing debate about coach credentialisation, it is retrospectively interesting that Kilburg's definition uses the term consultant, rather than coach. However, Sperry (2008:35), who contends that executive coaching is 'more properly a role function than a profession or identity', in his most recent definition talks about a 'trained professional' who functions as a facilitator (*Ibid:*36). Both men seem shy about calling a coach a coach.

For the purpose of this paper, I consider the following definition offered in the *Executive Coaching Handbook* (2008) apt for this research study:

> *Executive coaching is an experiential, individualized, leadership development process that builds a leader's capability to achieve short and long-term organizational goals. It is conducted through one-on-one and/or group interactions, driven by data from multiple perspectives, and based on mutual trust and respect. The organization, an executive, and the executive coach work in partnership to achieve maximum learning.*
> *Executive Coaching Handbook* (2008:19)

The Handbook's definition acknowledges the coach, recognizes leadership development as an important part of the process, places emphasis on the triadic nature of executive coaching and recognises that the organisation needs to benefit from the coaching. The Handbook explains that building leader capability is concerned with **'**developing new ways of thinking, feeling, acting, learning, leading, and relating to others' which 'builds individual and organizational effectiveness' (Executive Coaching Handbook, 2008:20). The definition mirrors ways in which M&V envisioned the coaching process.

2.5   The Role of HR

Introduction

This section considers the role of HR professionals in using executive coaching as a leadership development strategy. It briefly looks at the nature of leadership development and places executive coaching within the spectrum of leadership development options (Gray, 2006; CIPD, 2007). HR executives receive much advice on how to enhance the coaching process (Knudson, 2002; Kombarakaran et al., 2008) but they also have their own concerns about cost and value (Bluckert, 2005a; Clutterbuck, 2008).

Leadership development approaches

Many authors offer suggestions on how companies should organise leadership development and succession management interventions (Groves, 2007; Leskiw & Singh, 2007; Hill, 2009). Best practice leader development practices propose that companies should conduct a thorough needs assessment, select suitable candidates for development throughout the organisation, design appropriate infrastructure and learning systems to support the development initiative, put in place measures for evaluating outcomes, and take action to reward success and improve on deficiencies (Leskiw & Singh, 2007).

Day's much referenced review of leadership development (2001) raises the issue of *leader* development as distinct from *leadership* development. Leader development is an individual process that focuses on developing human capital (the emphasis is on individual-based knowledge, skills and abilities), while leadership development is diffuse and focuses on

developing social capital. Day suggests that, ideally, an organisation should take a two-prong approach and develop both human and social capital simultaneously. However, Goldsmith (2008: 101) suggests that 'the marginal gain for helping a highly successful person move from the 'top 5 percent' to the 'top 1 percent' may be greater (to the organization) than the gain from helping the average performer move from the 'top 50 percent' to the 'top 20 percent'. This appears to imply that the organisation has more to gain from adopting a human capital approach.

Scholars view leadership development as progressive. Lord & Hall (2005) see leadership development moving through stages, from novice leader, through intermediate to expert leader with concomitant changes in how leaders think about themselves as leaders (their identity level), and how they handle tasks, social and emotional issues, reach evaluative judgements and are concerned with values. At each progressive stage of leadership, these abilities reach a higher level. Lord & Hall's view of leadership development seems ideally suited to a coaching approach. At a more mundane, but still debatable level (Hollenbeck, McCall, & Silzer, 2006), leader development is frequently based around competency models. Hogan & Warrenfeltz (2003) talk about all competency models being reducible to four competency domains, intrapersonal skills (self-regulation and self-management), interpersonal skills (building and maintaining positive relationships), leadership skills (building teams, having and selling a vision to the team, getting team to achieve the vision) and business skills (communicating, following-up, planning, scheduling, managing budgets and resources). They suggest that these four domains cover the gambit of management education. They also make the point that although business skills may be easier to acquire, in the 'absence of reasonable leadership skills, good business skills won't really matter' (*Ibid*: 80). Garvey et al (2009) take issue with the notion of objectives based on competency models underpinning coaching conversations and see them as a means by which HR departments may seek 'to control what may legitimately be discussed in the privacy of the development dyad' (*Ibid:* 158). It could be argued that Hogan & Warrenfeltz's broad-brush approach to competencies allows coaching conversations to develop in many directions.

While leadership development can take many forms (Hartley & Hinksman, 2003), Gray (2006:475) contends that coaching is becoming 'one of the most significant approaches to the professional development of senior managers and executives'; this view is supported by other research findings (Longnecker & Fink, 2006; O'Connor et al., 2006; CIPD, 2007).

Companies are now less likely to use executive coaching in a remedial context (Lambert, 2008) and more likely to use it as a fast-track developmental intervention (Alfman, 2007, Johnson, 2007) that is sometimes viewed as a status symbol, rather than a stigma (Holloway, 2006). Johnson (2007) suggests that the demand for executive coaching can be explained by the way in which the rate of change favours speed and reduces the usefulness of traditional mentoring approaches and off-site courses.

Recent UK (Lambert, 2008) and Irish (O'Connor et al., 2006) research has found that companies have increased their focus on leadership and talent development, and have improved overall staff development. However, the Irish research found that much of this development was reactive, *ad hoc,* and supplied on a 'needs basis' (O'Connor, et al., 2006: 346). Cappelli (2008: 76) suggests that, in a volatile business environment, this may be the wisest approach and he recommends developing 'fewer people than you might need', and hiring in the rest. (O'Connor et al's 2006 data was collected in 2003 during the 'Celtic Tiger' period; today, Irish organisations are struggling to survive and are now even more likely to invest on a 'needs basis' only, and to favour Capelli's approach).

Managing the coaching process

HR personnel play a significant role in facilitating a coaching intervention and authors are not shy about offering advice on what this role entails, and how HR departments should design and conduct their coaching interventions (Knudson, 2002; Sherman & Freas, 2004; Chidiac, 2006). Knudson (2002) advises that: HR should frame the coaching objectives, ensure alignment with business needs, identify particular individuals or sets of individuals, select coaches wisely, consult with all parties involved regarding the requirements for a successful outcome, draw up strong contracts that produce the clearest possible agreements at the beginning of the coaching process, oversee the whole coaching process, keep track of goals and expenses incurred, and manage the coaches. As might be expected, this advice closely mirrors many of the key best practice leadership development factors identified by Leskiw & Singh (2007).

Lambert's (2008) survey report on coaching practices within UK organisations found that the trend is towards HR departments becoming more consistent and disciplined in their approach to hiring and managing coaches, and putting in place stringent selection, reporting and outcome review procedures. Some organisations may look to pool resources and outsource

coaching administration, however, Lambert advises against outsourcing control over coach quality, because, he argues, coaches work with an organisation's most valuable executives.

Evaluating returns on coaching

Executive coaching is a costly intervention. Many writers (Dagley, 2006; Holloway, 2006; Johnson, 2007, Ulrich, 2008) produce estimates of the cost of coaching, none of which is cheap. In addition to the actual cost of coaching, HR needs to factor in the loss of executive time (Dagley, 2006; Johnson, 2007) and the opportunity cost (Olson, 2008). However, Dagley's (2006) research found that some of his HR research participants were philosophical about the cost of coaching, commenting that 'it is expensive, but that doesn't matter if it works' (*Ibid*: 39). Whether executive coaching can, or does, show a return on investment (ROI) is a perennial issue and one of keen interest to budget holders. The prevailing view is that the majority of organisations are keen to ensure they get value for money (Bluckert, 2005; Clutterbuck, 2008; Lambert, 2008). How that value should be measured is another contention; some favour an ROI approach (Parker-Wilkins, 2006), others contend that ROI measurements are spurious and misleading (Olson, 2008). McGovern et al's (2001) research showed very positive assessments for executive coaching, including an ROI of 545%. However, this research was subsequently criticised on several grounds, including bias (Kampa-Kokesch & White, 2002; Feldman & Lankau, 2005). Executive coaching produces positive outcomes that are intangible, but nonetheless important (Lambert, 2001; Sherman & Freas, 2004). Dagley's (2006) research participants (HR professionals) reported an average of 14 areas of benefit for executives. While this is laudable, Dagley goes on to highlight some anomalies:

> *Cost is high, organisational benefit is moderate, and cost benefit is uncertain. Yet practitioners, almost without exception, indicated strong interest in using executive coaching in the future. At first glance, this relationship does not appear to make intuitive sense.'*
>
> (Dagley, 2006: 39).

He speculates that HR practitioners 'may have a vested interest in their programmes being seen as successful' (Dagley, 2006:44) Interestingly, Schlosser et al's (2006) Coaching Impact Study found that, in the assessment of coaching outcomes, line managers were more reticent about the extent of positive outcomes, than were coachees. Schlosser et al's research did not address HR evaluations. Goldsmith's (2006) answer to the ROI debate is to not charge for his coaching service until one year after it is completed and a positive assessment

of behaviour change has been given, not by the coachee, but by those who interact with him or her. I think this approach would solve the value dilemma for HR professionals.

As part of this research study looks for research participants' evaluations of the coaching, it will be interesting to see whether Dagley's findings are reflected in the HR Director's and the CEO's evaluations of the coaching intervention in M&V.

Creating a coaching and mentoring culture

The idea of building coaching and mentoring competencies within organisations is a live issue and its practice is growing in popularity (Lambert, 2008). While the notion of developing a coaching culture is appealing, Clutterbuck & Megginson (2005) argue that it is difficult to imbue an organisation with the characteristics of a coaching culture. They also suggest that not every organisation is ready for, nor wants, such a challenging culture that requires 'unbounded' time and energy from senior management and whose benefits are more difficult to measure because they are indirect (*Ibid:* 3). McPherson's (2008) description of the evolution of a coaching culture in Lancashire County Council gives a flavour of the effort involved in cascading such a culture through the organisation. Aside from implications of time and effort and challenge, Ellinger et al's (2008) research paper notes that managerial coaching behaviours can often be ineffective. This builds on the view that there may be practical limits to the coaching skills of line managers relative to what a 'skilled and experienced executive coach should achieve in terms of personal transformation' (Lambert, 2001: 3). This perspective is contested by those who hold that developing leaders to be internal coaches works to the benefit of the organisation (Lewis, 2008), helps build a coaching culture (Ahlfeldt & Cramb, 2007) and is preferable to hiring external coaches (Rock & Donde, 2008).

Caveats around leadership development

Researchers and scholars point out the many pitfalls between the aspiration of leadership development and its actuality. *Inter alia*, these include the haphazard nature of leadership development that fails to align strategy and development (Alimo-Metcalfe & Lawler, 2001; Ready & Conger, 2003; O'Connor et al, 2006) and problems connected with traditional management paradigm thinking and power plays within organisations (Ready & Conger, 2003; Hammett, 2008). Other problems include failure to take account of individual needs and to recognise that not everyone develops at the same pace, or responds uniformly to the same learning method (Lord & Hall, 2005). Some executives are easier to educate than others, and executives who lack self-control, have either too low or too high self-confidence,

have poor interpersonal skills, and shy away from rational decisions are a greater challenge (Hogan & Warrenfeltz, 2003). The question of evaluating whether transfer of learning takes place from a programme to the workplace is also problematic (O'Connor et al., 2006; Baron & Moran, 2009). Thus it appears that while the benefits of successful leadership development are significant, failure is always a possibility and HR professionals must exercise constant vigilance to ensure success.

Conclusion

This section has considered some of the issues that HR professionals face in their quest to develop leaders via executive coaching. Although the onus on HR may seem heavy (Knudson, 2002) and the list of 'to-dos' endless, nevertheless executive coaching is a bounded, structured process that should respond well to forward planning. It could be argued that the critical part of managing the process is aligning the coaching objectives with company strategy, qualifying candidates, employing an appropriately skilled coach, and supporting and monitoring the process. The following section discusses the skill sets appropriate for a coach and issues around the selection of a coach.

2.6   Qualities of the Coach

Introduction

This section considers coach quality issues that may affect the coaching industry, the skill sets needed by executive coaches, the critical nature of relationship building, the variety of possible coaching approaches open to coaches, and how the coaching process needs to be managed to produce a results oriented experience for executives.

Concerns about coach qualities

The coaching industry faces several issues, e.g. low barriers to entry have led to exponential growth (Wellner, 2006) which in turn has led to employers being frustrated by the variability of the coaching offer (Clutterbuck, 2008). While accreditation processes are growing in number, there are still concerns about accreditation disarray (Gray, 2006; Lambert, 2008; Hamlin et al., 2009). While accreditation has its proponents, some writers propose counter-arguments that express various concerns about constraining coaching talent by over-regulation (Grant, 2005, McCleary, 2006, Garvey et al., 2009). It is interesting to note that while HR departments may be becoming more assiduous in selecting coaches (Lambert, 2008), Turner's (2006) and Alvey & Barclay's (2007) research studies found that coach qualification was not a top-of-the-mind issue for executives. Contentiously, McCleary

(2006) suggests that demand for certification may be driven by HR Departments' personnel who want to simplify the process of hiring coaches, but that qualifications do not make a coach, what matters is the type of person the coach is. While there may be truth in what McCleary says, it could also be argued that holding qualifications and meeting competency standards should not deter a coach from striving for excellence. Without evidence of either suitability or qualifications, a HR person would need to be an exceptionally shrewd judge of character to be able to choose a coach based on 'the who which they are' (McCleary, 2006:10).

There are consistent calls for coaches to raise their professional standards by engaging in continuing professional development (CPD) and coach supervision (CIPD, 2007; Clutterbuck, 2008; de Haan, 2008b) and calls for companies to encourage their coaches to engage in supervision (Hawkins & Schwenk, 2006). The calls for CIPD and supervision are strengthened by de Hann's (2008b) research that found coaches experienced many varieties of doubts during a coaching session and he highlights the dichotomy of coaches needing to be simultaneously thicker skinned (stronger) and thinner skinned (sensitive), and suggests that CPD that facilitates conscious explorations of coaching issues will be helpful. Hawkins & Schwenk's (2006) report supports the notion of supervision and suggests that the benefit of supervision fortifies coaches to maintain ethical behaviour.

Skill Sets

Irrespective of the debate about coaching credentials, many authors enumerate central qualities that coaches need to have. Both the expertise and the personal characteristics of the coach are crucial ingredients in the mix of executive coaching (Kets de Vries, 2005; Stevens, 2005; Passmore, 2007; Clutterbuck, 2008). In terms of coaching skills, *inter alia,* a coach is required to exercise acute perception, diplomacy, and sound judgement, take a person-centred approach, act as a facilitator of learning, rather than a teller, have salient listening and questioning skills, be empathic, reflective, probing, challenging, combine warmth and daring, and add value quickly (Peterson, 1996; Hedman, 2001; Downey, 2003; Sherman & Freas, 2004; Stevens, 2005; Wright, 2005; Jones & Spooner, 2006; Wasylyshyn et al., 2006; Alvey & Barclay, 2007; de Haan 2008a). 'Coaching is about getting coachees to share and (re)experience their own critical moments' (de Haan, 2008a: 535). A coach is someone to whom an executive can speak frankly (Johnson, 2007), who doesn't court popularity (Holloway, 2006), who is friendly, without being a friend (Jones & Spooner, 2006), and

who, 'to avoid simply becoming good conversation partners' has the 'ability to tolerate tension and deliberately inquire into tensions within coaching relationships' (de Haan, 2008c: 106). Stern provides a good description of how a coach should be perceived:

> The coach must be perceived by the leader as competent, confident, independent, business savvy, patient yet action oriented, credible, trustworthy, confidential, and genuinely interested in the leader and the leader's business.
>
> (Stern, 2004:155).

Debate on expertise generally focuses on the extent to which executive coaches need to have a background in psychology in addition to a sound knowledge of business principles (Kilburg, 1996, 2000; Berglas, 2002; Passmore, 2007). Berglas (2002:87) makes a particularly strong case for coaches to be fully qualified psychologists when he says that 'in an alarming number of situations, executive coaches who lack rigorous psychological training do more harm than good'. Bluckert (2005b:173), who comes from a counselling background, argues that coaches 'should have a psychological mindedness' which he describes as an 'umbrella term which denotes a person's capacity to reflect on themselves, others, and the relationship between'.

Many writers argue that coaches should favour a systems approach (Kilburg, 1996; Orenstein, 2002; Feldman & Lankau, 2005). Olson (2008:157) thinks they need to have a 'non-trivial understanding of business practices' and he suggests that coaches should take a systemic perspective because executives 'are part of management teams or board of directors and influence decisions beyond their immediate responsibility' (Ibid). In a survey of executive coaching practices, Bono et al (2009:361) found that there is 'little uniformity in the practices (e.g. assessment tools, scientific or philosophical approaches, activities, goals, and outcome evaluation methods) of executive coaches'. Interestingly, while differences in approaches between psychologists and non-psychologists coaches were very small, they also found that psychologist coaches were more likely to mention knowledge of business as a key coaching competency, than were non-psychologist coaches. A reviewer of Bono et al's (2009) research made the insightful suggestion that perhaps this came about because psychologists were more sensitive to the need to be seen to appreciate the workings of business.

The coaching relationship

It is almost impossible to overstate the significance that writers attach to the client-coach relationship (Sherman & Freas, 2004; Jones & Spooner, 2006; de Haan, 2008b). Kilburg (1997:293) expresses the view that a good relationship will entail building a safety zone for the client and the coach 'in which reflection, creative exploration, and self-examination are encouraged and supported'.

The degree of trust both parties bring to the relationship appears to be key to a successful outcome (Peterson, 1996; Bluckert, 2005b; Alvey & Barclay, 2007). Mayer et al's (1995) model of dyadic trust in organisations identifies perceived ability (competence to get a job done), benevolence (perception of a positive orientation towards the trustor) and integrity (trustee adheres to an acceptable set of principles) as salient trustee qualities. They contend that 'Trust for a trustee will be a function of the trustee's perceived ability, benevolence, and integrity and of the trustor's propensity to trust' *(Ibid* 720). The degree of risk involved in the situation and subsequent outcomes were features of the model. Each of these factors can act independently of each other and the authors argue that trustworthiness is best thought of as a continuum along which factors can vary. In coaching situations, trust was highest when the coach and client shared clear expectations of confidentiality and outcomes, the client was open and honest, the coach was supportive, confirmed the client's developmental needs, was non-judgemental and challenged the client's leadership behaviours (Alvey & Barclay, 2007). It would appear that several aspects of the coaching process, e.g. goal setting and boundaries of confidentiality influence trust, as does coach qualities such as the ability to be simultaneously empathic and challenging (Ibid).

Alvey & Barclay's (2007) research found that confidentiality was the single most significant factor in maintaining dyadic trust in the coaching relationship. Because the issue of trust is linked to the notion of confidentiality, who has first call on the loyalty of the coach is a matter of concern. Invariably, writers recognize the executive as the principal client, entitled to (negotiated) confidentiality and primary focus, but also acknowledge the legitimacy of the sponsoring organisation's interest in the outcome (Sherman & Freas, 2004; Kets de Vries, 2005; Wasylyshyn et al., 2006). The notion of sharing the objectives of coaching with the sponsor can be extended to sharing information with, and seeking feedback from, direct reports and colleagues. This process allows the executive to seek feedback on progress, helps direct reports, peers, and superiors to recognise improvements in performance and behaviour,

which in turn may improve future ratings and act as a motivator for the executive (Thatch, 2002; Luthan & Peterson, 2003; Goldsmith, 2008).

Coaching conversations

Executive coaches draw on a variety of disciplines to inform their approach (Peltier, 2001; Stewart et al, 2008). A coaching conversation can take many forms, depending on the needs of the client and the particular orientation of the coach; the spectrum extends from a non-directive pull on one end, to a directive, push mode at the other extreme (Downey, 2003). As Downey describes it, the directive style belongs to the traditional management paradigm while executive coaching would tend towards the non-directive end, although even the most non-directive of coaches occasionally need to impart information in a directive way. The GROW model - Goals, Reality, Options and Wrap-up (Skiffington & Zeus, 2003), and variants of it, is one of the most popular and widely used models for structuring coaching conversations. However, many coaching practitioners proffer their own preferred approaches, for example, Kilburg, 1996; Tobias, 1996; Laske, 1999; Richard, 1999; Cocivera & Croinshaw, 2004; Sherin & Caiger, 2004; Gray, 2006; Du Toit, 2007; Gordon, 2008 and Styhre, 2008.

Barner & Higgins' (2007) paper *Understanding implicit models that guide the coaching process* outlines four theory models that inform coaching practice: the clinical model, the cognitive behavioural model, the systems model and the social constructionist model. While they consider no one model superior, they suggest that coaches need to be reflective about which model they use so that they can factor in the limitations of their model. For example, users of the clinical model may be prone to over-label clients based on limited information, the behavioural approach may be too directive, the systems approach may fail to engage key system players and with the social constructionist approach, the coach needs to be mindful not to allow their interpretation of the client's story to overwhelm the client's interpretation.

In addition to Barner & Higgins's paper, recent literature suggests that coaching can be conceived as a vehicle for transformational learning (Gray, 2006), as a process of sensemaking (Du Toit, 2007), as a process of second-order observation (Styhre, 2008) and as a process of Appreciative Inquiry (Gordon, 2008). These approaches all emphasise the importance of conversation in the coaching process, which connects with the notion of social constructionism, i.e. that people creatively construct their social realities.

In line with Barner & Higgins's (2007) approach, Stewart et al. (2008: 127-130) point to the different epistemological bases that underpin various models of coaching and suggest that the variety of available coaching models, even evidence-based models, do not provide a solid foundation for evaluating coaching and that 'coaches must possess skills, knowledge and attitudes that enables them to respond flexibly to coachees needs, adapting their style and employing different theoretical methodologies as the situation dictates' (Stewart et al., 2008:130). This contrasts with Passmore & Gibbes's (2007) view that sufficiently rigorous research will elucidate the secrets of coaching success.

A results oriented approach

Data Collection and Feedback

In addition to coaching skills and psychological or business expertise, coaches must be capable of managing the coaching process to produce a results oriented experience, e.g., collecting data, collaborating in setting limited objectives, establishing benchmarks for progress and monitoring outcomes (Ulrich, 2008).

Once candidates and coach have been selected, personal interviews, psychometric testing and 360- degree feedback can provide the linchpin for coaching agendas (Giglio et al., 1998; Starkey, 2006; Mackay, 2007) and the foundation for coaching conversations which build a trusting relationship (Alvey & Barclay, 2007). Psychologist coaches are slightly more likely to extend the range of interviews to executives' peers and were more likely to use multiple methods of assessment, thus potentially providing a richer picture of the client's disposition (Bono et al., 2009). However, there are reservations about aspects of 360-degree feedback (Kaiser & Craig, 2005, Olson, 2008) and the usefulness of psychometrics (Olson, 2008). Olson (2008) refers to issues about Myers-Brigg Type Indicators (MBTI) that produces profiles that 'may be a total artefact. Yet it is used to interpret you as a prototypic member of that category' (*Ibid:* 157). Thus, it would appear that the data collection process may sometimes be flawed. Similarly, the feedback process is not without its problems. While objective feedback is said to be highly appreciated by senior executives (Thatch, 2002, Mannarelli, 2006; Styhre, 2008), feedback on its own may not be enough to influence behaviour change (Day, 2001; Goldsmith, 2006; Gregory et al, 2008). Insensitive or too negative feedback can be counterproductive (Kilburg, 1997; Hall et al, 1999) and may be blocked-out by self-protecting defence mechanisms (Hogan & Warrenfeltz, 2003). Thus,

although useful, assessment feedback is not a coaching panacea, but if handled properly provides a launching platform for the start of the coaching process and should be used as a benchmark against which to measure progress (Gregory et al., 2008). Goldsmith (2008) argues that the most effective feedback comes from well-respected colleagues.

Coaching Objectives
Feedback should form the basis for setting coaching objectives (Gregory et al., 2008). While some authors argue that objectives should be limited to two (Goldsmith, 2008; Ulrich, 2008), there appears to be shades of opinion on who should be responsible for setting coaching objectives. Jones et al (2006) cite the International Coach Federation's (ICF, 2003) view of goals and objectives as a collaborate process between the coach and the leader. While not necessarily completely at odds with this view, Goldsmith (2008) contends that when successful people are being coached they should self-select one or two behaviours they want to change (three is too many) and seek feedback on progress from significant others whom they respect. The third view is that HR has responsibility for setting the coaching objectives (Knudson, 2002), a fourth view is that objectives fall out of the data collection and feedback process (Starkey, 2006) and are agreed between the coach and the executive. It could be argued that, irrespective of how they come about, goals agreed between all parties to the coaching (coach, executive, HR or the executive's boss) is likely to have the best chance of obtaining positive outcomes (Garvey et al., 2009).

There are mixed views on whether objectives should be sharp or fuzzy. Olson (2008) puts forward the case that specific goals are more motivational and likely to lead to success. However, there appears to be a move away from focusing on SMART objectives (i.e. objectives that are specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and have a time frame), towards broader, more holistic objectives (Clutterbuck, 2008) which is a view also favoured by Garvey et al. (2009). However, this trend seems to be at odds with that identified by Lambert (2008) that sees HR departments becoming more demanding of the whole coaching process. Garvey et al (2009) suggest that goals represent an atomistic mindset that favours HR remits, but do not necessarily benefit either the coachee or the people with whom they may interact. However, a coaching programme without goals seems fuzzy in the extreme and such programmes are unlikely to appeal to HR people who need to show a return on coaching (Lambert, 2008). In terms of general objectives, Reeves (2006) suggests that coaching will

help most executives move to the next level and that coaching is an opportunity for self-development.

Evaluating and monitoring coaching outcomes

Best practice suggests that executive coaches should evaluate and monitor coaching outcomes, but this rarely happens (Grant & Cavanagh, 2004) and Kilburg (1997:296) makes the point that evaluation is not a one-way process with only the coach looking to the client; he suggests that clients 'judge their coaches very realistically and at times harshly'. Similar to previous references, Bono et al's (2009) comparison of coaching practices found few differences between how psychologists and non-psychologists evaluated effectiveness, although generally psychologists were less likely to rely on client's self-reports and more likely to extend evaluation to peers and HR. Goldsmith (2008) simplifies the process by suggesting that very short mini-surveys, issued to respected co-workers, which focus only on behaviours selected for change, are an efficient way to measure behavioural change brought about by coaching. He is very strong on encouraging coachees to constantly seek feedback on progress from significant others in the workplace. Considering the range of potential monitoring instruments (Bono et al., 2009), and the emphasis on evaluation from the recent research studies, it is somewhat ironic that coaches are reported to be lax about monitoring coaching outcomes (Grant & Cavanagh, 2004).

Conclusion

Despite whirls of debate about coaching competencies, levels of expertise, and certification, coaches continue to be in demand, although good coaches may be in short supply (Clutterbuck, 2008). While the thrust of all coaching is facilitative and supportive, the proliferation of potential coaching models seems overwhelming. This clutter of methodologies no doubt contributes to the difficulty of establishing a precise epistemology of coaching (Stewart et al, 2008); it also possibly contributes to the issues that HR departments need to resolve when considering coach selection. This review of ideal coaching behaviour provides a foundation for considering the approach of the executive coach who worked with the M&V Directors. The following and final section of this Chapter discusses the third critical input to the coaching process, namely the dispositions of executives who experience the coaching process.

2.7   Executives Qualities

Introduction
This section considers qualities associated with leadership, and the qualities and attitudes that an executive needs to have to maximise benefits from a coaching programme.

Coaching and leadership qualities
Executives work in highly volatile, globally competitive environments where the rate of change is phenomenal and pressure to achieve is immense. Scholars tend to be prescriptive about the qualities needed for leadership in these challenging circumstances. Day (2001) suggests that a leader's intrapersonal competencies include self-awareness (emotional awareness, self-confidence), self-regulation (self-control, trustworthiness, adaptability) and self-motivation (commitment, initiative, optimism). Leaders need a compelling vision (Mannarelli, 2006) and the emotional intelligence to communicate effectively (Barrett, 2006). They also need to understand how others view them (Hogan & Warrenfeltz, 2003; Pomeroy, 2005). They need to move from traditional management paradigms of command and control and from destructive behaviours that reduce commitment (Axelrod, 2005; George & McLean, 2007), to more subtle, people oriented, relationship focused approaches that entail developing emotional competencies (Goldman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2002). Battley (2007b: 39) contends that the 'chasm continues to grow between what people [executives] are being asked to do, what they have been prepared to do, or what they may have natural ability to do'. Her views echo those of many authors who provide rationales for coaching (Goleman et al., 2002; Quick & Macik-Frey, 2004, Johnson, 2007). Lambert (2008) found that coaching is being used to support the demand for a different kind of leadership, one that is concerned with a new management paradigm of teamwork, collaboration and engagement. Executives can experience intense pressures and executive coaching is also being used to support senior executives who operate in stressful and isolated situations (Lambert, 2008).

Coaching readiness
Coaching readiness refers to whether an executive is likely to be responsive to coaching. Qualities such as motivation, commitment to change, self-awareness and feedback orientation are considered salient determinants of coaching readiness. Many writers argue that the level of executive motivation is key to a successful coaching outcome (MacKie, 2006; Turner, 2006; Baron & Morin, 2009). Kaufman (2006: 290) contends that 'a coach can only help an executive who has a strong will to succeed', one who is willing to engage in self-reflection

and learn from their mistakes. Battley (2007b: 39) advises executives that in her experience 'a key predictor of coaching success is strong personal commitment to change [...] A coach is a facilitator and a catalyst, you are the one on the playing field'. Johnson (2007: 5) makes a similar point when he writes that executives should expect to be challenged to find solutions, and not expect to be given solutions. However, Goldsmith (2008) contends that successful people's personal commitment and previous track record can make it hard for them to change; they don't realise that they have succeeded 'because of some behaviours, but in spite of others' (*Ibid:* 97). In terms of choosing appropriate candidates for development, O'Connor et al's (2006: 344) research into management development in Ireland found that 'the importance of the manager's frame of mind and level of self-awareness' had a direct impact on the success of programmes. This is a point also made by Hogan & Warrenfeltz (2003) when they discuss differences in managers' openness to new ideas. Inevitably, many of the qualities needed for leadership form part of coaching agendas, e.g. self-confidence, self-awareness, and self-management.

Readiness to accept and act on feedback, and have realistic expectations are also important ingredients for success (Turner, 2006; Johnson, 2007; Gregory et al., 2008) and executives' ontic-developmental level can influence ability to respond to feedback (Laske, 1999; Joo, 2005). Executive need to engage willingly in the coaching process and pressure from superiors reduces the value of coaching (Stevens, 2005). An alternative view, which perhaps takes a remedial perspective and assumes that coaching is being imposed on the executive, is that resistance is to be expected and that it is up to the coach to overcome this resistance (Natale & Diamante, 2005). However, this scenario is less likely to happen in the current climate where remedial coaching is on the decline and the focus is on developing individuals with talent and potential (Lambert, 2008).

Conclusion

Executives need to engage with a new, people oriented, leadership style paradigm. Working under pressure, they may need help to develop the stellar leadership skills needed for success in today's dynamic business world. While coaching has a role to play in helping executives find new ways of leading, executives' personal characteristics and readiness for coaching are significant determinants of successful coaching outcomes.

2.8   Overall Conclusion

Writers frequently refer to the multi-faceted challenges facing businesses in the 21st century, to the need for exceptional leaders in difficult times, and the business imperative of having a leadership development strategy in place (Day, 2001; Leskiw & Singh, 2007; Hill, 2009). Executive coaching nestles within the spectrum of leadership development strategies and is now a significant and widely used leadership development intervention (Gray, 2006; Longnecker & Fink, 2006; Alfman, 2007). Many researchers have documented positive outcomes from executive coaching studies. However, in a manner similar to the flawed results of research into the theory of leadership (Yukl, 2002), executive coaching research also suffers from methodological shortcomings and from the lack of an established epistemological base; what Sherman & Freas (2004) call the black-box effect. The plethora of available coaching approaches, plus the confidential nature of the coaching process, makes it difficult to be definite about how the process works (Stewart et al., 2008).

It could be argued that executive coaching is simultaneously robust and fragile. Robust to the extent that any model of coaching appears to work to some extent (Kilburg, 1997, 2004); fragile in the sense that many variables (organisational support, qualities of the coach and qualities of the executive and the partnership relationship between the triad) can influence its success (Stern, 2004). Despite the issues and contentions surrounding many aspects of executive coaching, Du Toit (2007:283) puts it well when she says: 'The common theme or unifying philosophy amongst the different approaches is a passion for the growth of people, assuming responsibility for possibilities and nurturing and exploiting talent'.

The following Chapter provides details on the methodology used to bring the voices of the research participants to the fore.

Chapter 3   Methodology

3.1   Introduction

The primary focus of this research study is to explore the process of executive coaching as experienced by executives. My aim is to gain a deeper understanding of those aspects of executives' coaching experiences that influence their perceptions of coaching effectiveness. A subsidiary focus is to explore how the executives and other organisation stakeholders evaluated coaching outcomes. The insights from this research study should feed into the scant body of knowledge that reflects executives' views (Turner, 2007; Styhre, 2007) and thereby enhance understanding of the factors that influence executives' perceptions of coaching. It may also have implications for how both coaches and HR personnel manage the coaching process.

This Chapter starts by outlining and providing a rationale for the research study and the research questions. In an effort to be reflexive and to explicate the research process so that its workings are clear (Charmaz, 2006; Holliday, 2007; Corbin & Strauss, 2008), I describe the research design and the philosophical issues that are central to it (Easterby-Smith et al, 2002). This leads into a discussion of the debate on ontological and epistemological issues concerning research interviews and the knowledge implications that the various assumptions make. This is followed by a description of the methods used to gather and analyse data and the Chapter concludes by considering the ethical issues pertinent to this research study.

3.2   The Research Questions

Introduction

As mentioned previously, although Document 3 presented insights into how executives of C&C experienced the coaching process, executives found it difficult to isolate the experiences and outcomes from stand-alone coaching from a more recent coaching experience that provided between-module coaching to support an emotional intelligence, leadership development programme. In contrast, this research study presents a microcosm of a single coaching programme. It describes the perceptions of key decision makers in the coaching process, and explores the perceptions of the executives post their coaching experience.

The Rationale for this Research Study:

Many writers (Kilburg, 1997, 2000; Lowman, 2005; Stevens, 2005; Turner, 2006; Styhre, 2008) lament the dearth of research that addresses the views of executives on the subject of executive coaching. This research study aims to contribute to closing that gap in the literature by bringing the voice of the executive to the fore via 'thick descriptions' (Stake, 1995) of what worked and didn't work for them as they engaged with executive coaching and thus make it possible to suggest conditions under which greater effectiveness could be achieved.

Research Question 1 addresses this question by seeking to:

- Explore executives' perceptions of the factors that impeded and facilitated the effectiveness of the coaching intervention

Research Question 2 seeks to:

- Explore research participants' perceptions of the effectiveness of the coaching intervention

M&V introduced executive coaching for senior executives as part of their succession management and leadership development strategy. Research Question 2 seeks to explore the effectiveness of the coaching intervention (Stewart et al., 2008) from the multiple perspectives of the executives engaged in the process, and from the perspectives of the HR Director and the CEO.

As Chapter 2 has detailed, many scholars expound views on how executive coaching should be managed within the organisation (Knudson, 2002; Chidiac, 2006; Kombarakaran et al., 2008). Scholars also have views on the ideal qualities of the coach (Kets de Vries, 2005; Berman & Brandt, 2006; Passmore, 2007) and the ideal qualities of the executive that will facilitate successful outcomes and provide benefits for the executive and for the organisation (Mannarelli, 2006; Battley, 2007b; Johnson, 2007). This research provides an opportunity to explore these views in the context of an Irish situation, while simultaneously answering the call for executives' voices to be given greater prominence (Kilburg, 1997, 2000; Lowman, 2005; Stevens, 2005; Turner, 2006; Styhre, 2008).

3.3   The Research Design

Introduction

Because the function of a research design is to ensure that the evidence obtained is capable of answering the research question, it provides a framework for the collection and analysis of data.   However, the research design also exposes the researcher's ontological and epistemological assumptions about the nature of reality and acceptable knowledge within research (Bryman & Bell, 2003).

My approach was to choose a qualitative case study design which had worked well for Document 3 and which was capable of getting to the nub of the research questions.   Because executive coaching is a 'contemporary phenomenon' with a 'real life context', it is ideal case study material (Yin 2003:13).   The exploratory and subjective nature of this particular research (stakeholders' perceptions) reflects my ontological position which 'emphasizes the diversity of interpretations that can be applied to [the world]' (Willig, 2008: 13) and my epistemological position reflects a social science view that seeks to 'interpret people's actions and their social worlds from their points of view' (Bryman & Bell, 2003:17).

My choice of research participants emerged initially through personal contacts and then evolved through a process of snowballing (Fisher, 2004).   Data was collected via semi-structured interviews with seven stakeholders to an executive coaching programme. Template Analysis (TA)[1] was the primary technique used to extract themes from the data. Similar to Grounded Theory Analysis (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) which is suited to under-developed research areas (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002), TA advocates an open-minded approach to emerging themes, although it acknowledges the legitimacy of *a priori* themes.
The methods used in this research have ecological validity in that they represent the experiential opinions, values and attitudes of stakeholders (Bryman & Bell, 2003) who lived through a coaching process.

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[1] The University of Huddersfield's School of Human & Health Sciences provides a Template Analysis webpage: www.hud.ac.uk/hhs/research/template_analysis/index.htm, under the aegis of Prof. Nigel King, which explains the philosophy and procedures of Template Analysis.

The following sections elaborate on the philosophical positions underpinning this research and detail the approaches to data collection and analysis and to the presentation of the findings.

A Philosophical Approach

Documents 3 and 4 discussed in detail the ways in which the literature is replete with debate about the orientations of the different research philosophies, known as opposing paradigms. Easterby-Smith *et al* (2002:30) detail the key distinctions between these paradigms, as shown in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Contrasting Implications of Positivism and Social Constructionism

	Positivism	**Social Constructionism**
The observer	Must be independent	Is part of what is being observed
Human interests	Should be irrelevant	Are the main drivers of science
Explanations	Must demonstrate causality	Aim to increase general understanding of the situation
Research progresses through	Hypotheses and deductions	Gathering rich data from which ideas are induced
Concepts	Need to be operationalised so they can be measured	Should incorporate stakeholder perspectives
Units of analysis	Should be reduced to simplest terms	May include the complexity of 'whole' situations
Generalization through	Statistical probability	Theoretical abstraction
Sampling requires	Large numbers selected randomly	Small numbers of cases chosen for specific reasons

Source: Easterby-Smith, et al, 2002:30.

However, these scholars also make the point that, despite the ability to draw up 'lists of assumptions and methodological implications associations with each position, it is not possible to identify any philosopher who ascribes to all aspects of one particular view' (*Ibid:* 28). Despite this caveat, I find that this research study fits snugly within an interpretivist paradigm, both ontologically and from an epistemological perspective.

Ontology

Ontology is concerned with assumptions we make about the nature of reality and about the nature of the world (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002; Willig, 2008). Drath et al (2008) cite Bennis (2007: 3) who identifies leadership ontology as a tripod that encompasses leaders, followers and their mutual goals. Bennis argues that acknowledging that ontology means that all discussions of leadership must address these three aspects. In a similar manner, it could be argued that the ontology of executive coaching encompasses a triadic relationship between the organisation, the coach, and the executive, plus the mutual goals that drive the coaching

process forward. In the social constructionist tradition, reality is viewed as socially constructed, and open to continuous reconstruction and interpretation; in the coaching process, despite elements of a shared experience, each participant in a coaching scenario creates his or her own reality based on subjective experiences. Thus this research has 'a preference for an emphasis on the ways in which individuals interpret their social world' (Bryman & Bell, 2003: 25).

Epistemology and Reflexivity

Epistemology

Epistemology is concerned with the nature of knowledge. The scientific world-view (positivism) argues that knowledge is external and objective and is only significant when based on observations of external reality. Knowledge is 'out there' waiting for researchers to discover it; these researchers who are themselves neutral and objective, neither influence nor are influenced by the research process (Morgan & Smuircich, 1980, Silverman, 2000; Saunders, 2003). The absurdity of this viewpoint is well illustrated by the subjective slants that individual, supposedly objective, journalists give to the same news story.

Many opinions inform the debate about the quality of knowledge one can reasonably expect from interviews (Silverman, 2002; Holstein & Gubrium, 2004; Miller & Glassner, 2004). Issues concern the likely veracity of interview data, the ability of the interviewer to remain objective, and the influence of existing theories on researcher perceptions. Gone is the notion of subjects as 'passive *vessels of answers*' to whom interviewers direct questions which produce uncontaminated answers (Holstein & Gubrium, 2004: 144). However, there appears to be a consensus that interviews provide a means of accessing the subjective experiences of research participants whose points of view should be granted the 'culturally honoured status of reality' (Miller & Glassner, 2004:127). Corbin & Strauss (2008:32) suggests that 'sensitivity' to the research process should replace the traditional call for objectivity: 'Sensitivity means having insight, being tuned into, being able to pick up on relevant issues, events, and happenings in data. It means being able to present the view of participants and taking the role of the other through immersion in data'. This is what I strove to do.

Reflexivity

Although it is easy to pay lip service to the concept of reflexivity, the ability to be reflexive did not come easily to me. Reflexivity is concerned with acknowledging the presence of the researcher as a powerful influencing factor in the research process (Holstein & Gumrium,

2004). Thus as researchers we influence the nature of the knowledge we gather: 'we don't separate who we are as persons from the research and analysis that we do' (Corbin & Strauss, 2008:11), but it is difficult to be sensitive to the ways in which we might be imposing our assumptions on the data. For example, being steeped in a culture of text-book rhetoric, I was well into this research study before I appreciated that one of my underlying assumptions might predispose me to favour SMART (Specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and with a time-frame) objectives as legitimate and desirable targets for executive coaching. Other assumptions that I managed to surface included an expectation that business values would favour short-termism and speedy results, and included the notion that executives would be quite demanding in their expectations of a coach.

Willig (2008:10-13) discusses the ways in which research is strengthened when a researcher is reflexive and she encourages researchers to be clear about how they see their role in the research. Are they the key player because they construct the finding, or do they see themselves as someone 'who uses their skills to unearth the evidence'. Here the researcher perceives the process 'as a treasure hunt rather than a construction process' (*Ibid:* 13). These are deep questions, but the answers to them need not be mutually exclusive. I did find the interview process something of a treasure hunt and before each interview I always had a sense of anticipation as to what new insights might come my way. I constructed the findings and as such I am *a* key player, but only one among many. However, my part in this research has been proactive. While I encouraged executives to recount their coaching perceptions; I was more than just a narrator of these perceptions. To some extent at least, I guided the direction of their stories by the thrust of my questions and subsequently had ownership of how these stories were structured, interpreted and presented. Thus, I do not see myself as an objective observer in this research, but rather as a subjective participant who imposed a sequence, identified patterns and inferred interpretations (de Haan, 2008b). Having acknowledged this, I did try to represent faithfully the multi-faceted views of the research participants and to be as diligent as possible in offering alternative explanations to account for the research findings.

3.4   Methods

A case study approach

As already stated, this research study is placed within the interpretative paradigm.   The research participants form a microcosm of a coaching situation within M&V: the HR Director who initiated the coaching, the four Directors who were her initial candidates for the coaching programme, her chosen coach who travelled from England to coach the executives and the Divisional CEO whose budget paid for the coaching. Case studies can either seek to provide cause and effect explanations or seek to understand human experience (Stake, 2008). This case study seeks to do the latter, although it is sometimes difficult to avoid speculating on cause and effect!

Document 5 is what Stake (2008) categorises as an instrumental case study, i.e. the case study is undertaken to provide deeper insight or understanding about an issue (executives' perceptions of coaching and research participants' evaluations of coaching), and thus the case itself (a pilot coaching programme) is not the focus, but rather the issue is the object of interest. Case study data was collected from in-depth interviews, from media reports and from the company's web site. Some supporting documentation on company values and 360 degree feedback processes served to validate research participants' experiential knowledge, as opposed to opinion (Stake, 2008). However, to preserve anonymity, these documents are not included as appendices. Furthermore, I use pseudonyms for all research participants to preserve confidentiality.

Conducting case study research via interviews has many advantages. The interviewer gets access to the subjective experience of the interviewee while, at the same time having the discretion to decide the topics, draft the questions and follow 'interesting leads' (Charmaz, 2006:29). Interviews also allow researchers to bring the voice of the actors to life via what is known as thick descriptions. Denzin (2001:53) explains the difference between a thin and a thick description: 'A thin description simply reports facts, independent of intentions or circumstances' and a thick description, in contrast, provides detail about the context and process of an experience, and the intentions and meanings that informed the experience. Thus, case study explications expect 'thick description', 'experiential understanding' and 'multiple realities' (Stake, 1995:43) and tries to preserve the 'different and even contradictory views of what is happening' (*Ibid:*13).

The following sections explain how the research participants came to be part of this study, and describe my approach to data analysis and data presentation.

Making the contacts

Previous research has made me aware that getting quality time with senior executives is not easy, thus I was fortunate to have a well-regarded contact within M&V who smoothed the research path for me. My initial interview was with the HR Director who initiated coaching into the Division. This interview was not concerned with the pilot programme per se, but rather with the company's leadership development approach and how executive coaching fitted within this. The HR Director agreed to facilitate my research and (eventually) passed on the names of two Directors (John and Paul) who were willing to give me an interview. During the first interview with John, it became clear to me that executive coaching was introduced as a pilot programme with a contained number of executives and one coach. Through the good offices of John, I made contact with a former Director (Diarmuid) who had been part of the programme and Diarmuid in his turn effected an introduction for me with the Coach who is based in England, and with the fourth person (Fiachra) who took part in the pilot coaching programme and who had also left the company. Many months later, when I was writing up the discussion section of Document 5 (looking at the contradictory nature of some of the data and trying to decide what it was that I knew), I decided to request an interview with the CEO of the Division. This interview, which took place in the final stages of writing up the document, was intended to clarify some anomalies, but succeeded in muddying the waters even further!

Conducting the interviews

For this research study, eight semi-structured interviews, the majority of which lasted between one-and-half and two hours, took place in five locations: A background interview with my executive contact took place in my office. (The background interview gave me some insight into M&V's business environment and its approach to leadership development). Other interviews took place in offices on the premises of M&V (the HR Director, two of the Directors and the CEO), the offices of two ex-directors, and a private room in a hotel (Coach). The interview with the coach took place at the end of his working day.

The interviews took place over five months from May to September 2008 and the interview with the CEO took place in April, 2009.

I was conscious of Miller & Glassner's (2004) views that interviewees respond to interviewers based on how we present, how they interpret our role in their lives, which social categories they assign to us and whether we present as a good listener who is neither too mainstream nor too marginal. They suggest that this latter perception is important to elicit good stories. As a counterpoint to how I might impact on the executives, I was also conscious that the interviewees were themselves likely to engage in a fair amount of image management. As Goffman (1971:216) puts it: 'With those whom one does not know, careful performances are required'.

I used variations on 'helping me with my research' and 'just a chat about coaching' to foster an informal atmosphere. I took this approach because executive coaching is a very personal experience – to borrow a description from one of the interviewees, '*it's a sometimes confessional relationship',* and I thought it important to establish a personal relationship with the executives so that they felt comfortable talking to me about this aspect of their life. Charmaz (2006:19) considers that making a determined effort to establish rapport is a way of demonstrating respect for the research participant as we attempt to 'learn about their views and actions and try to understand their lives from their perspectives'.

All interviewees agreed to allow their interviews be taped, thus I was able to engage fully with the interviewee, to concentrate on the content of the interview and on the body language of the interviewee. When the initial niceties were over (my explanation of the research, its confidential nature and some conversation about how they came to be contributing to the research), I gave the interviewee a copy of the theme sheet. I simultaneously discounted it by telling them that this was just a rough guide to the structure of the interview (which was the truth). I said my main interest was to understand what it was like for them to have been coached (Willig, 2008:8). My questions were mainly descriptive, evaluative, and open-ended: 'Tell me about your work in M&V'; 'How did it come about that you were offered coaching?' How did you feel about being coached? What words would you wrap around your relationship with the coach?' While the dialogue articulated many *a priori* themes, it also took some unexpected turns. However, at the end of every interview I checked the theme sheet to ensure that all the salient points had been covered (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002) and also asked the interviewee if there was anything they wanted to add to the interview.

The interview proper started with a non-threatening chat about how the person came to be working in their role (Easterby-Smith et al., 2002). As the executives spoke about their roles in the organisation and their working lives, quite a colourful picture of the organisation emerged. When the conversation turned to coaching, I was able to note any change in posture, enthusiasm, speech interruptions, etc., which helped me 'read' the person more fully. As the series of interviews progressed (sometimes with large time-gaps between them) each one built (cautiously) on the preceding ones (Charmaz, 2006). I was conscious that, as Easterby-Smith et al. (2002: 95) put it: 'it is not beyond the wit of managers to infer from the questions asked what kind of information has already been obtained by the interviewer, and from whom', and I was anxious not to betray any confidences from preceding interviewees.

Transcribing the data

Because of their confidential nature, I transcribed all interviews, except that of the coach for which I used a transcription service. In addition, to the actual words used, I sometimes found it useful to include information in the transcript that helped bring life to the written word, e.g. laughter, deep thought, excessive pauses; changes in pace, and whether a tone was enthusiastic or neutral. As with the material from Document 3, I was struck by the lifeless nature of transcribed conversations as against the animation of one-to-one interaction.

Data Analysis

Qualitative analysis is a subjective process that involves a 'process of examining and interpreting data in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge' (Corbin & Strauss, 2008:1). Because many approaches are possible and researchers need not be strait-jacketed by a single process (Denzin, 1998), I used TA as my primary approach, but was also influenced by the philosophy of Grounded Theory that advises against being swayed by theoretical preconceptions (Bryman & Bell, 2003).

Template Analysis requires the researcher to engage in close scrutiny of the text with a view to developing a coding system based on important themes within the data set. The method prescribes a hierarchical coding approach that identifies broad themes e.g. 'Outcomes from Coaching', and then narrows down to specific themes that perhaps identify the range of outcomes, e.g. 'behavioural and attitude change', 'self-awareness', etc. Holliday's (2007: 89) advice is to look for themes that 'seem to get to the heart of the participants 'story' in the interview transcript'; in this way, the themes belong to the participants, rather than the

researcher. In this study, while *a priori* themes are dominant in the final template (which determines the presentation of executives' stories in Chapter 4), emergent themes have also earned their place (Charmaz, 2006; Holliday, 2007). For example, the transforming nature of advice from the coach (not a common literature theme), juxtaposed with significant reservations by some executives about aspects of the Coach's approach. Tietze et al's (2003) work, *Understanding Organizations through Language* and Garvey et al's (2009) comments on the power of dominant discourses alerted me to the extent to which the rhetoric of business may have infused the thinking of the research participants and, it could be argued, framed their expectations of coaching outcomes. Tietze et al's (2003) chapter on metaphors was particularly insightful when I came to consider the coach's interview.

Crafting the story
I am conscious that crafting the case study story was a subjective exercise in selection and a different researcher might have highlighted different aspects of research participants' stories and perhaps reached different conclusions. Because of the contradictory nature of research participants' accounts, I spend a lot of time agonising over how to present and interpret the data and I am aware that what has emerged is my 'dressing of the case's own story' and that in the recounting of any case study 'more will be pursued than was volunteered and less will be reported than was learned' (Stake, 2008:137).

The executives' perceptions are presented as a 'montage' (Denzin & Lincoln, 2008: 44) of multiple realities that juxtaposes their various responses and highlights the subjective nature of their experiences. This montage is preceded by summaries of the HR Director's story, followed by the Coach's story. (The full stories can be found in Appendix B. This chapter closes with the CEO telling his story about the pilot coaching programme. The penultimate Chapter offers a discussion of the findings and presents a conceptual framework that reflects the findings from the research study. The final Chapter offers a set of conclusions, recommendations and implications for professional practice

3.5   The Ethics of Fieldwork
The number of ethical committees that inhabit the research corridors of universities reflects the importance given to this topic. Ethics are concerned with values and beliefs and with doing the right thing by people. Informed consent, confidentiality and consequences are ethical issues that may arise at different stages of an interview project (Easterby-Smith et al,

2002, Kvale, 1996, Saunder & Thornhill, 2003). Although Kvale (1996) makes the point that fully informed consent can be problematic in semi-structured, free-flowing interviews, I am satisfied that all interviewees were fully cognisant of the nature of the research study and co-operated fully and generously with the process. In fact, I was amazed at how particularly helpful two of the executive directors were in furthering my research by volunteering to make contacts for me.

Ensuring confidentiality for research participants was a key issue. To preserve the anonymity of the company and all research participants, pseudonyms are used (Sekaran, 2003, Schnell, 2005; Lofland, 2006) throughout the document. Because the island of Ireland contains only a small business community, and because the number of large indigenous companies is limited, I have decided to forego naming the company's industry sector to eliminate any risk of a breach of confidentiality.

3.6   Conclusion

In summary, Document 5 is an instrumental case study within the interpretative paradigm. The focus of the case is how a particular set of executives perceive the coaching process and how all research participants evaluated coaching outcomes. The presentation of findings aspires to bring a rich, contextualised account of what it was like for the executives to be coached, and the implications that their experiences may have for all involved in the process of executive coaching.

Chapter 4   Multiple Realities

4.1   Introduction

This chapter sets out to tell the stories of the seven people most concerned with the pilot coaching programme within M&V. The HR Director introduced coaching into the Division and her story is concerned with how this came about; she presents her opinions on coaching generally and on the ethos of the company. The Coach's story tells how he came to be involved in coaching and describes his approaches to coaching. For ethical reasons, the Coach was not asked to comment on coaching within M&V, nor did he comment on any individual Director. For reasons of space, summary accounts of these stories are presented in Section 1 of this Chapter and the full, dialogue rich stories from the HR Director (Caroline) and the Coach (Maurice) are contained in Appendix B.

The nub of the Chapter, is the executives' perceptions of the coaching process and their various evaluations. Using the themes that emerged from the data analysis, the executives' stories are combined so that the reader has a sense of how the coaching process was experienced under various headings. Section 3 tells the final chapter of the coaching story – the experience of the Divisional CEO. As mentioned in the Methodology Chapter, this interview came very late in the research process, but it provided an arresting reality story that threw me back into the melting pot of interpretation.

4.2   Summary of the HR Director's Story

Caroline's story portrays her as a professional HR Director, under pressure to develop her leadership team, conscious of her budget, and of her boss, yet prepared to make the coaching spend because she believes that it is the best way to develop rising talent.

Caroline introduced executive coaching into the M&V Division shortly after her appointment as Divisional HR Director. Her intention was to close some leadership gaps in her team and to respond to Group HR's call for succession planning and the development of internal talent. Based on past experience, she valued coaching as a leadership intervention that was particularly useful for developing executive potential.

The agenda for the coaching fell out a 360 degree feedback survey that evaluated Directors against a suite of leadership competencies. Following on from a performance review by the Divisional CEO, Caroline identified suitable candidates for development and offered three Directors the opportunity to engage in coaching.

For this, she employed an English-based business coach (Maurice) whose work she knew. He was particularly good at strategy and leadership, and knew how Directors should behave. She was very happy with the results from the coaching, which were clearly visible. Two of the Directors have since moved to business units that have more responsibility. If the need arises, she is willing to provide specialist coaching for executives. Currently, *circa* fifteen people within the Division are being coached. At Group level, HR is compiling names for a bank of coaches that Divisional HR Directors can draw on.

The company has invested a lot of money in coaching and has trebled its budget over the last two years. Value for money is important. In co-operation with the line-manager, she delineates a clear expectation of the changes she expects to see from the coaching. When a coach is in place, she monitors the coaching process, checks with the executive and the coach that the process is working well, but does not expect feedback on the specifics of the coaching agenda. She would not expect the coach to breach confidentiality. Although her interest is in coaching for improved performance, she appreciates that the coaching conversation may address many aspects of the executive's life.

Some time after Caroline's arrival in M&V, Group HR developed a suite of leadership development programmes (known as the Leadership Pathway) that addressed staff needs at different levels. Coaching between taught modules supports many of these programmes. The need for succession planning influenced the impetus to provide these courses. The pace at which the company was growing, its concomitant need for executives who understood the business, plus its inability to find suitable candidates externally, were influencing factors. Group HR have also developed short, be-spoke programmes for senior executives; a coaching and mentoring programme for senior executives is in the pipeline. Now that these courses are in place Caroline may offer a bespoke course before she offers coaching.

The HR Director is working towards a time when she can dispense with external coaches. Her ultimate ambition (*utopia*) is to have a coterie of senior staff who can coach their direct reports. She has recently completed an executive coaching programme.

4.3   Summary of the Coach's Story

Maurice's tells an interesting, metaphor intriguing, confident story, which includes some paradoxes. His account of his coaching practice touches on points raised in the literature review and his description of his four stage approach gives an insight into how he sees the process working.

Maurice worked in the IT industry for 21 years and worked his way up from technician to be owner and managing director of an international corporation. Following a management buy-out and while looking around for a fresh start, he '*fell into coaching*'. Initially his focus was on coaching sales people, but he adjusted his proposition to meet the demand for executive coaching. He now coaches at Board level in international companies and has been working at this for twelve years. He feels that his years in senior management give him credibility with executives. He has a keen interest in psychology and each year he upgrades his qualifications. He never mentions his psychology credentials and has never been asked to present any qualifications; he thinks that industry standards are low in this regard. He is of the opinion that few coaches are capable of doing a good job at Board level.

Because coaching '*is an exceptional spend*', CEOs, rather than HR departments, seek out his services, but he appreciates when the HR department is involved. He bases his contracts on a fixed cost per person, with a minimum commitment of two hours every two weeks from the executive; his commitment to the executive is open-ended. He provides a sophisticated interactive internet service to his clients and supplies executives with the books he wants them to read. This gives him control over their reading and he can check whether they have properly absorbed the content; he has the salient points of the books on power point. Covey's (1999) *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* appears to be required reading for all executives. During the time of his contract he feels he has *a duty to the company* to monitor all the executive's learning.

When he engages to coach in an organisation, he prefers to concurrently coach two or three executives from the same company; this maximises the time he invests in understanding the culture of the company and the nature of its business. He also spends up to 10 hours interviewing executives' diary reports and subsequently translates these views into a qualitative 360 that he uses to provide insights for the executive. He sometimes, but not always, uses psychometrics.

The Coach often shadows executives as they go about their activities, he role plays sensitive or challenging situations with them, and tries to develop their ability to behave consciously. He holds a mirror up to them. They need to be in control of how they behave and question whether their behaviour is eliciting results that they want. He provides executives with the opportunity for quality reflective discussions, which is something they do not get within the business. He is a great believer in the science of cause and effect (once you know why something happens, then you have the power to stop it). Developing self-awareness and self-control are key aspects of his work.

Maurice takes a four-stage approach to his coaching. Stage 1 is about building trust (no politics, no hidden agendas) and proving that coaching can help. Stage 2 is about showing a return for the company via better job performance by the executive; the ability to worker faster and smarter creates space for Stage 3, which is the nub of the coaching and focuses on what the real issue is (*whatever that may be*). Stage 4 anchors and embeds behavioural change.

Leadership is a difficult and lonely job and the quality of feedback from bosses and followers can be very poor. Thus leaders appreciate being able to talk freely to a non-judgemental, non-sycophantic person who will tell it as he sees it.

Maurice sees resilience and consistency as key leadership traits; inconsistency confuses people. Leaders have to be able to make people want to do what they want them to do and they need sophisticated people skills that many executives do not have naturally.

He had undergone a reasonable vetting process before he took up the coaching assignment with M&V. His contract was to coach four senior executives; the CEO was happy to talk to him, but according to Maurice, he did not want to be coached. The leadership team in the

Division has yet to put its stamp on the business and the attributes of the CEO (*a very nice man*) and his particular leadership style dominate the Division.

4.4 Executives' Profiles

Introduction

This section starts with a brief introduction to the four executives who are the key participants of this research study; these mini-profiles attempt to give a flavour of their personalities. It then proceeds to reflect their perceptions of M&V's work environment. (Where I think it might be helpful, I add some small input from my observations). The substantial section of the Chapter recounts their experiences of being coached. The final section recounts the CEO's experiences with the Coach.

Director 1 (John)

John joined the Division in 2000. His background is in finance, he qualified as an accountant when he was 21, but he was always more interested in business functions, rather than pure accounts. Currently he heads up a Business Unit, and although he has been at Director level for some years, he sees his present role as a significant career move because he now is responsible for a Profit & Loss Account. His section employs about 300 people. He believes he has a high level of self-awareness; he knows his strengths and limitations, and does not have any worries about talking to the CEO or the Human Resource Director.

John presented as a friendly, helpful, relaxed and very confident young man. He spoke with enthusiasm about the business and about coaching. When asked a question, he rarely answered lightly, and all responses were thoughtful. His contribution was possibly the most 'considered' of any of the interviewees.

Director 2 (Paul)

Paul joined the company in 2001. He came in as Finance Director for the Division. He sees himself as a *very commercial sort of finance person* and he was always looking for a change out of finance to a more general management role. On foot of his recent appointment to head up a Business Unit, he now is responsible for '*about half the business of this business*'. He has nine general managers who report directly to him and about 700 people work in his section. Paul sees his move to this side of the business as essential for his career.

Paul presented as a friendly, rather shy, quiet-spoken man. He spoke with great enthusiasm about the business, but was very hesitant, with lots of speech interruptions (ems and uhs) when we moved to the topic of coaching. He describes himself as sometimes lacking in confidence, particularly in situations outside his comfort zones. Initially I felt he was up-tight about the prospect of being interviewed, but eventually the jacket came off and he relaxed in his chair.

Director 3 (Diarmuid)
Diarmuid joined M&V in 2002; he came in as IT Director to run the IT function. In 2004 the Logistics function was added to his role. Circa two weeks before my research interview took place, Diarmuid resigned from M&V and returned to his previous company.

I met with Diarmuid in the very plush lobby of his company's offices in the city centre. Diarmuid presented as a lively, talkative, very friendly, and informal young man. He was completely at ease in the interview and spoke frankly (and sometimes indiscreetly) about the Division, the culture, and his coaching experiences. His interview was most enjoyable.

Director 4 (Fiachra)
Fiachra joined M&V in 2003 as a Regional Sales Manager and subsequently became Director of Sales and Marketing. In 2007 this position was made redundant and following a negotiated settlement, Fiachra took three months off to clear his head and decide on how he wanted his career to proceed. He now has taken up a position as Managing Director of several companies that form part of a conglomerate.

I met with Fiachra in the very functional Dublin offices of his present company. He presented as a friendly, lively, young man who spoke at a very fast pace. He admits to being a workaholic who normally puts in a 12 hours day. He lives in a hotel for most of the week and travels home to his family on weekends.

4.5   M&V's Work Environment

Despite some reservations about aspects of the company, almost everybody speaks positively about working in M&V's Division. Descriptions vary from '*a very fair company*' (John) to '*a great place to work in* '(Diarmuid). While the Directors to whom I spoke were in their mid-30s to early 40s, many general staff are long serving and have '*spend their life working for M&V*' (Paul).

About five years ago, Group Headquarters formulated values that underpin the ethos of the company. These values, which trip off people's tongues, have become very explicit in the last two years. They centre '*around achievement, around honesty, around not being greedy, working hard, long-time relationships, you know, they mean something at all different levels to employees*' (Paul). These values form part of the decor in the reception area of the Division. They are incorporated into the 360-feedback formula and influence managers' bonuses; the values are explicit in the company's annual reports and in its induction programmes. A recent employee survey that got a 90% response rate, showed that around 68% of employees knew and understood the values. Presently, an external coach is working with two general managers to improve their 360 ratings on the people aspect of the values.

In addition to the values, the company has a set of guiding principles, eighteen in all, which are built around the values and are used to 'organise ourselves and make business decisions' (M&V Brochure: 'Who we are, What we do and How we do it').

Fiachra, who was seriously at odds with the Divisional management before he negotiated his redundancy, has this to say: '*I think they do try to stick to the values where at all possible, they do try to do right by people, I would never have a bad word to say about them, how they treat people*'.

The Role of the Divisional CEO

The divisional CEO's personality and leadership style influences the culture, so, for example, if you look to the UK, '*they've had 4 leaders in 4 years and as a result the culture is very fractured and fragmented and people are confused as to what they are*' (Diarmuid). All research participants agree that the Divisional CEO is a very nice man '*who wouldn't see anyone wrong*' (Fiachra).

Views on his leadership style vary. One Director sees him as '*very empowering ... very laissez faire*'. He sketches very broad parameters '*and lets you get on with it. He'll tolerate a certain level of mistakes, which is important as well*' (Diarmuid). A diametrically opposite view is that while the CEO '*was very personable, very approachable, and you could certainly go to him with any issue or problem*' (Fiachra) he struggled to settle on a decision and stand over it. He tended to be influenced by the last person to approach him. When I relayed the laissez-faire observation above to Fiachra, his response was that generally the CEO would

'*let people get on with it, but if the business came under a bit of pressure, he'd come in all over it; which is not the right thing to do*' (Fiachra).

Caveats about the company

Despite the valedictory nature of many comments, some of the research participants did not see the company as perfect. Leadership and strategy are relatively new words in M&V. The traditional view was '*you're here to do a job – pull up your sleeves and get stuck in, cause if you're only sitting in your office thinking about the job – well really!' (Diarmuid)*.

The general ethos is one of hard work and low risk; creativity is not encouraged. Everyone has an opinion to offer and when things go right, everyone takes some of the credit, but when things go wrong, you are on your own; '*you could make ninety-nine good decisions and nobody comments, make one bad decision and everybody comments'(Fiachra)*. Another view sees M&V '*as a very good business that empowers people to get on with things*'. It is very tolerant of mistakes – '*too tolerant with some people, to be honest ... and generous to a fault*'. But, if you *'mess up once too often, they will draw a line in the sand' (Paul)*. The age profile of Directors also has implications: '*Because we are young we do make mistakes and sometimes that lack of experience will bite you, but it does give you a youthful sense of optimism and why can't we do this?'(Diarmuid)*. Another view of Diarmuid's is that the traditional culture within M&V is to regard people as a cost and to avoid hiring people even if that would solve a specific problem.

The learning organisation
The company is '*big into wanting to learn and the training budget has quadrupled over the last five years*' (Paul). Currently, Group HR is developing a new Directors' Course that will include an emphasis on coaching and mentoring skills. Mentoring is encouraged, but it is slow to get off the ground. As part of the new brand building exercise, the sales managers were trained in coaching skills: '*this will help embed that managers can coach the guys around them – it's almost commonplace now' (John)*.
Previously the business was not good at developing people and pulling them through the system, so invariably talent ended up being brought in from outside. Many managers have come up from the shop floor '*nothing wrong in that*' (Paul), but it is a big challenge to develop the breadth of thinking to move the business forward. On the other hand, the

business '*has been lucky because there's very little movement in the general managers, a lot of our guys are 10, 15, 20 years in the business*' (Paul).

Both the Group HR Director and the Divisional HR Director are working hard to change the mind-set that sees people as an over-head. They are now starting to over-hire, i.e. employ talented individuals before they have a defined role for them. Thus, M&V are beginning to look at people as a lever to growth. Right across the whole company and right down through the ranks, everyone is getting the opportunity to upskill. The down side of this is the stress it places on operating levels when staffs are pulled out for training.

4.6   The Coaching Experience

Meeting the coach

Coaching started for each Director at approximately the same time and for three of them it followed on from the 360 feedback and the performance review with the Divisional CEO. The HR Director approached Directors separately and pitched the offer of coaching slightly differently for each one.

The HR Director came to **John** with the suggestion that coaching would help hone some of his capabilities: '*I think this would help you get ready to do CEO, and Maurice can help with that*'. He describes the initial meeting with the coach where they worked together and got to know each other and Maurice assessed '*whether he felt he could work with me. We got on very well, we built up a relationship quickly*'. His coaching agenda was straightforward – it was about building behaviours '*that make good leaders*', he saw it as an agenda of personal change.

Paul was ambivalent about how he felt. He describes himself as being open to the coaching experience, looking to see how it could help, yet suspicious and with some concern '*that big brother was watching*'. His reservations did not last long; by the end of the first or second session he had every confidence that the sessions would be confidential. He found Maurice '*an easy sort of guy to talk to ... He was a nice guy*'. They shared some common life experiences (both divorced) and had some common interests in terms of sport. He felt that Maurice tried to understand him and where he was coming from and what issues he needed to

address to develop his skill set. He found the coaching sessions '*a relief from the day to day pressures – to be able to bounce stuff off somebody who was non-judgemental*'.

Paul had a diffuse agenda, some of which had fallen out of the 360, but some of which was personal. '*Coaching and developing others was a key thing, and impact and influence in terms of communicating to large groups and leading large groups – a bit of lack of confidence, it's fair to say*'. Paul tells a story then about how he is the only one in his family to go on to third level education, the only one not to work with his hands. In his early career he lacked confidence about whether he could get to the next step. '*Then I'd get to the next step and I'd look around and say, Jeez, it's ok here, I can do this*'.

He desperately wanted to get out of finance and into the business side of things: '*another 20 years of finance would have wrecked my head*'. In the back of his mind was the thought that he would use the coaching to explore '*how I'm going to change my life as well*'. He had ambitions to take full responsibility for some of the business: '*not just reporting figures, I wanted to be part of the action*'; maybe rise to CEO when the present incumbent retires in 5 or 6 years. So his agenda also included '*the whole leadership piece ... and some of the current issues that were floating around*'.

Diarmuid's story is full of drama. As IT Director he was on top of the job, then he was asked (some say he offered) to take on the function of Logistics Director. This was a disaster because his usual strategy of putting in long hours and really working hard was not getting the job done. He really struggled to stay on top and in 2005-2006 '*went from being a real high flyer in my career*' to having a disastrous year where the feedback from the 360 and the performance review from his boss put him in the bottom quadrant. This was '*Appalling – and a really bad situation to be in, cause if you're in that bottom box, you need to move yourself out of the box, or leave*'. So the HR Director asked, '*Will you try coaching, will you meet Maurice?*' By now, Diarmuid was getting paranoid; he lived in fear of being fired and what he wanted was more hours in the day so he could get on top of the work; he did not think he needed coaching: '*I went in and I told him how I didn't need any coaching – I thought it was rubbish! What I needed was more hours in the day to deal with all the problems...*' Maurice was not fazed by his outburst, he just '*soaked it all up and listened. And I started working with him, and it was brilliant – I had the zeal of a convert, you know*'.

Fiachra did not have the results of a 360 because at that stage the 360s were confined to the Board of Directors, but coaching was offered to him. His views on self-development are constant: he is always happy to avail of any training on offer; he is always seeking to improve himself. Although Fiachra was having a difficult time within the business, he found Maurice '*very personable*' and initially he was happy to work with him. Sales people were not properly valued within the business and there was a perception that sales were a necessary evil, as opposed to being a prerequisite for the business. He did not believe that they were ever going to '*put a sales person in a senior role, in relation to putting them on the Board'*.

He had had an excellent relationship with the previous HR Director but now his relationships with key people such as the CEO and the HR Director had deteriorated. He had had five bosses in four years and he:

> '*struggled with the idea of having so many bosses to please ... I suppose a lot of my stuff was about where my head was at the time in relation to where the business was, and the difficulty of integration and trying to pull it all together'.*

He brought these issues to the table with Maurice, particularly the fact that everyone had a vested interest in his section:

> '*so it was virtually impossible to keep everybody happy -   What I said to Maurice was, from where I was sitting: everything you do right, everybody else takes the credit, everything that goes wrong actually lands on your own two shoulders'.*

Fiachra had a limited number of coaching sessions (maybe five or six) with Maurice before the company offered him a redundancy packet. His last couple of sessions took place in the evening time in a hotel where both men were staying. He found these final sessions very difficult to decipher and suspected that the coach might be acting as an agent for the company.

Trusting the process

Diarmuid remembers Maurice making '*a very strong play in the beginning*' that the coaching relationship was with him as coachee, '*and while people in M&V are footing the bill, and I've got to go back and talk to them, I won't talk about anything confidential'.* Diarmuid is happy to accept his word on that and while he trusts Maurice, he would not be as confident about the trustworthiness of other coaches who work for the Division. He tells the story of how a person who was coaching some of his direct reports came to him and shared '*more stuff than I might be comfortable with'.* While he was glad to get it, he was also thinking: '*I hope the*

people know that I'm getting this, because there is a kind of confession box about it, that you'd hope would be private'. Diarmuid suspects that lack of trust was the fundamental problem for Fiachra who believed that Maurice *'was an instrument of the CEO and HR Director'.*

John was philosophical about contact between the coach and the HR Director. Caroline would ask John if coaching was going well and he assumed Caroline was also checking with Maurice, '*I know she was paying him enough, so I'm sure she was interested',* but he also knew that the nature of what he discussed was confidential and Diarmuid was similarly satisfied, as was Paul. Fiachra was never *'100% sure'* that the coach was on his side.

Profiling

The feedback from the Coach's qualitative 360 resonated with most of the Directors, but the psychometric results fell flat. John remembers a '*super-duper*' Myers-Briggs profile, but he found the psychometrics predictable – he didn't learn anything he didn't know; he was already '*psychometriced out of it*'. Paul was not impressed by the psychometrics – '*there was nothing new in it for me';* he thinks '*you get put into a box as a result of some of those things, a bit of pigeon-holing as a result of 360s, psychometrics, things like that'.* This was a viewpoint he repeated a number of times.

Initially Fiachra could not remember any profiling results, but later in the interview he talked about getting a profile that showed him to be high in creativity, which, according to Maurice, was an unusual profile at Director level in M&V. The coach explained that this was neither good nor bad, but having this trait marked him as different from his peers and so he might find it hard to get his ideas accepted – he was too much '*out there'.* Fiachra seemed to find this viewpoint discouraging.

In contrast to the indifference engendered by the Myers-Briggs profiles, the 360 qualitative feedback from the series of interviews was appreciated: '*it was insightful, it endorsed certain things – it also helped me understand the things that I was really good at' (John).* Diarmuid found the qualitative 360 useful, although he did not get the information from it until about his 10th coaching session. For him, the richness lay in *'hearing some of the phrases – people described me as a butterfly , and a number of people used that, because I was involved in a*

lot of things, flitting round from item to item'. The feedback was not particularly hard to take because he knew he was getting better.

Paul initially discounted the qualitative reviews. He did not find Maurice's 360 very useful, particularly the advice to be more visible to the Group CEO and the Group HR: *'to be honest, the Group guys are just too distant from us, I don't think they understand us'.* However, at a later stage in the interview he pulled out some feedback that the coach had given him on '*What people see when they look at Paul*; *What people don't see when they look at Paul, and What people would like to see when they look at Paul'*. He had found this profile useful at the time, and '*although I don't use it as much as I should'*, now, when he meets with his general managers, he is conscious of his leadership style and the kinds of behaviour his managers might expect from a leader.

The Coach's approach

Three directors were agreed that the coach was a nice guy, easy to talk with, easy to get along with, easy to open up to, a very good listener, that he developed rapport and empathy and was non-judgemental. Fiachra describes him as '*very personable'*; he also describes his approach as '*probing and very challenging'.* Paul tells of how the

Coach became his confidant as he dealt with a difficult personal situation - '*Maurice was solid for me in terms of that personal issue'.*

He was very knowledgeable of business and business people and the pressures they are under; very good at focusing on the positives and on the strengths. In addition, '*He had good tool kits, models, philosophies, approaches. He was very good at that ... he could bring them to life with some real examples and could make them credible – he didn't sound too academic and too conceptual – he could bring some reality to them' (John).* Diarmuid describes him as '*very structured, very disciplined, very good at ticking the boxes – and you start to realise that after a time. He was great on models – he had a model for everything and little stories, you know – sometimes it could get a little repetitive'.* Paul found the Coach very good at building his confidence, he pointed out how maybe only thirty people in the country were in a position as high-ranking as Paul's was.

All Directors mention how Maurice gave them insights into working well with their PAs. He told Paul: *'If you haven't got that as a basic, you're going nowhere'*; he now works closely

with his PA who '*keeps him on the straight and narrow*'. John, who had something of a fraught relationship with his PA, talked about the better relationship he has and that he '*never, never, never touches his diary now*'. Diarmuid says that the PAs loved the new arrangements, that they felt motivated by the work the Coach did with them and that they now had a sense of mission to help the Directors. Fiachra thought the '*PA stuff was useful*'.

Two of the Directors spontaneously referred to Covey's book. Maurice gave each of them a copy of the book and a DVD. Diarmuid was of the opinion that Maurice '*makes everyone read the Covey 7 Habits book*'. He read the book, went on to read Covey's *7 Habits of Highly Effective Families* and '*badgered the CEO into letting me do a Covey three day training course*'. He thought that the Covey stuff was '*brilliant ... it's a great model that just works*'. Diarmuid became an enthusiastic reader of emotional intelligence books.

While John found the book useful, he thinks Maurice's discussions underscored its value:

> '*I needed Maurice. Reading Covey and listening to Covey was great, but I needed Maurice beside me to help me get it. I'm not sure the book would have had the impact it did without the coaching ... but Covey would have been the basis for a lot of what Maurice would have helped me with*'.

Fiachra does not remember Maurice referring him to any readings; Paul remembers reading Covey, but does not remember discussing it with Maurice. Neither John, Paul, nor Fiachra remembers Maurice talking about aspects of emotional intelligence, although John thought Maurice was '*sound on people*'. However, Diarmuid suspected that perhaps Maurice '*has to work at*' being emotionally intelligent; he too has to work at it, so this helped him identify with Maurice. He based his judgement on what he saw as the surface enquiries that Maurice made about personal things, such as family and holidays (he does a little pantomime), but then would '*quickly move off of that, and on to business*'.

Advice from the Coach

Every executive had stories to tell about how useful Maurice's advice was and how it influenced their career and their leadership approach. In addition to his general advice on maximising the use of PAs, Maurice told **Paul** that if he was serious about taking over the MD role, then he needed to get business experience and be responsible for running a business. He needed to emphasise his interests outside of finance. '*I had a lot of conversations with Maurice around that – I knew it anyway, but Maurice reinforced it. He said: the next role that comes up, go for it*'. He also advised him to read up on areas outside

his expertise so that he was '*up to speed*' before talking to people. He needed to raise his visibility within the Group, create more access for himself with the Group CEO and the Group HR Director. He would refer to the profile of how people saw Paul, and make the point that Paul might want different audiences to see him differently.

Maurice pointed out to **John** that he always '*sort of fumbled through what he had to do',* that he was not in control.

> '*He put an analogy to me: If you met Patrick O'Brien* (Group CEO) *in a lift on the way to a meeting and Patrick said: John, what did you deliver for this business, this year? You should be able to answer that question succinctly, with confidence. He made it clear that being able to execute big achievements started a whole lot earlier in the process by being clear what the big things are you need to achieve and absolutely focussing on those things. This was very powerful for me'.*

He also helped John see that the minutia of business didn't interest him: '*What Maurice helped me realise was, the detail that needs to be there – that's not me, it's never going to be me, so go get the guy who's going to do it for me. And now I have him'.* He describes this as a '*real moment of awareness'.* He realised that he was not going to spend the '*next 20 years trying to do something I'm crap at; I'll focus on what I'm really good at ...'*

Other key pieces of advice concerned tailoring his message to the needs of his audience, bringing control into his life, learning to say no, spending more time developing his people and getting out of the office to network. What Maurice helped him understand was that '*my job isn't to do it anymore, my job is to get it done'.* Advice like that helped him; now he reflects on it and tries to avoid getting sucked into doing small things. He has put in place structures, he sets up weekly meetings with the team, and goes through what needs to be done.

Diarmuid remembers that Maurice advised him that '*When you walk into the Board room, you should take off your vocational hat and be a director first and foremost'* because the team is there to run the business. **Fiachra** was working eighty (80) hours a week and Maurice said to him:

> '*That's wrong, you need to step back, because you're mind is working on overdrive. You're not sleeping, and then you're turning around the next day and because of lack of sleep, you're more temperamental'.*

Fiachra's working week now varies between sixty and seventy hours.

4.7   Coming to an End

For three of the Directors, the coaching ran its year's course. John was more than satisfied with what he got from it.   The Divisional CEO consulted with Paul about ending the coaching.   Paul thought there '*wasn't much more to be got out of it*' and cost was a consideration. Some time later, Diarmuid looked for Maurice to work with him again and was very pleased with the results; Fiachra had left M&V before the year was up. Fiachra does not think he would be interested in ever being coached again: '*I wouldn't let anyone inside my head like that again*'.

4.8   What has Changed?

Behaviour and Attitudes

A major outcome for **Diarmuid** is his change of behaviour around people. Prior to coaching he was completely task focussed. Although affable on a social occasion, once in the work environment he was indifferent to relationships: '*And I didn't understand why I didn't get results – that's the challenge*'. He knows his attitude damaged relationships with certain people in M&V and even though he tried to make amends, it was too late for some. He thinks it wonderful that he now has a clean slate in the new job. After his second coaching contract with Maurice, Diarmuid had the most positive 360 people management feedback of any manager. It was so good that the Divisional CEO wanted him to meet with the Group HR Director as an example of what coaching could do. At that point Diarmuid told the CEO that he was leaving M&V for a new position, '*and the Poster Boy was torn off the wall!*'

Diarmuid sees himself as very good at implementing processes – '*once you show me what to do, I can do it*'. At Maurice's suggestion, he now approaches building relationships as a conscious activity, it is not something that comes naturally yet. He has stories to tell about how coaching has changed his approach, how he makes time for people, enquires about their interests, goes to lunch with direct reports. He will be meeting with a graduate trainee that afternoon. In '*a former life I'd have been totally focussed on the task*', now he will talk to that person, ask what is her background, what does she need to learn off this job? He is eager to create a good developmental situation for her and to '*create a win-win*' for them both. He now sees people as the key to success while before he thought he could do it by himself: *I*

know I can do the technical stuff, I know I can work hard, I know I can be creative when I get into a room and pull a solution, but if I don't bring the people with me, I'm goosed'. He sees a lack of emotional intelligence as his big weakness, but he thinks it is a great advantage that he has this knowledge in his mid-thirties.

Diarmuid now has a set of skills, tools and techniques to do things better in his professional life. Coaching has made him try to '*get all that chaos out of your life. Stop getting into the detail and worrying about the detail and focus on the big stuff'.* He now has a laser like focus on a small number of things and he does them. Perhaps the most significant thing that coaching has done for him is move his time horizon up *'if you want to be a leader and a very senior person in any organisation, your time horizon needs to be much longer'.* This insight totally changes the way you approach what you do. *So taking time to think things through and map that all out for myself – coaching gave me all of that'.* The 2007 feedback from the 360 reflected thoughts about how much more disciplined he was about rigorous follow-through.

He now has a different mind-set, and coaching has had a big impact on his personal life. Before coaching he would have said '*Oh, I'm very into family'* but his actions would not have supported that. Now he spends a lot more time with his wife and children, he no longer works all hours and he is more relaxed because '*I'm much more in control of what I'm doing during the day, it's much easier to switch off the job'.*
One other thing that coaching made clear to him was to focus on your strengths and go after them. That was part of his reason for leaving M&V. He sees his key strength in consultancy, which is where his current company specialises.

Initially **Paul** wondered: '*Did I get anything tangible out of coaching? Hard to say'.* However further conversation elicited that what Paul got from coaching was '*definitely the confidence to step outside of my box in terms of finance'.* He speculates on whether he would have done that without Maurice, and thinks he probably would, but his new job came up just months after finishing the coaching and he felt more confident about going after that role. He credits Maurice with giving him the ability to coach, although finding suitable successors is still one of his biggest challenges. He is more organised, more focussed on objectives, and works well with his PA.

What **John** learned from Maurice was personal discipline, he learned to manage himself, and leave behind '*that guy running around – lastminute.com – getting everything done, taking on a bit too much*'. Maurice was instrumental in helping to change that approach. He came to know his strengths and know what he wanted out of the business. He is now where he wants to be, and he sees his present job as being concerned with strategic leadership, providing consistency, direction, structures and procedures for the business. He credits Maurice with helping him '*do the transition to my first real senior job*'. Now he does much less, but focuses on the bigger things and gives them the time and energy they need. He always keeps Maurice's feedback sheet close by and he looks at it now and again. He often refers to what he learned from Maurice when directing his own senior team.

Fiachra learned a lot about himself from the training. At that time he '*tended to be quite volatile and temperamental and me blowing my top was a reasonably regular occurrence*', but that does not happen anymore. Maurice highlighted this information for Fiachra and '*basically he made it clear that it was something that was going to hold me back and it was something my colleagues had difficulty with. I would have taken a huge lesson from that*'. What the coach made him realise was '*that somebody could have a go at me and I'd forget it in ten minutes, but not everyone responded the same and some people take it with them for longer*'. He has learned how to '*distract myself from the emotional side, and stay committed to what I want to achieve. So I learned a lot about myself and I haven't had a hissy fit or rant in the last few years*'. Now he tends not to display his emotions: '*I tend not to let people see whether they're getting to me or not getting to me*'. He probably would not get as emotionally upset or as emotionally elated as he once did.

Fiachra followed Maurice's advice about taking time out. Now he has learned to switch off: '*I can go home, or go back to the hotel in the evening, and not do any work and not feel guilty*'. The training seeped into his personal life too and his wife has remarked how much more patient he is with the children.

He is also kinder to himself and no longer puts excessive pressure on himself: '*I would have been my own worst critic, now I'm not that bad on myself, and I've probably learned that everything you want to do, can't be done today, and you've got to step your way through it and once you're making progress, you're getting places*'.

Self-awareness and reflectivity

Paul thinks that he is probably '*only marginally better*' at being self-aware and self-reflective, '*I wouldn't be great at that*'. However, from the business perspective, he has spent a lot of time over the last several months reflecting on what has been done and thinking about how he is going to take the business forward: '*Without jumping in and doing, on the business end, I've become much more reflective*'. He is also much better at keeping himself focussed on objectives.

John believes he has a high level of self-awareness, he knows his strengths and limitations, and is '*fully receptive to feedback, once I think it's fairly based*'. However, he is '*considerably more reflective now*' and he plans ahead. He makes sure that his team '*are all shared and engaged in something*' and they are clear on what the priorities are and what the big issues are.

Self-awareness and reflectivity have given **Diarmuid** a different mind-set. He finds it very encouraging to constantly step back and look at what he is doing:

> When you're working with a coach, he's acting as the reflection. He's acting as the mirror. He's constantly holding up the mirror to you. If you learn something from it, you learn to keep doing that for yourself. It's harder, but you keep doing that for yourself post the coaching experience.

Diarmuid had his eyes opened: '*I always thought I was self-aware ... but there were areas that were almost outside of my boundaries – like emotional intelligence – I didn't know how bad I was*'.

Fiachra is now much more aware of his behaviour. While he is always reflective, and always looks back and wonders could he have done things differently, he didn't appreciate what a negative impact his volatility had on others. Maurice's qualitative 360 gave him this insight.

Commitment to the organisation

Coaching had some effect on how John and Paul felt about the organisation, but both men were already in a positive frame of mind. John '*likes M&V*' and appreciates that the company has taken '*some risks with the jobs they've given me*'. For him,

> '*coaching endorsed the investment the organisation was making in me, but it would also have endorsed that the organisation thinks I am capable of doing*

*more and are getting me ready for it – so that's a very positive feeling – so yea –
it would have'* (influenced his commitment).

Paul was similarly committed to M&V and planned to pursue his career within the company. Because Diarmuid was at a low ebb when coaching was offered, his sense of commitment was influenced '*massively*', particularly his sense of commitment to the Divisional CEO who was very supportive. He quotes him as saying: '*You're a good guy who got into a bad position, and you'll be a good guy again – and the coaching, and whatever else we can do, is going to help you'*. The offer of coaching did not influence Fiachra's commitment to the organisation (although he never refuses training).

Team coaching

Paul believes that an ability to coach is one of his legacies from Maurice. He tells the story of a new manager whose performance was not immediately up to expectations and there was pressure from the Divisional HR Director and the CEO to replace him. Paul had confidence in him and coached him successfully and the CEO and HR Director later admitted they were wrong.

John does some coaching and would like to do more, but he would like to get training and have some formal structures around it. The company is talking about running a coaching and mentoring development course, and he would find that very interesting.

Diarmuid does not see himself as a coach, he does not think he would have the patience for coaching '*because I do think it takes a long time*', but he '*would dabble in giving advice to colleagues along coaching lines'*.

4.9 Some caveats about the coach

Although all Directors expressed regard for the coach, **John** was the only one unreservedly enthusiastic about Maurice. The other three were critical about aspects of his approach.

Paul thought the coaching agenda was ambitious and that they tried to do too much: '*there was probably 5 or 6 things we needed to address, and we probably should have only addressed two of those things, and nailed two of those things'*. While he and Maurice '*talked about the leadership piece*', nothing much was done about it. Because of this he feels he didn't get as much out of the sessions as he could have. Maurice was not charting his progress: '*I was at 1, now I'm at 4. That's what I found was missing'*. He also felt that the

coach was '*Not forceful at holding me to account; I feel he probably let me off the hook too easily in some areas'.* He talks about another coach who is working with him now to help him influence his team and sell his strategic vision. He finds her approach '*powerful'*, she helps him prepare talks, shadows his performances, and gives very direct feedback. He feels he is getting '*real benefit'* from her coaching.

Paul is sceptical about what value Maurice's coaching had for him: '*Did I learn anything concrete – I don't know'.* He tends to talk in terms of what coaching did not do for him, rather than what it did. However, almost his parting phrase is: '*After talking to you, I think I got more out of it, on reflection, than I thought I did in the beginning'.*

He certainly did not learn how to hold people accountable, which is something he would have liked. He thinks he learned this lesson from experience, rather than from coaching. He describes himself as being a bit '*soft'* and '*feeling for people'* and tells how he could not bring himself to confront a particular employee who was no longer up to the job. This person had worked closely with him when he first took up position in M&V and had helped him bring the finance side of the Division into line. He constantly deferred taking a decision until he could no longer avoid it. He felt very much on his own and the attitude of those above was: '*It's your mess, you sort it, but don't let it cost the company too much'.* Eventually he braced himself for the '*hard conversation'*, agreed a settlement and is still friendly with the lady. This event happened post-coaching.

Diarmuid also has some criticisms of Maurice. He worked with Maurice over two different periods, the initial year that was common to them all, and then he asked that the coach come back and work with him again for 3 months.

> '*If I take that first year, the first 3 to 6 months of it, he was very structured, he was working to a path, it seemed to be a different path to the others, but he was knocking on all of those business skills ... but then in the second half he seemed less clear on where to go. Every session seemed to get high-jacked – he'd ask me what was going on – I'd tell him what was going on – he'd latch on to what was happening this week'.*

Diarmuid knew that the coach was '*having a whole pile of difficulties – personally I think he just got a bit distracted'.* The second time he asked for Maurice was to help in building better relationships with his team. His scores had improved, but he felt that he would do

really well if he had Maurice helping him on a '*very specific issue*'. So Maurice came and worked with him:

> '*very specifically around teams, relationships and people ... and then we did the 360s and the scores got better. So he was very good when you kept him focussed ... but he meandered when it was left to him to set the agenda*'.

Diarmuid also thought that Maurice was very poor on focussing on the outcomes: '*I did kind of feel, for someone who was constantly telling me to measure, he was very weak on measuring*'.

Towards the latter end of his coaching, **Fiachra** had a problem with how the sessions were going. He felt that the conversations went round and round, discussing things forever, with nothing ever decided. He was coming out of a session more confused and frustrated than when he went in. He found Maurice's line of questioning suspect and couldn't understand why he was asking certain types of questions, e.g. '*Why was I staying with M&V, would I not be better to move on; how much would it take for me to move on*?' While he was uncomfortable with the questions, he did not challenge Maurice '*because I was there myself anyway, and all of a sudden he was asking the questions that I needed to be asked personally. But I never understood why the questions were coming.*' Fiachra thought that Maurice should be taking a more positive approach and not be advocating walking away from the problem: '*Should I not stand back and try to see what will make it work out*'. He thinks that Maurice sensed his frustration with the fact that he had had so many bosses and that he did not think he could work well with the new boss.

4.10 The CEO's perspective

The Rationale for coaching

The CEO (Gearoid) presented as an affable, self-assured man in his late 50s/early 60s. I explained that my interest in talking to him was to discover how coaching came about in the Division and how he assessed its outcomes.

As expected, he explained that coaching came about through the HR Director when Caroline suggested that the most effective way to develop the Divisional team was through coaching. Gearoid had '*no experience of using external coaches*', although he was familiar with the benefits of coaching as an internal development process. So, from that point of view he was receptive to the idea and he knew there was a need '*in particular cases*'.

Cost was an issue, but it wasn't a big issue, although he was surprised at how expensive it was. On the other hand, the Division had invested little in senior management development over the previous 3 or 4 years, and he was '*aware that money needed to be spent, work needed to be done, and we had some very high talented individuals on the team who needed to have their talents and abilities shaped and modelled and directed*'.

The CEO explains that Caroline had '*used Maurice before, she selected him, so in the context of the selection of a coach, that was not well done*'. Maurice's background was entirely in the electronics, high-tech industry. '*In my view, that was a deficiency in his ability to relate to the type of business we had here and the challenges and so on*'. Although the CEO met the coach before he gave him the contract, he was strongly influenced that he came recommended and had a successful track record. When he met him, he though him a '*sort of good guy person, experienced, who would know what he was talking about, his manner, and so on seemed to be pretty professional, and that which you'd expect in a coach*'.

There was a formal contract, but Gearoid can't remember the details. However, the coaching lasted: '*Say 6 months to a year. So, we extended the contract if people thought they were getting benefit out it, and some did and some didn't*'. The executives chosen for the programme were those that he and Caroline deemed would most benefit from it, based on talent assessment and potential assessment '*We purposely didn't put anyone with a remedial aspect on it,* but it was remedial to the extent that weak areas needed to be developed.

The CEO's own coaching experience

During the interview, it emerged that Gearoid was a participant in the pilot coaching programme, although he was the first one to drop out of the coaching. The CEO speculates that he might not be a candidate for this type of coaching, but he was frustrated by the lack of engagement, '*nothing tangible coming out of it*'. He would have expected '*a bit more challenge, a bit more monitoring, a bit more coherency around the structure, a bit more of a step-by-step process, I suppose*'. He had a couple of problems with Maurice:

> '*I felt I was getting a lot out of the one-to-ones, but I didn't feel there was enough structure around follow-up. There wasn't enough regularity – there were a number of meetings missed, you know there was a gap of about 6 weeks between meetings, and so on. I felt that Maurice didn't engage strongly, I felt he wasn't interested in the business. That's where*

> *the background comes into it, I think. And I just felt, I felt I needed more from a coach'.*

Gearoid explains that Maurice's said it was the coach's responsibility to set the agenda, to map the journey, and to present the necessary challenges: *It's up to you to take the journey but I will be there to support and direct you'.* On a one-to-one basis, he found the coach good, *'he was fine'.* The coach presented an assessment through a psychometric, and the assessment showed up a number of things:

> *'nothing surprising, but it was good, strong stuff and a proper way to start the coaching process and it was validating in that it highlighted the strengths as well as the developmental areas'.*

He goes on to explain his frustration:

> *'but the things that the assessment showed up didn't drive a programme; it didn't drive a continuity of interaction. When we met the next time, it was about something else, and when we met the next time, it was about something else'.*

The CEO acknowledges that he did get some worth from the coaching:

> *'(Maurice) did give me some very good pointers, about managing teams and so on, so I wouldn't knock it all. When I reflect on it, and I have reflected on it, there were some real nuggets in there. It started off very positive but after 6 months I had frustrations. Now I didn't break for those reasons, and then we had a particular incident that I believed was a serious breach of professional conduct'.*

He goes on to tell the story of what finally decided him to opt-out of the coaching. Diarmuid, one of the coachees, failed to deliver on a project, *'and there were questions being asked at Group about his performance'.* The Group HR Director approached Maurice to *'review how the coaching was going from a talent development point of view'.* Gearoid had no problem with that or with the Group HR Director discussing the process and talking about strengths and weaknesses. However, the Group HR Director specifically asked Maurice to share with him his assessment of Diarmuid, and Maurice gave it, and said that he thought Diarmuid was limited, that he was *'a particular type of guy who had these development faults that would be difficult to remedy, and so on'.* The CEO *'was appalled!'* He had a big row with the Group HR Director. *'I got Caroline in, I got Maurice in, and I said I'd lost all confidence. [...] What I objected to was a damning indictment of a guy who was a senior member of my team and who I still had faith in, and so on'.*

He cannot remember how Diarmuid became aware of this, '*but Diarmuid was aware of this. Absolutely. It was just a mess'*. The CEO confronted the Coach and told him '*he was very unprofessional, and he told me that he had never been told that in his whole career as a coach. It was view shared by the HR Director who had brought him in and who felt very let down by it'*.

The Coach did apologise, '*he was defensive, of course, but he did put his hands up and say, with hindsight, he shouldn't have. He said that the Group HR Director came in and interrogated him, that he said, I'm the Group HR Director I need to know these things about the senior people working in the business'*.

Gearoid expresses astonishment that Maurice does not acknowledge that he was part of the coaching cohort and speculates (with a laugh) that maybe '*he just blotted it out of his memory. I refused to pay him the second half of his fees. Because I had lost trust in him, and [ ] because there was a serious deficiency in the number of meetings we had set out, and we had an argy-bargy over that, but we agreed. So very much, I was a part of the programme'*.
The CEO wasn't that surprised to find that Diarmuid spoke very highly of Maurice, He thought that '*Diarmuid got a lot out of the coaching, because Diarmuid was at a difficult time in his career, because he'd managed this big project that had collapsed, and he needed somebody, and Maurice was that somebody'*.

As the person picking up the bill, Gearoid had conversations with Maurice about the coaching. Everyone knew this was happening: '*We handled that fine'*. The CEO was also checking with the executives about progress '*and it varied'*. The executives had their own issues. '*Fiachra was very sceptical about the process, but he had his own issues, which were very behavioural, he was a loose cannon around – a very good sales guy, but a loose cannon'*.

Gearoid tells a story of how his boss, the Group CEO rejected Maurice as a suitable candidate for a coaching programme with Divisional CEOs: '*He interviewed Maurice but he didn't rate him because he felt his background was all wrong. This was before I had any problems with him, when I was very positive about him. [ ] With hindsight, he was right'*. He thinks

this is an important lesson, that '*you match the type of experience of the coach to the background of the people he will be coaching. Their working lives'.*

Coaching outcomes

The CEO doesn't think they got a lot out of the coaching. '*We did an assessment at the end, with the guys and with Caroline. Both Diarmuid and John were positive about the coaching, so we let them continue with it because they thought they were getting stuff, and that's ok'.* But he couldn't see a lot coming out of it. '*Two left the business, and two are still with us. In both cases, I would find it hard to put my hand on my heart and say Maurice had a significant influence. Even though I think it did help, particularly in John's case; but less so Paul, from what I see'.*

He thinks Diarmuid and John benefitted most from the coaching because they were '*very keenly aware of the areas that they needed to improve in, very explicitly in terms of feedback from myself and performance reviews and so on'.* The CEO thinks that these were areas susceptible to coaching, such as '*execution, project completion, focusing in John's case, looking at the bigger picture; for Paul, I suppose, the challenge was more personal stuff'.*

He tells his last story:

> '*Taking John's case, we knew what we wanted him to do, we went through a lot of that with Maurice, and he spent a year at it with the Coach. Then a new guy comes into the business and he doesn't know any of this, but gets talking with his colleagues and then says to me: You know what the problem with John is, he needs to focus, he's like a bungee jumper. This is after a year with the coach!'* (He laughs).

Coaching within the Division

Presently the Division is using two external coaches. However, now it is more on an *ad hoc* basis, more on a response to an individual needs basis. There is talk of a Coaching and Mentoring course for managers. Very little mentoring goes on within the business, not in any formal way.

4.11 Conclusion

Chapter 4 illustrates the multiple realities that can exist within a reasonably bounded process such as a pilot coaching programme. It brings to the fore executives' perspectives on many aspects of coaching and provides all research participants' evaluations of the coaching

process. Validating an interpretivist approach, almost every person expresses a subjective perspective that is at odds with someone else's account, and there are many anomalies. Coming late in the research process, the CEO's story of unprofessional conduct by the Coach was a dramatic counterpoint to views from the HR Director and from most of the executives. The following Chapter discusses these various views and relates them to relevant theories.

Chapter 5   Discussion

5.1   Introduction

This Chapter addresses the research questions outlined previously. My aim is to compare, contrast and blend contributions from research participants and to explore their perceptions and responses against theories found in the literature, bearing in mind The Executive Coaching Forum Handbook's (2008) partnership definition of executive coaching. The answer to Research question 1 discusses the factors that inhibited and facilitated positive coaching outcomes. This is an extensive section that addresses organisational climate (leadership development orientation, executives' perceptions of the Division and of the CEO), how management managed the coaching process, qualities of the Coach, and qualities of the executives. The answer to Research Question 2 discusses how the executives, the HR Director and the CEO evaluated the coaching intervention.

5.2   Research Question 1:

- **To explore executives' perceptions of the factors that impeded and facilitated the effectiveness of the coaching intervention**

5.2.1 Introduction

The Executive Coaching Forum Handbook (2008:19) sees executive coaching as *'an experiential, individualized, leadership development process'* designed to achieve organizational goals. It goes on to describe a one-to-one or group coaching process that is underpinned by feedback data and *'based on mutual trust and respect'*. The definition describes an ideal situation where '*the organisation, an executive, and the executive coach work in harmony to achieve maximum learning'*. Within M&V, the Division initiated an executive coaching programme as a leadership development intervention that would help groom successors for the business. A reputable external coach gathered extensive data and engaged on a one-to-one basis with executives over an extended time. The focus was to enhance leadership skills for the benefit of the organisation. In theory, at least, the organisation, the coach and the executives would work together to maximise gains for the organisation. It would be reasonable to assume that this definition describes how senior management within the Division envisioned the coaching process working.

Because they are salient to the process, characteristics of the coaching triad feed into coaching interventions and influence coaching outcomes. Firstly, organisational factors include investment in people development, internal relationships within the company and senior managements' ability to manage all aspects of the coaching process. Secondly, qualities of the coach are critical to the process. These include interpersonal skills, coaching skills, business and psychological acumen, and an ability to manage the coaching process to produce a results oriented experience for executives. Thirdly, qualities of executives that influence their readiness for, and ability to respond to, the coaching initiative are salient determinants of positive outcomes. The following discussion considers these factors and the extent to which they influenced perceptions of positive coaching outcomes.

5.2.2 Organisational Factors

Leadership development orientation
In line with Lambert's (2008) and O'Connor et al's (2006) observations that companies are currently investing heavily in leadership development programmes, M&V has invested in both succession planning and talent management via a suite of leadership development courses underpinned by coaching. M&V's coaching initiative is in line with various best practices identified as key to effective leadership development. For example, the company has a leadership competency framework, a solid foundation of values and guiding principles, a recognised need for succession planning driven by the specific needs of the business, and a 360-degree feedback process to identify competency gaps and to indicate subsequent progress. All these pre-conditions aid effective leadership development as outlined in Leskiw & Singh's (2007) research findings. At Director-level, the coaching programme resembled what Hartley & Hinksman (2003) refer to as prescribed leadership development associated with competency frameworks and 360-degree feedback. Three-sixties (360s) are particularly useful for bridging the *Inner-Outer* perspective, i.e. lining up people's self-perceptions with those of their colleagues (Hogan & Warrenfeltz, 2003:80) and providing a foundation for selecting organisational talent (Mackay, 2007). In this aspect, M&V were further along the road of best practice leadership development than were C&C where both leadership competencies and 360s were introduced at the instigation of the coach. However, it must be acknowledge that Paul's perception of 360 profiles as putting one 'into boxes' lines up with Olson's (2008) views on the flawed nature of profiling.

There appears to be a logic and consistency to M&V's in-house leadership development programmes (Alimo-Metcalfe & Lawler, 2001) in that the courses resonate around company issues (Ready & Conger, 2003; Hartley & Hinksman, 2003) and the company has a clear connect between high potential employees and succession strategy (Leskiw & Singh, 2007). Although Cappelli (2008) contends that too much planning for succession is wasteful, the initial coaching intervention aimed at senior executives within the Division was designed to fast-track leader development (Alfman, 2007; Johnson, 2007) at least partly in response to pressure from Group HR to develop leaders for succession. Because the leadership development initiative is company-wide and cascades through the organisation, the impetus for these development plans appears to be forward looking and strategic and avoids the *ad hoc* approach that characteristics many Irish companies (O'Connor, et al., 2006). However, the more recent decision to use coaching for senior executives as an issue based resource, rather than a developmental one, favours an *ad hoc* approach. This possibly reflects the CEO's overall negative evaluation of the executive coaching programme (Lambert, 2001) and also reflects his contention that coaching works best when the objectives are specific (Sherman & Freas, 2004; Olson, 2008). It is probably fair to say that, although executive coaching may now be used on an *ad hoc* basis, the structured and strategic nature of M&V's leadership development programmes and the fact that these programmes are all underpinned by between-module coaching is an exception to O'Connor's (2006) findings of how Irish companies manage their leadership development interventions.

The Divisional HR Director's initial emphasis on coaching is in line with Lambert's (2001) position that coaching lays the groundwork skills that enables successful mentoring, although there is little sign of this happening. The extent of the coaching input supports Gray's (2006) comment that coaching has become a significant approach in the professional development of senior personnel and the company's move to build a bank of acceptable coaches is in line with Johnson's (2007) contention that hiring coaches is becoming standardised. The Group HR Director's decision to build a bank of acceptable coaches may ease the work of Divisional HR departments (McCleary, 2006) by centralising the coach hiring process. Additionally, this approach might standardise the quality of coaching talent (Clutterbuck, 2008) available to M&V, and help eliminate confusion about accreditation (Gray, 2006; Lambert, 2008; Hamlin et al., 2009). As a counterpoint to this approach, it is interesting to note the Coach's assertion that he has never been asked to specify his qualifications, which is in line with both Turner's (2006) and Alvey & Barclay's (2007) findings that coach

qualifications were rarely an issue for executives, although one might expect that they should be an issue for professional HR people.

While the HR Director is confident that coaching has been very worthwhile at Director-level, she appears to suggest that coaching is capable of developing potential at senior level but not capable of developing capability at middle-management level. Her experience differs from research that found coaching was most effective at middle level management (Bowles et al., 2007). Despite her satisfaction with coaching at Director-level, there is some indication that the HR Director's affair with coaching is also beginning to wane. The new suite of courses that the Group Talent Management Team has designed for Directors will now be her first resort, which suggests that both she and Group HR are conscious of the opportunity cost of coaching (Olson, 2008).

The Divisional HR Director's 'utopia' is to reduce dependency on external coaches and inculcate managerial coaching skills. This aspiration is supported by Clutterbuck's (2008:10) view that 'the trend to ensure that all managers have coaching and mentoring skills is likely to accelerate' and by McClery's (2006) view that investing in developing coaching skills is preferable to investing in individual coaching. It would appear that hiring an executive coach has furthered the HR Director's aim in that Paul attributes his coaching ability directly to the coach, and John expresses a desire to acquire coaching skills. It is interesting to note that the HR Director's own efforts at internal coaching were not fruitful, which brings to mind reservations about managerial coaching (Ellinger et al., 2008).

Despite efforts to have a company-wide leadership development orientation, courses to inculcate coaching and mentoring skills are still only in the pipeline, which suggests that the company is far from embracing the challenge of instigating a coaching and mentoring culture as described by Clutterbuck & Megginson (2005). Although a continuous move towards imbuing coaching skills would be a step towards establishing a coaching culture (Clutterbuck & Megginson, 2005), using McPherson's (2008) case study of cascading a coaching culture through Lancashire County Council (it took four years and tremendous effort) as a yardstick, it could be argued that the company has a long way to go to achieve this ambition. While the HR Director's aspirations are admirable, the interview with the CEO appears to suggest that inculcating a coaching and mentoring culture is a long-finger prospect.

Views on the Divisional Leader

Various views on the Divisional CEO's style of leadership possibly say more about the beholder than the leader, as perceiver biases and implicit leadership theories may distort perceptions of leadership effectiveness (Chemers, 1984). The tendency for people to provide conflicting personal views was a recurring happening within this research, e.g. Fiachra's statement that the CEO 'wouldn't see anyone wrong' juxtaposed with his previous belief that his efforts never got proper credit but that all his mistakes were noted, seem at odds with each other. It could be argued that the executives are describing a lack of consistency within the Division and that this is represented in their own descriptive inconsistencies, although Charmaz (2006) contends that interviewees often make conflicting, contradictory statements about the nature of their worlds.

Views on the organisation

As might be expected from interpretivist research, there were as many nuanced views on the company as research participants. From the stories told (e.g. Fiachra had five bosses in four years), it appears that the Division may have been struggling because of its failure to attract and retain top calibre people. The ability to do this is a key characteristic of good leadership (Hogan & Warrenfeltz, 2003).

The company ethos as described by the Divisional HR Director (more supportive and helpful than other organisations where she had worked) is very positive. This perception is generally endorsed, but with some caveats. The most positive sentiment was Diarmuid's view that 'It is a great company to work for' which represents a positive attitude that reflects staff satisfaction which is needed to reach 'stretching objectives' (Clutterbuck & Megginson, 2005:9). It was, perhaps, reassuring that not all comments were out-right positive as this might have indicated an orchestrated response. However, it was interesting to observe that the most consistently positive comments came from those Directors still working in the organisation.

Conflicting views around the nature of the culture highlight the relevance of people's personal experiences in influencing perceptions. Fiachra reports feeling that his role as Sales Director was not valued. Laske (2004:47) proposes that gaps between executives' role expectations and their experience of the organisation are 'energy sinks' because they cause 'discrepancies of self and role'. It is reasonable to assume that for Fiachra, this perceived discrepancy was a significant irritant that coloured his perception of the organisation. On the

other hand, for three of the Directors, the coaching was a validating experience that increased their sense of commitment to the organisation, which is in line with Kombarakaran et al's (2008) findings.

The HR Director's role

From an organisational perspective, managing the coaching process covers the spectrum of engaging the coach, choosing and qualifying the executives, agreeing agendas, and monitoring and evaluating the process (Knudson, 2002; Lambert, 2008).

As the Divisional HR Director describes it, her approach appears to be professional and assured, watchful but not intrusive. (It was the Group HR Director who intimidated the Coach). In line with practitioner recommendations, she prefers a coach to have coaching qualifications (Judge & Cowell, 1997; Brotman et al., 1998; Berglas, 2002) but recommendations and results influence her more. All of the coaches she currently employs are skilled in business, rather than psychology. While this approach is not a policy decision (the Divisional CEO's own background is in psychology), it runs counter to contentions that coaches should be skilled psychologists (Berglas, 2002; Passmore, 2007) and runs counter to the practice prevailing in C&C where all the coaches were either psychologists or counsellors.

According to herself, the HR Director attempts to clarify the coaching agenda (managers can be so woolly) and the tenor of her remarks suggests that she favours specific agendas (Olson, 2008) and accountability (Knudson, 2002). She seeks reassurance from the executive and the coach that the process is working satisfactorily (Wasylyshyn, 2003; Knudson, 2002). In addition to her efforts to gauge the effectiveness of the coaching intervention by talking to executives and the coach, she also has some measurements in place (Stewart et al., 2007) and she contends that the performance review following on from the coaching is the litmus test that will judge its efficacy (Hogan & Warrenfeltz, 2003). While all this rhetoric is very impressive, Paul's comment that neither the Coach nor the HR Director made any attempt to hold him accountable suggests that there is a discrepancy between the HR Director's espoused and enacted theories (Argyris & Schon, 1978).

The CEO's role

The CEO had no direct experience of using external coaches and he was 'very strongly influenced' by the fact that the Coach was 'being recommended with a successful track record'. With hindsight, he feels that not having a proper selection procedure was a mistake, and that lack of industry knowledge militated against the Coach engaging fully with the business (Saporito, 1996; Stern, 2004). However, there is nothing to suggest that had Gearoid checked out the Coach's credentials (Kiel et al, 1996, Berglas, 2002; Sherman & Freas, 2004) and formally interviewed him for the job, he would have refused to employ him.

Partly in line with best practice recommendations, a contract was agreed that specified cost, duration, and timing of sessions (Kilburg, 2004). The coaching contracts lasted from between six months to a year, depending on whether an executive thought it worthwhile to continue with the programme. (This is in sharp contrast to the pilot coaching programme in C&C where the coach describes the coaching as 'just a taster' because each executive was entitled to just three sessions).

Initially, the coaching agendas fell out of competency gaps identified by the 360-degree survey feedback and the CEO's performance review (Mackay, 2007). The executives chosen for the programme were those that the HR Director and the CEO deemed would benefit most from coaching, however, contrary to recommendations, no attempt was made to measure their readiness for coaching (Kiel et al, 1996; Tobias, 1996; Sherman & Freas, 2004). The CEO says that 'we purposely didn't put anyone with a remedial aspect on it, we put people with high potential on it'. (This is somewhat at odds with a later statement from the CEO when he refers to Fiachra as 'a loose cannon' and offers the view that there was a remedial aspect to all the agendas because specific improvements and competency gaps needed to be closed). However, whatever their initial orientations, all of the agendas inherently had the potential to benefit the organisation, in that the learning envisaged was aimed at building leadership capability and ensuring successors, which is in line with the Executive Forum Handbook's (2008) view of coaching achieving short and long-terms organisational goals.

Together, the HR Director and the CEO briefed the coach on what they perceived as the developmental issues that the executives needed to address. Contrary to recommendations, no tripartite meeting involved the Coach, the executive and senior management; neither were

there formal review meetings that involved the CEO, the executive and the Coach (Peterson, 1996; Wasylyshyn, 2003).

It appears that the CEO's decision to be coached was spontaneous and came about after he met the Coach. When it came time to set the CEO's coaching agenda, the Coach usurped this task and, according to the CEO, said that, as Coach, it was 'part of his responsibility to map the journey that you will have to follow on this'. This very directive approach may have been a ploy by the coach to play to his own coaching strengths (Garvey et al., 2008). In this instance, his strategy is out of line with other executive centred approaches to setting objectives. For example, CFI's (2003) recommendations sees agenda setting as a co-operative task involving both the coach and the executive, Goldsmith's (2008) approach sees successful executives selecting their own coaching objectives, and Sherman & Freas's (2004) view advises a collaborate, mutual interest approach by all parties to the process. Although the CEO seems very definite about how the coach approached setting the objectives, at another point he appears to suggest that the objectives fell out of the feedback from the psychometrics (Starkey, 2006), but complained that there wasn't enough in the feedback to drive a coaching programme. What appears to be missing from the dyadic dialogue is an interactive feedback process that gives the Coach access to the CEO's sentiments and evaluations (Gregory, et al., 2008).

When the coaching got underway, in addition to her own efforts to check progress, the HR Director involved the CEO in a monitoring exercise. While she looks for 'top-line information' only, the CEO had no such reticence. As an expected and agreed part of the process, he had conversations with the Coach about progress, both positive and negative (he heard nothing that surprised him), and conversations with the executives, and he is happy that 'we handled that fine'. The CEO's expectations were more in line with Wasylyshyn's (2003) advice that, respecting confidentiality, the coach should brief senior people in the organisation. This contrasts with C&C where the HR Director made only an informal attempt to monitor outcomes because he was of the opinion that any investment in people would have a pay-back. Contrary to views that designated colleagues have a role to play in the coaching process (Sherman & Freas, 2004; Goldsmith, 2008), other than annual 360s, no attempt appears to have been made to engage peers or direct reports in an ongoing evaluation process. Such a process could have had the double benefit of motivating executives to

implement behaviour change, while alerting colleagues to the positive changes that have occurred (Sherman & Freas, 2004; Goldsmith, 2008).

The CE0 was the first to opt out of the coaching programme. Interestingly, this decision was taken, not because of his growing frustration with coaching, but because a breach of confidentiality by the Coach damaged the relationship between them. This happening raises two separate issues. Firstly, it highlights some of the ethical tensions that can occur within the triadic coaching relationship. Kombarakaran et al's (2008) research study notes the contribution that coaches' ethical and professional conduct make to the success of coaching programmes and Hawkins & Schwenk (2006) make a clear connect between coach supervision and ethical behaviour. They suggest that supervision helps coaches deal with ethical issues around confidentiality and managing relationship. Maurice, it seems, preferred a solitary coaching approach, thus he missed-out on the potential benefits of supervision (CIPD, 2007; Clutterbuck, 2008). It seems reasonable to assume that coaches other than Maurice experience demands that could weaken their ethical stance. Thus Kombarakaran et al's (2008) call for clear practice guidelines and professional standards seems apt.

The second issue it raises concerns the CEO's reason for opting out of the coaching. His inclination seems to have been to stay with the coaching even though he was finding the experience frustrating. This behaviour runs counter to the Coach's suggestion that busy executives will not stay with the coaching process unless they can see clear results. While the CEO may be very critical of the coach (Kilburg, 1997), he fails to act on his sentiment. The CEO's dissatisfaction, partly engendered by discontinuity between coaching sessions, finds echoes in Turner's (2006) research that found that discontinuity was one of the issues that concerned her research subjects. There is nothing in Turner's paper to suggest that her research subjects acted on their dissatisfaction by either challenging the coach or leaving the process, which goes some way to support contentions that practitioners' interpretations of what is happening during coaching may not match those of the executives (Lowman, 2005; Olson, 2008).

The Divisional HR Director was under pressure to show that the coaching initiative was working (Kincaid & Gordon, 2003; Bluckert, 2004). Her contention that it worked 'absolutely' at Director-level has already been queried. What is interesting about this aspect of managing the process is that she must have been aware that the CEO was somewhat

disenchanted with his coaching progress. Yet neither the HR Director nor the CEO conveyed this dissatisfaction to the Coach. Even after his own bad experience with the Coach when he refused to pay the balance of his coaching fees, the CEO was willing to sanction further coaching, although he was aware that at least one other executive was less than enthused by his coaching experience.

The CEO claims that he lost trust in the Coach, which supports Alvey & Barclay's (2007) findings that ensuring confidentiality is key to trust. However, despite his personal loss of confidence in the Coach, he continued to employ him and eventually re-hired him, which is difficult to rationalise. Two executives and the CEO refer to the high cost of coaching (Holloway, 2006; Johnson, 2007). Despite this awareness, it could be argued that, counter to suggestions in the literature about companies being keen to ensure they get value for their coaching spend (Clutterbuck, 2008; Lambert, 2008), in this instance the CEO lived up to his laissez-faire description and was less than assiduous in protecting the interests of the company.

Conclusion
Despite adverse comments from research participants, the organisation seems to be working towards taking on the characteristics of a learning organisation (valuing people, cascading learning through the organisation). However, this may be a steep learning curve in a company where leadership and strategy are relatively new concepts. Interestingly, the move to develop be-spoke programmes for senior managers opposes a current view that neither in-house nor external leadership programmes are dynamic enough to cope with the current pace of business change (Johnson, 2007). It is reasonable to speculate that the cost of coaching (Holloway, 2006; Johnson, 2007; Ulrich, 2008) might be the impetus for providing such alternatives.

As in any situation involving people, the variety of views can be bewildering. Certainly, the organisation exhibits some of the characteristics of a 'critical parent' in the Berne tradition, i.e. it is paternalistic, but demanding, and one would have to question whether, in a critical climate, learning from others (except learning what not to do) is likely to be an activity that is generally supported and encouraged (Pearn et al., 1994). On the other hand, there are positive indicators, for example, the CEO's willingness to allow executives to continue coaching, providing they felt they were receiving benefit, is certainly benign (and surprising,

in the circumstances) and shows a willingness to foster learning (Sambrook & Stewart, 2000). Being willing to tolerate mistakes and to take some risks are also good indicators of a learning organisation in the making (Ellinger, 2004), as is its investment in people development. These developments are a move away from Diarmuid's observation that the mindset was to regard people as a cost, rather than an asset.

In many respects, the approaches of the Divisional HR Director and the CEO make sense. Reputation is an important aspect of coach credibility and the HR Director had personal experience of the Coach's work and could vouch for his results, thus it is reasonable that her enthusiasm for the process and her belief in the Coach influenced the CEO. Regarding executive selection, although Berglas (2002) suggests that executives undergo psychological tests to gauge their coaching readiness, the 360s and performance review were acceptable approaches for determining coaching eligibility and for formulating coaching agendas. (It is interesting that a number of times the CEO questions his own suitability for coaching). The Coach was briefed on what was expected from him concerning three of the executives and he had very definite ideas on where he wanted the coaching to go for the CEO. Both the CEO and the HR Director took the monitoring process seriously. So far, so good.

Despite all these positive moves, the CEO expresses disappointment with the results of the coaching. He attributes this to the Coach's failure to engage with the business (Saporito, 1996; Stern, 2004) because his high-tech background was 'all wrong'. He comes to this decision with hindsight provided by the Group CEO's refusal to 'rate Maurice' as a coach for the Group CEOs. It could be argued that the Coach's own business experience and his willingness to invest time in understanding M&V's business (Saporito, 1996) would bring him sufficiently up to speed on industry dynamics; that the CEO's rationale is a smoke-screen that hides his failures to challenge the coach on the *ad hoc* nature of the coaching sessions, or to act on foot of his own experience and on the feedback from his executives.

Ironically, both the HR Director's and the executives' assessments from C&C's much shorter coaching programme was more positive than negative, although two executives choose to leave the programme after the initial feedback session from the coach. It could be argued that, had M&V's coaching programme been shorter, all the positives would have been front-loaded and the Coach would have emerged whiter-than-white, although this is at odds with

Baron & Morin's (2009) findings that found a strong correlation between the coach-coachee's relationship and the number of coaching sessions received.

5.2.3 Qualities of the Coach

This section considers the Coach's approach as he describes it, and reconciles this with the various accounts of other research participants and with theories from the literature review.

A personal reference

As the Coach tells it, much of his approach resonates with best practice. For example, his emphasis on a detailed contract on commitment from both the executives and the organisation; on having an intimate relationship with the executive, but never socialising; on standing aloof from politics; on creating a safe zone for executives and on building trust and credibility for the coaching process (Knudson, 2002; Downey, 2003; Kilburg, 2004; Johnson, 2007). His focus on providing honest feedback (Mannarelli, 2006; Starkey, 2006; Styhre, 2006) and on providing the opportunity for quality discussions that have the potential to raise self-awareness (Kilburg, 1997; Styhre, 2008), are also themes that reoccur in the literature. Despite the Coach's positive rhetoric, many of his approaches fail to be validated by the executives (Lowman, 2005).

According to the CEO, despite time spent researching the organisation, the Coach failed to show a genuine interest in the business (Stern, 2004); he appeared to fall short of Saporito's (1996:97) contention that a coach should understand 'the unique context and business objectives of the client organisation'. However, the Coach's extensive business background did meet recommendations for a coach to have an understanding of organisations (Peltier, 2002; Olson, 2008), which appeared to increase his credibility with the executives. The Coach's annual investment in CPD (refreshing his academia), with its emphasis on psychology, indicates that, at the very least, he fell within Bluckert's (2005b) remit of psychological mindedness, even if he did not meet Berglas's (2002) requirement of rigorous psychological training. However, his knowledge of psychology (don't be qualified in something they don't want) remained hidden, which possibly suited the pragmatic, business-focused executives (Peltier, 2001). If this is so, it contrasts with the findings from Document 3 where executives appreciated the psychological insights that their coach brought to the conversations.

Managing the process

The coach has his own approach to managing the process. He insists on wide access within the organisation. His qualitative 360s, which are more commonly used by coach psychologists (Bone et al., 2009), take hours to compile and he spends time developing an understanding of organisational dynamics, all of which line up with Saporito's (1996) recommendations for the first stage of the coaching process. He also checks the dynamics between himself and the executive to ensure that they can work together. John's reference to meeting the Coach to see if they would be comfortable together validates this. He talks about creating benchmarks to measure progress (Gregory et al, 2009), about guaranteeing the confidentiality of the client (Alvey & Barclay, 2007), and about his obligations to the company. Thus although there is always some tension between who exactly is the client in the coaching relationship, Maurice articulates an approach that recognises the organisation, but respects the client (Kiel et al, 1996, Sherman & Freas, 2004; Kets de Vries, 2005). As we know, some of these assertions are suspect. According to the CEO, the mutual trust and respect that should underpin the relationships between the coaching triad (ECF Handbook, 2008) was at least partly undermined by the Coach's response to pressure from the Group HR Director.

A structured approach

The coach describes the coaching process as taking place in four phases. Phase one is where he wins the trust of the executive and proves that coaching will work. The second phase establishes that the executive now works more efficiently and effectively and delivers an early win for the organisation (Jones & Spooner, 2006). As the executives presented their versions of the coaching, it was clear that phases one and two had completed, but there was no mention of phase three, i.e. that the executives were maximising their efficiencies to make time to work towards 'the real reason for coaching'. There was no hint that the executives achieved anything extraordinary over and above the Coach's structured agenda. Indeed, Diarmuid talks about the coaching starting to drift once the 'ticking the boxes' stage had completed and both the CEO and Paul were disillusioned by the *ad hoc* nature of the coaching conversations. It could be argued that for some of the Directors, Phase 4 (the embedding phase) did take place. Certainly, John and Diarmuid (and Fiachra to a lesser degree) describe themselves as substantially different people, permanently influenced by the coaching process.

On his website, Maurice refers to Covey's (1999) book *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* as 'probably one of the most useful books I have ever read'. As the executives talked about what they gained from the coaching, it was clear that inculcating Covey's philosophies was a formative part of Maurice's structured approach. It is interesting that, although coming from very different starting points, the coaching emphasis and the outcomes seem very similar for John and Diarmuid. A possible explanation is that both men obviously paid heed to Covey's *7 Habits* while Paul had only a fuzzy recollection of reading Covey, but not discussing it, and Fiachra had no recollection of any readings.

A behavioural model
Maurice is a firm believer in the science of cause and effect (reminiscent of Pavlov and Skinner), and he wants his clients to exercise time control and behavioural-control, be consistent, be consciously competent, and manipulate their behaviour to get the results they want. Hogan & Warrenfeltz, (2003:76) refer to Piaget's and Dewey's theories of learning that 'thoughts follow action' or 'we learn by doing'. However, Hogan & Warrenfeltz add the rider that while conceptual understanding follows action, reflection on the action must take place for this to happen.

The Coach articulated the view that it is not his role to tell the executives how to behave. He refers to holding up a mirror so that executives can see their own reflections and he talks about not telling, but helping executives to work things out. Thus in this instance he places himself in the non-directive, pull end of the coaching conversation spectrum as delineated by Downey (2003:23). Although Maurice says that 'coaching is not about teaching them anything; it is about helping them figure things out', yet his language and use of metaphors is occasionally reminiscent of a more martinet (teacher/army sergeant) approach. He uses expression like 'enforcing' learning, 'make them read it', he checks that executives are making the best use of their time when away on courses. He uses power-point slides to 'question understanding'. In references to the organisation, he talks about his 'duty to the company' and his sense of obligation when 'things happen on my watch'. It is interesting to note that these military metaphors carry into the Coach's rationale for answering the Group HR Director's queries about Diarmuid's performance. According to the Coach, he was 'interrogated' (perhaps by a superior officer?) and felt obliged to answer.

Despite the rhetoric of a 'pull' position, Maurice's descriptions of his coaching fits in with a directive, behaviourist model approach, i.e. he acts as an advisor and trainer (Barner & Higgins, 2007). The Coach's general philosophy and the extent to which executives quoted his advice supports this view as does the CEO's comment that the Coach insisted it was his prerogative as developer to set the agenda and map the journey.

The Coach's comment that 'I sometimes think there must be a right way to do this' could be open to several interpretations. It could be seen as another small indicator of a possible behaviourist approach in that it implies that success with individual executive often comes via trial and error (a Skinnerian approach) but it also resonates with Sherman & Freas's (2004) concern that coaching is a 'black box' process that does not easily yield the secrets of its success. Alternatively, it could reflect Stewart et al's (2007) stance that coaches need ultra flexibility in their approach so that they can respond to client needs. Either way, his comments do not run contrary to the view that it is difficult to identify the precise epistemological base underpinning executive coaching (Kilburg, 2004; Styhre, 2008). Another explanation might view the coach's remark as expressing an instrumental doubt (de Haan, 2008b) regarding the best way to proceed. However, de Haan (2008b) also makes the point that instrumental doubts, that is doubts as to the 'how' of coaching are more often experienced by novice coaches, which this Coach was not.

Coaching positives

Aside from his own references, according to the executives, the Coach had an impressive list of coaching skills. Critical for the coaching process, he quickly established rapport with all executives (Kilburg, 1997; Jones & Spooner, 2006; de Haan, 2008b), and provided a safety zone for confidential discussions and frank speaking (Kilburg, 1997; Johnson, 2007).

While his initial psychometrics were generally well received (the CEO was particularly impressed, although there was little new in it for him), it was interesting to note that, although a psychometric profile may be necessary and insightful for the coach (Kiel et al. 1998; Giglio et al., 1996), some executives already familiar with their profiles from previous psychometrics (I'm psychometriced out of it) needed a different input to stimulate their interest and curiosity. The Coach's qualitative 360-degree feedback fulfilled this need. His propensity to carry out qualitative 360s with executives' diary reports fitted the practice of psychologist coaches (Bono et al., 2009) and in a small way supported the Coach's

contention that his various academic achievements had given him a high level psychological training that was ideal for coaching. Certainly, his yearly investment in furthering his psychology qualifications places him within the ambit of being 'psychologically minded' (Bluckert, 2005b).

Executives describe the Coach as empathic, a good listener, a confidence-builder, non-judgemental, supportive, reflective, probing and challenging (Peterson, 1996; Hedman, 2001; Downey, 2003; Wasylyshyn, 2003; Sherman & Freas, 2004; Whitmore, 2004; Stevens, 2005; Wright, 2005; Mannarelli, 2006). Although Diarmuid is sceptical about the Coach's levels of emotional intelligence, John thought him 'sound on people' and the CEO got some 'real nuggets' on working with teams.

An interesting aspect of the findings from this research study was the extent to which the executives appeared to welcome a directive, hands-on approach. For example, John 'needed Maurice' to help him get the most out of the Covey book, Diarmuid wanted Maurice to structure his agenda and to provide more measurement. This could be viewed in two ways. The most positive interpretation would be that the executives acknowledged the coach's business acumen and were happy to act on his suggestions, as was the case in Kombarakaran et al's (2008) research study. Alternatively, it could mean that the executives were looking to the Coach to provide solutions, which is not what coaching is about (Battley, 2007b; Johnson, 2007). Either way, the executives' enthusiasm for his input suggests that they appreciated his particular style of dispensing advice, which resonates with Lambert's (2008) view that coaching is moving away from a purist non-directive orientation and also suggests that, within the components of a trust model, the Coach was perceived to have credibility (Mayer et al., 2005).

The Coach's reference to his own approach as structured, suggests that he has a standard set of approaches, e.g. time control, focusing on the important, and using a PA effectively would be examples of his favourite topics. Diarmuid's comment that you become aware that Maurice was 'ticking the boxes' validates this view. While it might be going too far to suggest that the Coach took a 'one-size-fits-all' approach which is counter-productive (Jones & Spooner, 2006; Kaufman, 2006), perhaps his contribution remained largely the same, with the pace and timing of delivery customised for individual executives.

The quality of the coaching relationship is the linchpin of the coaching process (Downey, 2003; Jones & Spooner, 2006; de Haan, 2008b) and the Coach was particularly good at building relationships. Despite their disparate personalities, attitudes, and agendas, all the executives expressed a liking for the Coach; the CEO thought him a 'good guy person' and even Fiachra who was never '100% sure' that Maurice was on his side found him 'personable'. Paul, who initially held back on trust, was soon won over, and came to regard the coach as a valuable, non-judgemental confidant (Alvey & Barclay, 2007; Styhre, 2008) who was 'solid for him' during his personal crisis. It could be argued that, in the initial stages of the coaching, the Coach displayed all the qualities that Mayer et al (1995) identify as precursors of trust. He was likeable, he was knowledgeable, he was on their side, and, initially at least, he produced results.

Sharing confidences appears to have been a two-way process. Maurice shared his personal circumstances with Paul, which no doubt helped Paul feel understood. However, a comment from Diarmuid suggests that Maurice also shared personal information with Diarmuid, which Diarmuid used to explain what he perceived as Maurice's lack of focus: 'I knew the coach was having a whole pile of difficulties'. The notion that the Coach was distracted is bolstered by the fact that he missed several appointments with the CEO, which irritated the CEO and diminished his perception of the Coach's commitment. It is reasonable to speculate that had the Coach the benefit of supervision (Clutterbuck, 2008; Garvey et al., 2009), which is appropriate for even the most experienced coaches (CIPD, 2007), this would have improved his ability to cope with personal difficulties.

Criticisms about the Coach

Kilburg's (1997) contention that clients judge coaches very realistically appears to be true (although whether they act on that judgement is another story). In this research study, four of the five executives failed to observe the 'structured approach' that the Coach favours. The CEO and three of the Directors were reticent about aspects of the coaching. The most trenchant criticisms came from Paul and the CEO about the nature of the coaching agenda, the Coach's failure to establish benchmarks and targets, and his failure to look for accountability or evidence of progress. Both the CEO and Diarmuid mention the lack of continuity between sessions. Interestingly, Turner's (2006) research found that when pressed to critique their coaching sessions, executives also cited lack of continuity and a failure to measure results.

Grant (2005) makes the point that coaches often fail to evaluate and monitor coaching outcomes. Despite the Coach's rhetoric, and considering Paul's, Diarmuid's and the CEO's observations about lack of measurement, it certainly appears that the Coach's efforts to establish benchmarks in the initial stages of coaching were unrewarding, unappreciated, and perhaps unnoticed. This goes to support the notion that practitioners can be mistaken in their interpretation of what is happening in the coaching process (Lowman, 2005; Olson, 2008). As a counterpoint to this, Diarmuid's comments sometimes seem inconsistent. For example, his observation that the Coach was *'very weak on measuring',* juxtaposes with his claim that his performance delivery had improved and his 360 ratings had soared, which certainly suggests some validating measures, *albeit* provided by the company.

Many authors consider that Trust is at the core of the dyadic coaching relationship (Peterson, 1996; Downey, 2003; Bluckert, 2005b; Alvey & Barclay, 2007) Regarding the issue of trust, it is interesting to ponder Mayer et al's (1995) model of dyadic trust and consider how it applies to the M&V executives. Three executives expressed high regard for his trustworthiness. For these executives, the Coach had the requisite ability to coach them. They considered that he had a positive orientation towards them, i.e. he had their best interests at heart (he was 'solid' for Paul in his personal crisis, he was tutoring John to become CEO and he was rescuing Diarmuid from the bottom quadrant of the performance box). Thus for John, Paul and Diarmuid, Maurice had the requisite trust model components and as trustors, they appeared to have a strong propensity to trust. However, Fiachra always had reservations about whether the Coach was 100% on his side. His poor relationships within the company lowered his propensity to trust and he doubted the benevolence of the Coach, tending to think of him as an instrument of both the Divisional CEO and Divisional HR Director with whom he had a very fraught relationship. Thus far it is easy to apply Mayer et al's (1995) model of dyadic trust to what was happening within M&V. However, the model becomes more difficult to sustain as the story unfolds.

The CEO's story tells of a serious breach of professional trust by the Coach. The fall-out from this scenario would be difficult to keep secret, thus the fascinating aspect of this event is the counter-intuitive nature of the continued trust between Diarmuid and the Coach. (It was Diarmuid who contacted the Coach for me). It seems that revelations of the Coach's conversations with the Group HR Director about Diarmuid's flaws, did not damage

Diarmuid's trust in the coach – his perceptions of the coach's benevolence and integrity were (apparently) undented. Amazingly, he recounts a cautionary tale of another coach who, when working with his direct reports, breached trust by sharing more information with him than he 'might be comfortable with'. But Diarmuid had no problem with Maurice around trust. Mayer et al (1995) argue that components of the trust model can act independently and that trust is best thought of as a continuum along which the various factors can vary. The CEO suggests that because of Diarmuid's poor performance he needed somebody, and the Coach was that somebody. While this suggestion might be emotionally true, it certainly does not appeal to logic. Did the benefits that Diarmuid received from the coaching outweigh any sense of betrayal? Was the Coach able to talk his way out of the disaster? Following the breach of confidence, the CEO lost confidence in the Coach and discontinued his own coaching. Diarmuid not only continued with his coaching, but sought, and received, more coaching from the same Coach, which was sanctioned by the CEO and the HR Director. Alvey and Bartclay's (2007) research found that trust within the coaching dyad was a function of relational, situational, and behavioural factors, but that confidentiality was at the heart of trust in the dyadic relationship. Aspects of this piece of research certainly suggest that trust factors are extremely complex and can work independently, and counter-intuitively, of each other. Liljenstrad & Nebeker's (2008) research sought to uncover how coaches from varying backgrounds differed in their approach to coaching. A key finding from this research was that coaches, irrespective of their backgrounds, believed that all coaches should be obliged to adhere to ethical guidelines that respect confidentiality. I don't doubt that if Maurice had completed that survey, he too would have indicated belief in the ethical guidelines box.

During his interview, the Coach contended that working at Board Room level, executives have to see value for their time, otherwise they would not stay with the coaching process. This is supported by Jones & Spooner (2006) findings that adding value quickly is essential for high achievers. It may be that, as the coaching progressed, the bond that formed between the coach and the executives (everybody liked the Coach), inhibited the executives' inclination to walk away from the process. The CEO was the first executive to opt out of the coaching process, not because he was 'frustrated' with the discontinuity and lack of achievement surrounding the coaching process, but because he was angry with the Coach for going beyond his brief and denigrating one of his team to the Group HR Director. Paul stayed with the coaching for nine months even though his comments imply that he was

experiencing the same frustrations as the CEO. Thus the Coach's contention that busy executives will not stay with the process unless they experience gains does not appear to hold true in this instance.

Conclusions

The qualities of the Coach had a forceful impact on the coaching process, both positively and negatively. The Coach seems to have had two great strengths, one was his 'likeability' and the other was his insightful advice that appeared to resonate memorably with most of the executives. His ability to establish a rapport with all his clients may have acted as a shield that hindered their ability to challenge his approach or suggest corrective action.

Unfortunately, his negative traits were also powerful. Despite his claims to a 'structured approach', three executives mention the *ad hoc* nature of the coaching sessions, their discontinuity and lack of cohesion. Neither Paul nor the CEO felt challenged to achieve (although Fiachra felt over-challenged), neither did they have any sense of achievement, which also suggests that the Coach could have done more to measure results and encourage reflection. Looking back on Document 3, the Coach in that research study looked for executives to journal their learning on a monthly basis. Although they were reluctant to do this, she thought it essential that they reflect on their learning.

While there are many discrepancies between how the Coach describes his approach and the executives' experiences, perhaps the most difficult to rationalise is the Coach's assertion that the CEO was happy to talk to him, but did not want to be coached. This misrepresentation of what happened could be seen as an extreme example of managing a story to present the best face possible (Goffman, 1971).

A charitable interpretation could be put on the difference between what the Coach says about confidentiality and the experience of the CEO. The events that the CEO described happened some eighteen months prior to my conversation with the Coach, thus a kindly interpretation might suggest that the position articulated by the Coach is the one he holds now, and that the M&V trust experience was a painful learning curve for him. What this research highlights are the discrepancies that can exist between one practitioner's espoused and enacted theories (Argyris & Schon, 1978) and the discrepancies that may exist between a practitioner's perceptions and the perceptions of his clients (Lowman, 2005; Stevens, 2005).

5.2.4 Qualities of the Executives

Introduction

This section considers the extent to which qualities of the executives could have influenced the coaching outcomes. While the executives shared gender characteristics and some common attitudes to work, they also differed in many ways, e.g. in their work situations, their temperaments, attitudes to coaching, motivation, response to feedback, degrees of reflection, ability to recall coaching details, work/life problems, and work-life balance. The following discussion addresses these topics.

Discussion

At the time the coaching took place, the four Directors shared some salient characteristics but also differed in significant ways. All were relatively young males, ambitious to further their careers and steeped in the business. They were 'all good guys' (CEO) who were considered prime material for talent development. As is the norm for many senior executives, they worked in a demanding environment (Levinson, 1996; Saporito, 1996; Laske, 2003) where explicit company values expected them to achieve. Although work oriented and dedicated to performance, their personalities were very different, as were their personal circumstances, their work situations and their propensity to welcome the coaching intervention.

For three of the executives, the coaching agendas included Hogan & Warrenfeltz's (2003) leadership skills competency. While John's and Paul's agendas fell into the leadership domain, far from closing *a* competency gap, the coaching agenda covered the whole gambit of leadership skills, in addition to some intrapersonal issues of self-management. Thus, the notion that extensive and overambitious agendas militate against success (Kilburg, 1997; Goldsmith, 2008) does not appear to have received much attention. These extensive agendas (to develop appropriate leadership behaviours is a very embracing agenda) are also at odds with the HR Director's view that coaching should address specific needs. Interestingly, the CEO proposes that the Coach had a clear understanding of what he was to achieve with both John and Diarmuid and this accounts for their positive response to the coaching. This is in line with Downey's (2003) theory that the quality of goal setting at the beginning of a coaching programme is a critical success factor.

Although Diarmuid was not explicit about his coaching agenda, he was very open about his poor performance, the distress this was causing him, and the likelihood of his being fired if

his performance did not improve. He also acknowledges a totally task-focused approach. Fiachra was not as clear about his predicament. The fact that he was looking to sort out his head and struggling to integrate the business post some mergers, allied to his deteriorating relationships within the company, makes it reasonable to infer that his agenda was likely to veer towards remedial, rather than developmental. His behaviour was likely to be viewed as a destructive force within the organisation (Giglio et al., 1998). This is validated by the CEO's reference to Fiachra as 'a loose cannon' and Fiachra himself refers to some of his behaviour as 'rants'. (It could be argued that the circumstances of these two executives supports Kaufman's (2006) contention that coaches are often faced with serious performance management problems). Prior to coaching, both Diarmuid and Fiachra might have fitted into Axelrod's (2005:120) 'hard-charging manager' and Quick & Macik-Frey's (2004) category of executives who do not appreciate the damage negative emotions can have on a company's bottom line. However, post coaching, each appreciated the effect their behaviours had on peers and direct reports and thus acknowledged the subtler set of competencies (people skills) needed for their leadership roles (Katz & Miller, 1996; Goleman, 2002; Sherman & Freas, 2004).

Many authors agree that the personal characteristics of executives influence the likelihood of achieving positive coaching outcomes (Goldsmith, 2006; Mannarelli, 2006; Battley, 2007a) as does their attitudes towards the notion of accepting coaching (Kilburg, 1997; Quick & Macik-Frey, 2004; Stevens, 2005). From their own descriptions, Diarmuid was tough and task focused, hostile to the ideas of wasting time on coaching; Fiachra was volatile and creative, willing to accept any 'training'; but sceptical about the coaching process. Paul was soft and sensitive, somewhat suspicious of the coaching offer, yet hopeful that it could make a difference to his life. John lived a chaotic life 'that guy running around, lastminute.com., taking on a bit too much', but he was eager to engage in coaching and develop leadership behaviours.

Apart from the variability of their temperaments, the executives' attitudes towards coaching were on a continuum from enthusiastic (John) to outright negativity (Diarmuid). In between these extremes, we had some suspicion (Paul) and a willingness to accept any 'training' (Fiachra). I suspect that the offer of coaching to Fiachra may have been tainted by his relationship with the HR Director. In any event, these men were hardly a propitious coaching set. However, when the coach worked his magic, everyone appeared to fall into step. This

gives some credence to the view that resistance is to be expected and it is the job of the coach to overcome it (Natale & Diamante, 2005).

Motivation is another salient component that determines coaching readiness and drives positive outcomes (Kaufman, 2006; Mannarelli, 2006; Kombarakaran et al., 2008). All of the executives were ambitious. When coaching took place, the two Directors with a background in finance (John and Paul) were eager to take on the extra leadership responsibility of running a business unit, both had ambitions to succeed the current CEO thus they were likely to view the offer of coaching as a step in that direction. Their ambition fitted in nicely with the HR Director's remit of supplying 'home-grown' successors for the business units. Although Diarmuid was initially averse to wasting time on coaching, he quickly became 'a convert' and was highly motivated to benefit from the coaching.

The CEO refers to the lack of senior management development over the previous three or four years. Thus, even though they were at a senior level in the organisation, Directors were in the novice stage of developing leadership consciousness (Lord & Hall, 2005). This resonates with the findings from Document 3 where senior executives were also only beginning to distinguish between management and leadership. In this research study, only one executive had no reservations about the coaching offer. Thus it could be argued that this executive (John) had the prerequisites for success in developing leadership skills in that he identified with the role and had sufficient self-confidence to be willing to engage in activities that would develop his skills (Lord & Hall, 2005).

While one might intuitively think there would be a correlation between motivation and response to feedback, it appears that self-confidence and feedback orientation can be intervening variables that affects one's ability to be responsive to feedback. Lack of self-confidence is a coaching inhibitor in that it makes a person defensive and unreceptive to feedback, thus they find it harder to change their mental models (Hogan & Warrenfeltz, 2003). Gregory et al's (2008) model of feedback components includes executives' feedback orientation in addition to the organisation's feedback environment. We have somewhat mixed messages about M&V's environment. The HR Director claims that the organisation is more open and supportive than many others she has worked for, but Fiachra claims that most of the feedback he got was negative. Paul who refers to his lack of confidence seems to have had the most difficulty accepting the Coach's input, e.g. he discounted the psychographics,

and rejected the advice to raise his profile at Group level. His disinclination to accept feedback could suggest that based on his ontic-level, he was neither ready for nor receptive to feedback (Laske, 1999; Joo, 2005), thus his feedback orientation may have been poor (Gregory, et al., 2008). However, Paul did claim that the coaching raised his self-confidence enough to encourage him to apply for the Business Unit Directorship.

Poor work-life balance was an issue for some of the executives. On a continuum of work-life balance, two executives were on the extreme work end (Fiachra and Diarmuid), and two were balanced equitably. However, the coaching brought a better balance to Diarmuid's life and some improvement for Fiachra, who now only works 60 or 70 hours a week!

The executives differed considerably in their ability to retrieve details of the coaching and remembering was an issue for two of the Directors. John and Diarmuid had great clarity around the coaching, and spoke at length and with enthusiasm about the experience. Both Paul and Fiachra would respond to questions with comments like 'I can't remember exactly, it was a long time ago'. The fact that these two Directors were preoccupied with difficult personal (Paul) and work (Fiachra) issues may have interfered with their full commitment to the coaching (Kilburg, 2004; Frisch, 2005).

On the spectrum of self-awareness, having the benefit of both the organisation's 360-degree feedback survey and the Coach's qualitative 360 enlightened Directors about their reputations. For two of the Directors this was an insightful experience (Hall et al., 1999) because, while they claimed to be already self-aware, the consequences of some of their behaviours were unknown to them, e.g. Diarmuid being task focused alienated people, as did Fiachra's 'rants'. Quick & Macik-Frey (2004) claim that many executives lack introspection. This certainly seems to have been true for Paul, Diarmuid and Fiachra. The Coach's qualitative 360 in particular gave them the opportunity to line up their self-perceptions with others' perceptions (Hogan & Warrenfeltz, 2003). This suggests that prior to these insights their self-observations were profoundly faulty. Thus, self-awareness can have blind spots, and one's reflexivity may initially need a helping hand, a holding up of a mirror, to ensure accuracy. One Director (Paul) still finds reflexivity a challenge, so it is reasonable to infer that, prior to coaching, lack of awareness may have been a serious deficit for him and his reluctance to accept feedback may have diminished the value of the qualitative 360.

Although a 360-feedback process and a performance review led the coaching, whether more could have done to qualify the executives is a moot point. Berglas (2002) suggests that executives be assessed psychologically to gauge their readiness and motivation to be coached. Stevens (2005) suggests that pressure to engage in coaching lowers engagement. While the HR Director says that only those who want to be coached, are coached, it is interesting to speculate whether either Diarmuid or Fiachra could have refused coaching without sacrificing the goodwill of the HR Director and the Divisional CEO.

Conclusions

Undoubtedly, executives' personal qualities and their current circumstances will influence their receptivity to the coaching process. However, it is not easy to be certain what these personal qualities are. When considering the personal qualities of the Coach, it was possible to compare and contrast the views of both the executives and the company management as to the character and skills of the coach. In this instance, judgements about the qualities of the executives are based on what executives choose to reveal about themselves, and on occasional evaluatory comments from the CEO's interview. Acknowledging these limitations, it would appear that a level of self-awareness and a willingness to be open to accepting advice and feedback are critical facilitators that outweighed the potential inhibitor effects of life and workplace crises.

5.2.5 Overall Conclusion

Research Question 1 set out to explore executives' perceptions of the factors that impeded and facilitated the effectiveness of the coaching intervention. As articulated by the executives and interpreted by me, the findings from this study suggest that a range of facilitators and inhibitors influenced executives' perceptions, and support Stern's (2004) contention that:

> *Although it is essential to get the right coach for the EC situation, there are many other factors besides the coach that will affect the success of the coaching: the readiness of the executive, the support from the boss and the organization, the HR infrastructure, and so forth.* (Stern, 2004:161).

To synthesise the findings from Research Question 1, Table 3 overleaf presents a summary of the key facilitators and inhibitors identified by this research. These findings inform a revised conceptual model presented in the final section of this Chapter.

Table 3: Summary of key factors that facilitated and inhibited the coaching programme

Facilitators	Inhibitors
Organisational • Culture is changing to acknowledge people as a resource • Leadership development progresses in a strategic and structured way • Coaching is resourced as a leadership development option for talented executives • Learning is cascaded through the organisation via leadership development courses supported by coaching • Manages the preliminary stages of coaching well	**Organisational** • Lingering blame culture • Poor interpersonal dynamics that diminished trust • Failure to express dissatisfaction with coach's approach • Failure to follow-up on ambivalent/ unenthusiastic feedback from executives • The probability of conflicting expectations
Coach • Has strong interpersonal skills • Provides quality feedback data • Invests time in understanding industry • Emphasises executives' strengths • Has a valued range of coaching skills • Gives valued advice	**Coach** • Tolerates over-ambitious (unrealistic) objectives • Fails to measure progress and/or fails to get executives to acknowledge progress • Doesn't appear to notice that some executives are dissatisfied with progress • Fails to provide a sense of continuity between sessions • Fails to engage with industry dynamics • Breaches confidentiality
Executives who: • Are motivated to learn • Have realistic expectations • Are open to feedback and to learning • Are interested in becoming more self-aware • Are self-confident and willing to try out new behaviours • Have a minimum of personal and/or performance issues	**Executives who:** • Struggle with being self-aware • Have too many objectives • Resist feedback and advice • Don't provide feedback to the coach when they are disappointed with their progress • Have distracting personal problems • Have interpersonal issues with senior management • Lack the confidence to try out new behaviours

5.3   Research question 2

- **To explore the research participants' perceptions of the effectiveness of the coaching intervention**

5.3.1 Introduction

This section focuses on research participants' perceptions of outcomes garnered from coaching. It considers various classifications of outcomes and presents a typology that attempts to capture the coaching outcomes articulated by the executives. Because of various confounding factors (e.g. executives may not have mentioned every positive outcome), this does not purport to be a precise exercise. It goes on to consider the nature of the learning outcomes from coaching, and the factors that contributed to increased self-awareness. It also considers the contradictory evaluations that both executives and management articulate.

5.3.2 Outcome classifications

Executive coaching outcomes can take many forms and are capable of being classified under many headings, e.g. cognitive, affective, and behavioural; personal, professional, and organisational; proximate or distal (Joos, 2005); intrapersonal, interpersonal, leadership, and business skills (Hogan & Warrenfeltz, 2003). Proximate outcomes include increased self-awareness, new learning and new behaviours. Distal outcomes are less immediate and refer to happenings such as career success and improved performance. Another possible way of categorising outcomes is by the nature of the learning that has taken place, e.g. is it single loop, double loop, or triple loop (Argyris and Schron, 1978). While the outcomes will be discussed under many of these headings, I have chosen Hogan & Warrenfeltz's (2003) management development skills component model (intrapersonal, interpersonal, leadership and business skills) as a way of structuring the outcomes as their model elements appear to capture the essence of what developing leadership competencies is about. Because Hogan & Warrenfeltz's model focuses on the executive, I have included the components of Joos' (2005) distal outcomes as a means of identifying additional benefits to the organisation.

5.3.3 Key Coaching Outcomes

It could be argued that attempting to finely categorise outcomes is an arbitrary exercise in that every outcome has multiple dimensions that seep into and influence all other categories. For example, improved self-confidence could have several outcome classifications, e.g. proximate, intrapersonal, personal or cognitive. With these complexities in mind, Table 4 (p.109) is, inevitably, only a messy classification of the key coaching outcomes experienced

by the executives. (The CEO is not included in this Chart because the focus of our interview was to ascertain his evaluation of the benefits of coaching from a Divisional perspective).

On the Chart, a plus sign indicates which Directors experienced particular outcomes. A point to note is that the absence of a plus sign against a heading does not indicate that a Director has a deficit in that area, rather it indicates that he did not identify this particular skill as a coaching outcome. So, for example, Paul is the only Director to have a plus for self-confidence, but for the other Directors, self-confidence may not have been an issue. Furthermore, while a plus sign indicates the presence of an outcome, it does not indicate the intensity of change.

As Table 4 illustrates, delineation of outcomes spreads across categories. In the Intrapersonal skills section, all executives benefit from an improved awareness of their strengths and weaknesses (all credit the Coach with being positive about emphasising strengths). What is fascinating about this section is the number of plusses accumulated by Fiachra who had the least amount of coaching and the least trust in the Coach.

Surprisingly, only two of the executives have outcomes under interpersonal skills, which is viewed as being among the salient outcomes of executive coaching (McGovern, 2001; Wasylyshyn et al., 2006; Kombarakaran et al., 2008). Several possible explanations could account for this: the excluded executives did not have a deficit in this skill, alternatively this skill was not a focus for the coaching, or it was a focus, but the executives omitted to mention it. I suspect that the latter is likely to be closer to the truth, and that the Coach's qualitative 360 raised interpersonal issues that the coaching addressed.

Improved leadership skills are the most impressive outcomes. While there could be some debate as to whether planning and focusing on objectives is more a business, rather than a leadership skill, I would argue that from the executives' descriptions, the Coach was addressing leadership skills (e.g. Diarmuid's comment that if you want to be a leader you need to move your time horizon up). Under business skills, the constituent gain for all executives was the ability to use their PAs effectively.

Orenstein's (2006) findings supported her hypothesis that behaviours directly related to stated coaching objectives showed the greatest change. To a small extent, Table 4 supports this

view, in that the executives whose agendas focused on leadership, built leadership skills, and Fiachra, who never mentions leadership, develops his skills in the intrapersonal/interpersonal areas, which according to Hogan & Warrenfeltz (2003), is the prerequisite for developing leadership skills.

If you accept that all of the skill sets ultimately benefit the organisation, then the returns for the company seem significant. However, although coaching increased Diarmuid's commitment to the organisation (Kombarakan, et al., 2008), and particularly to the CEO who supported him, contrary to affective commitment theory, it did not, as anticipated, stop him leaving the organisation (Becker, 1992; Fiorito et al., 2007).

Table 4: Key coaching outcomes as articulated by executives

Intrapersonal Skills	John	Paul	Diarmuid	Fiachra
More Self-Confidence		+		
Increased reflexivity	+		+	+
Knowledge of strengths and weaknesses	+	+	+	+
Better control of emotions				+
Better work/life balance			+	+
Less critical of self				+
Resilience		+		
Interpersonal Skills				
Less task focused			+	
More empathy in relationships			+	+
Improved family relationships			+	+
Leadership Skills				
Focuses on objectives	+	+	+	+
Thinks strategically	+	+	+	
Plans ahead	+	+	+	
Develops coaching ability		+		
Unites team	+		+	
Business Skills				
Is better organised	+	+	+	
Works well with PA	+	+	+	+
Organisational Gains				
Increased commitment	+	+	+	
Fills a succession gap	+	+		
Performance delivery improves			+	

The learning that has taken place appears to have met the expectations of many scholars who claim that coaching will enhance self-awareness (Kilburg, 1997), will produce cognitive and affective change (Joo, 2005) that will lead to behaviour changes that enhances performance (Downey, 2003; Bluckert, 2005). It would also appear that the coaching covered the spectrum of skills, performance, development, and the executive's own agenda as described by Witherspoon & White (1996). The outcomes are also in line with Reeves (2007) who

proposes that coaching will help most executives move to the next level (John and Paul); that coaching is an opportunity for self development and can be especially useful for leaders who need to improve self confidence (Paul), develop a new skill or approach in preparation for a change of role (John), and/or improve interpersonal and communication skills (Fiachra and Diarmuid). Thus it would appear that the coaching outcomes had the potential to build organizational effectiveness by building leader capability in that, post coaching, most of the executives had developed 'new ways of thinking, feeling, acting, learning, leading, and relating to others' (Executive Coaching Handbook, 2008:20). These outcomes are in line with aspects of prior research outcome findings, e.g. self-awareness (Turner, 2006), emotional competence (Wasylyshyn et al., 2006), reflectivity (Styhre, 2008).

For all the executives, parts of their learning have been radical and therefore could be categorised as double-loop (Argyris, 1977). By his own account, the Coach attempted to engage the executives in transformative learning by fostering critical self-reflection (Gray, 2006). The Coach's propensity to ask the executives 'Why do you do that?' suggests that, while he may have focused on bringing about behaviour change via imparting particular skill sets, he also sought to influence conceptual thinking and encourage reflection by challenging executives on 'why they do it, and why they do it the way they do it' (Hogan & Warrenfelttz, 2003:81). His emphasis on executives being 'consciously competent' resonates with Du Toit's (2007) contention that raised consciousness helps sensemaking and that coaching conversations can provide insights that move executives past programmed ways of behaving and create new ways of thinking (Gray, 2006; Duffy, 2008; Styhre, 2008).

The Coach's approach appears to have been particularly successful with the two executives who subsequently left the organisation. For Diarmuid, the learning has probably been transformational, i.e. he is now capable of critical self-reflection and is willing to take action based on his new knowledge (Gray, 2006) e.g. his radically revised approach to interpersonal relations (looking for a win-win, rather than being totally task focussed). His reference to holding a mirror up to himself suggests that he is also capable of the meta-learning (learning how to learn) to which Knudson (2002) refers. Diarmuid's move from a transactional to a transformational style of leadership (Bass & Avolio, 1990) echoed other research findings e.g. Finn et al., 2007, Cortvriend et al., 2008. Similarly, Fiachra's newfound ability to keep his emotions in check are a critical part of emotional competence (Goleman et al., 2002).

Lord & Hall (2005:594) speculate that 'self-knowledge may have a key function in leadership development' which ties in nicely with the contention that self-awareness is a key outcome of Executive Coaching (Hall, et al., 1999; Turner, 2006). While self-awareness will not guarantee change (Goldsmith, 2006), it is an essential precursor of change (Kiel et al., 1996; Kilburg, 1997; Wright, 2005). Hogan & Warrenfeltz (2003:81) assert that the concept of self-awareness has two intertwining parts: self-awareness as knowledge of one's identity, 'how one evaluates oneself' and self-awareness as knowledge of one's reputation. True self-awareness 'involves bringing one's identity into alignment with one's reputation'. From executives' comments, it appears that the Coach addressed both aspects of this concept. Paul tells of the feedback sheet that drew attention to how people saw him, and how they would like to see him. However, he rarely refers to this profile, in contrast to John who keeps his close by. Fiachra appreciated the feedback that revealed how his colleagues regarded him and he was willing to act on that feedback (Gregory, et al, 2008), as was Diarmuid who is sensitised to how his task-focused behaviour cost him loyalty. With the exception of Paul, all the executives claim to have deepened their ability to be reflective, which is a key element in developing emotional competence (Quick & Macik-Frey, 2004).

Piecing together elements of their stories, Figure 2 depicts the combined inputs that created self-awareness for the four executives.

Figure 2: Inputs to Self-Awareness
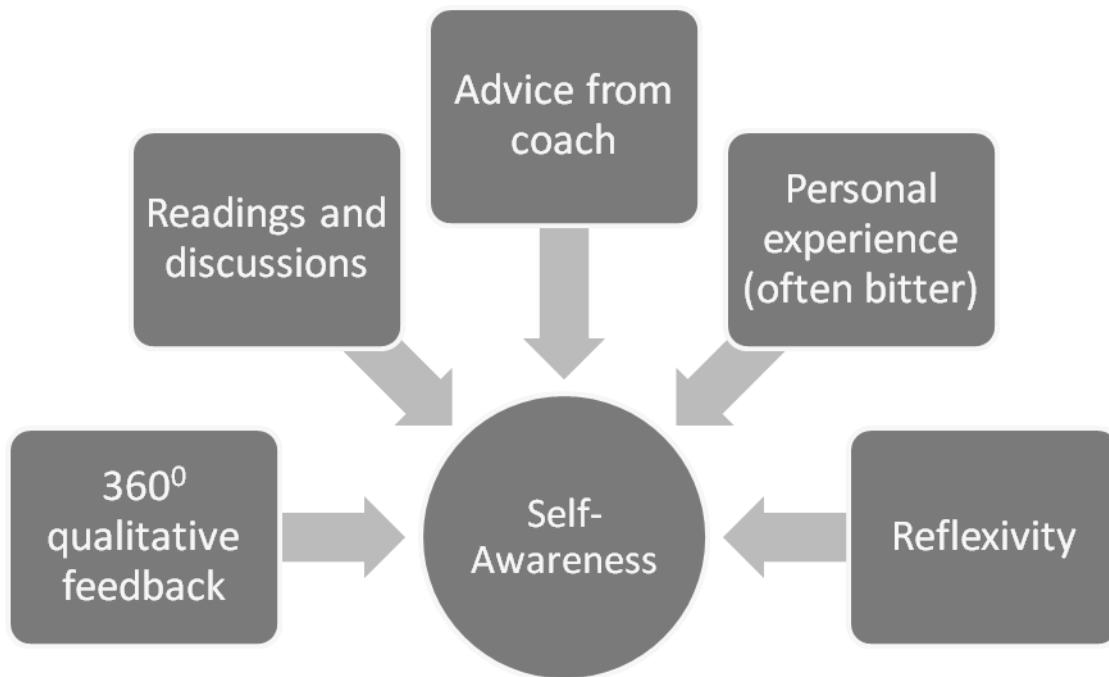
Four of the inputs to self-awareness were enhanced via interaction with the Coach (feedback, readings and discussions, advice and reflexivity). Personal experience is particular to the executives. Not all executives experienced all inputs and not all executives benefitted equally.

When you consider the executive agendas in terms of the company's leadership competencies (Customer focus, Commercial acumen, Strategic thinking, Managing complexity and change, Impact and influence, Teamwork, Learning agility and Developing others), the main focus appears to have been on individual based knowledge, skills and abilities associated with leader development (Day, 2001). Thus for most of the Directors, the emphasis was on strategic thinking, on competent leader behaviours and on career development actions. Lord & Hall (2005) argue that the novice stage of leadership tends to focus on acquiring appropriate leadership behaviours and being concerned with whether others accept you as leader. Paul's sensitivity to his direct reports' leadership expectations suggest that he is at least on the first rungs of leadership.

Contrary to views expressed in the coaching literature (Katz & Miller, 1996; Sherman & Freas, 2004; Styhre, 2008), soft skills associated with managing people were not top-of-the-

list for most of the Directors, e.g. it was in his second round of coaching that Diarmuid focused on team relationships. However, the CEO does mention getting 'nuggets' of advice from the coach on managing his team, which supports John's assessment that the Coach was 'sound' on people. Furthermore, none of the executives mentions that developing emotional intelligence was part of their coaching agenda (although it was a byproduct), and neither was it volunteered as such by the Coach or the CEO. However, both the results from the 360s and the principles of Covey's *7 Habits*, were likely to raise awareness of people issues for all executives.

5.3.4 Executives' perceptions of effectiveness

While all the executives articulated positive outcomes, perceptions of gain were not equal. Both John and Diarmuid acknowledged an extensive number of positive outcomes, Paul dithered about acknowledging any 'tangible' outcomes (although over the interview he enumerated quite a number of outcomes) and Fiachra spoke at length about two significant outcomes and mentioned several more. The disparity in perceived outcomes could be attributed to several factors that confluence: personal characteristics, personal circumstances, and work related issues.

For **John**, all these factors were positive. He had had a validating approach from the HR Director that coaching would prepare him to take over from the current Divisional CEO and he was well motivated to work towards that end (Mannerelli, 2006; Turner, 2006; Baron & Moron, 2009). The way in which he appreciated the coach's input (Kombarakaran et al., 2008) ('Covey was alright, but I couldn't have got it without Maurice'), responded to his questioning and advice ('that was powerful for me'), and kept Maurice's feedback sheet close to him for easy reference illustrates his responsiveness to the coaching. He also related Maurice's lessons to his own team, which indicates that he may have leveraged the coaching for the benefit of the system as a whole (Olson, 2008). The foregoing suggests that John was like the proverbial sponge, ready to soak up all of Maurice's wisdom and follow his advice. John's enthusiasm for the business, yet his balanced approach to life (he doesn't discuss his work outside of business and tries to get home in time to read his son a bedtime story) suggests that neither family nor business issues hindered the process. None of the other executives was in this fortunate position.

From an inauspicious beginning, **Diarmuid** articulated an extensive range of positive outcomes. He became highly motivated and enthusiastic about the process ('the zeal of a convert'), was eager to learn and willing to invest time and energy pursuing Covey's philosophy and the theories of emotional intelligence (Mannerelli, 2006; Turner, 2006, Baron & Moron, 2009). He readily took on board Maurice's advice to treat interpersonal relations as a 'process', because understanding and using processes was a strength ('once you show me how to do something, I can do it'). Coaching was a huge learning experience for Diarmuid (there were things that he didn't know he didn't know) as he gained insights into his behaviour (Turner, 2006; Styhre, 2008) and the impact it had on others.

Although Diarmuid did put a lot of effort into changing his behaviour (Battley, 2007a; Gregory et al., 2008) and while he credited the coach with helping him achieve many positive outcomes, some of his comments were less than fulsome, even dismissive. For example, while John commented that Maurice had techniques, models and examples that provided insight, Diarmuid described this as 'he had a model for everything' and 'little stories that could get repetitive'. Similar to Paul, Diarmuid notes an absence of measurement, yet in the same interview, he refers to improvements in his 360 ratings and the enormous improvement in his performance delivery. It could be inferred that as Diarmuid's performance improved, he became more detached, objective and critical, which is akin to the notion of 'sucking the mentor dry and then complaining about their incompetence' (McAuley, (2003:14) cited by Garvey et al, 2009: 115).

Fiachra was possibly the most difficult candidate for coaching, most reminiscent of Axelrod's (2005:120) 'hard-charging' manager. A volatile workaholic, he was disgruntled in his job, and his relationships with senior management had deteriorated. His consistent references to 'training' suggest that he may not have put much value on the coaching intervention. Yet he liked Maurice, found him 'personable', acknowledged some significant outcomes, but ended up thinking that Maurice's line of questioning was pursuing a company agenda. It is interesting that despite Fiachra's growing mistrust of the Coach's intentions, he still managed to achieve positive outcomes from the coaching, which suggests that trust or lack of it may not affect perceptions of expert credibility.

In many ways, Fiachra's experience of coaching was probably personally invalidating, e.g. he was disappointed that his creativity was not regarded as an asset, towards the end of his time

with M&V, when he was at his most vulnerable, he found the coaching conversations circular, rather than resolving, and he found the Coach's challenging style uncomfortable. De Haan (2008a:535) suggests that coaches experience many doubting moments during coaching sessions and he points up the dilemma of coaches needing to be simultaneously 'thicker skinned' and 'thinner skinned'. It could be argued that in this instance, the coach appeared to be too strong, and that a more empathic approach might have worked better. Certainly, Fiachra's experience left him averse to coaching – 'I wouldn't let anyone inside my head like that again'. Thus it may be possible that the Coach, despite his investment in psychological qualifications, fell into Berglas's (2002:87) category of coaches 'who do more harm than good' because they lack 'rigorous psychological training'.

Paul was reluctant to acknowledge any returns on the coaching and much of his interview elaborated on what coaching did not achieve. He came to the coaching process somewhat suspicious, but this soon dissipated. On the surface, Paul's personality suggests that he should be open to coaching – he has few of the personality traits (Axelrod, 2005) that make coaching difficult. Paul presented as a quiet-spoken, gentle, some-what self-deprecating man. He described himself as 'somewhat soft'. He was also well motivated to learn (Peterson & Millier, 2005; Mannarelli, 2006; Battley, 2007) because he desperately wanted to change his life and his job ('Another 20 years in finance would wreck my head'). Thus, he was not content in his existing job, another positive indicator for coaching (Frisch, 2005). He liked the coach, trusted him and could speak confidentially and frankly to him about personal matters (Johnson, 2007; Styhre, 2007; de Haan, 2008b) and he appreciated an objective perspective (Stevens, 2005; Styhre, 2008). Despite all these positives, his views on outcomes are very much at odds with those of John and Diarmuid, who underwent the same process for the same amount of time, with the same coach.

Several possible explanations may account for Paul's poor evaluation. Perhaps Paul's personal circumstances impeded his ability to focus on making the necessary changes; he certainly was distracted and distressed by what was happening in his personal life at the time (Frisch, 2005). Both Hogan & Warrenfeltz (2003) and Lord & Hall (2005:594) propose that to build leadership skills requires identification with the role of leader and enough self-confidence to engage in 'developmental leadership activities', so Paul's lack of self-confidence may have been a contributing factor (Hogan & Warrenfeltz, 2003). Among the client barriers to successful coaching, Kilburg (1997) names unrealistic expectations of the

coach or the coaching process and lack of follow-through on homework or coaching intervention suggestions. There are several hints that Paul rejected the advice that the coach gave (Kilburg, 2007; Gregory et al., 2008), e.g. he thinks it is pointless to raise his profile with senior management in Group Headquarters ('these guys are too far removed from us, they don't understand us'). He doesn't like the information coming from the qualitative 360-degree feedback ('you get put in a box'); he barely remembers reading Covey's book which provided the foundation for change for John and Diarmuid, his personal awareness and reflectivity leave something to be desired ('I wouldn't be great at that'). His expectations may have been too high (Kilburg, 1997), or was it a case of passive resistance to the coaching where an executive may appear engaged with the process, but does not make progress? (Zeus & Skiffington, 2003).

Paul, perhaps, exemplifies Batterley's (2007a) point that the coach is only a facilitator and catalyst, and that the executive must be the prime mover to find his own solutions. It could be argued that perhaps Paul's underlying assumption was that the coach would change him, rather than he would use coaching to change himself. He mentions several times that the coach did not hold him to account, and when the coaching was finished, the HR Director failed to hold him to account. (This is in contrast to his initial concern that with coaching 'big brother would be watching'). Parsloe (2002:25) contends that adult learning involves being actively engaged in the learning process, reflecting on, and drawing conclusions from, what has been learned, and testing out the lessons learned. It would appear that Paul did little of that.

All of the above is a reasonable argument to account for why Paul did not benefit from coaching. The disconcerting fact is that he articulated quite a number of benefits, but failed to recognise this prior to our conversation. Thus the question could be asked, what might the coach have done differently to enhance Paul's evaluations? Gregory et al. (2008) suggest that as coaching progresses, initial feedback should be used consistently to benchmark progress and that the coach should seek feedback from the executive on his/her level of satisfaction with the coaching intervention, and which approaches are working or not working.

Weick (1995:11) suggests that when people make retrospective sense of a happening, they start with an outcome in hand (e.g. nothing came from the coaching or alternatively, the coaching was brilliant) and 'then render that outcome sensible by constructing a plausible

story that produced it', thus rationalising their own interpretations. Many of Paul's stories that evidenced how coaching still left him vulnerable to mistakes could be seen in this light. It could also be argued that by the end of our conversation, he was inclined to reinterpret the outcome ('After talking to you, I think I got more out of it, on reflection, than I thought I did in the beginning'), but time did not allow the story to be reconstructed.

5.3.5 The Organisation's disparate evaluations of the coaching intervention

Two quite different evaluations emanate from the instigators of coaching. The HR Director spontaneously mentioned how confident she was that, at Director-level, the return on investment was positive and worthwhile. The Divisional CEO, 'hand-on-heart' says that he cannot see that the coaching made any great difference. Such disparate views are not easy to reconcile. While Schlosser et al's (2006) research found that targets for coaching differed across the coaching triad – coachee, coach, and line manager, in this case the objectives for coaching fell out of the 360s and performance review, and both the Divisional CEO and the Divisional HR Director had agreed these coaching objectives with the Coach. Thus it would be reasonable to expect their evaluations of outcomes to be based on a similar premise.

It is difficult to fathom the HR Director's very positive assessment, unless one subscribes to Dagley's (2006) description of some HR practitioners' attitudes as counter-intuitive in that their positive attitudes towards coaching does not appear to reflect the reality of what coaching delivered. Of the four Directors who experienced coaching, two have left the organisation, one mid-way through the coaching, the other shortly after the expense of a second round of coaching. Coaching influenced both Directors to quit M&V, although their departure circumstances were radically different. For Fiachra, 'training' (coaching) became distressing and frustrating. Although largely unappreciated by him, perhaps the final sessions with the Coach helped Fiachra come to a decision about his future and this ultimately smoothed the redundancy negotiations, thus benefitting him and the organisation. In that sense, perhaps the organisation did get a return from his coaching.

Ironically, coaching also influenced Diarmuid to reconsider his career choices. However, two 360s that took place in the interregnum between the start of coaching and his decision to resign, showed his approval rates soaring. Thus, in terms of short-term payback, Diarmuid's

substantial improvement may have justified the cost of his coaching; any long-term benefits will accrue to him personally and to some other organisation.

Despite the HR Director's contention that the returns at Director level were evident and obvious, it was less obvious to Paul who wondered whether he get any benefit from the coaching. Furthermore, he makes the point that neither the Coach nor the HR Director attempted to benchmark improvements ('I was at 1, now I'm at 4'). On the plus side, he was confident enough to apply for and get the Business Unit Director position.

John would appear to be the only clear winner. He was very positive about the returns from coaching, and assumed the mantle of successor, thus fulfilling the HR Director's brief. The final tally indicates that at best, coaching yielded a 50 percent success rate for the company in that, of the original four Directors, only two remained with the company. The 50% success rate would diminish even further if you accept both the CEO's and Paul's less than rosy evaluations of the coaching process.

As mentioned previously, Dagley (2006) makes the point that HR personnel who design coaching programmes have a vested interest in presenting them as successful. Thus from the HR Director's perspective, there were some tangibles in that she met the organisation's need for successors. Two successors were 'grown' internally and they now carry the business forward. They both claim to have an awareness of how leaders should behave, and how their behaviour affects followers' perceptions (Hogan & Warrenfeltz, 2003). Strategically, they claim to be more thoughtful. The returns from these qualities may be difficult to calculate, but they certainly appear substantial and may be enough to validate the HR Director's decision to introduce executive coaching as a leadership development intervention. However, in terms of opportunity cost (Olson, 2008), perhaps some less expensive programme might have produced just as good results.

The HR Director's assessment contrasts with that of the CEO who seems to feel no need to validate the coaching programme. Schlosser et al's (2006) research recommends that the voices of managers be heard so that coaching targets can be better aligned. However, in the instance of this research, the CEO's voice was strong in setting the targets for coaching, but his estimate of its value for the organisation is dismal. Although he speculates that Diarmuid had gained the most from coaching ('but then he left'), and John has shown increased

maturity since coaching, overall, the CEO was doubtful as to the value accruing to the organisation. Two had left the organisation, he could see no change in Paul, and he was not overly effusive about whatever change had been wrought in John. The CEO's inability to detect worthwhile change might imply that transfer of learning had failed to take place (O'Connor et al., 2006; Baron & Moran, 2009). Thus the central view that the organisation must see a return from coaching (Bluckert, 2005; Clutterbuck, 2008; Lambert, 2008) is not supported by the CEO's evaluation of the coaching intervention. Gauging the CEO's assessment of overall gains, it would be reasonable to infer that if the criterion of getting paid on the basis of colleagues discerning positive changes had been applied (Goldsmith, 2006), the Coach would be a poorer man. However, despite the CEO's poor evaluation of this particular coaching intervention, he continues to use coaching within his Division, albeit with different coaches and a different focus (it is more *ad hoc* and based on individual needs). Thus, partly as a result of the CEO's poor assessment of the coaching programme outcomes, the Division appears to be using coaching in a more reactive way (O'Connor et al., 2006).

5.3.6 Conclusions

It would be fair to say that the outcomes from the coaching exercise were considerable, but the spread across categories was unbalanced. Some executives benefitted mainly in the areas of intrapersonal and interpersonal skills, others in the area of leadership skills, and to a small extent, all made a step forward with business skills.

The executive with the greatest confluence of positive circumstances was most positive in his assessment of the coaching. However, the least enthusiastic executive had almost as many gains, but the nature of these gains may be less robust in that they certainly were not top-of-the-mind for Paul; neither were they obvious to the CEO. Even executives who were reluctant endorsers and claimed only limited benefits, actually gained a lot, e.g. Fiachra's ability to control his emotions has significant implications for his future career. Paul's initial denial of any positives emanating from the coaching raises questions as to the coach's techniques in putting down benchmarks and in fostering reflexivity. This lack of awareness has implications for a coach's reputation (Lambert, 2001).

The disparate assessments from senior management can perhaps be rationalised by Dagley's (2006) speculation that HR personnel may make positive judgements about the outcomes of coaching based on salient results that meet their particular needs. Thus for the HR Director,

the fact that two of the Directors were deemed suitable for greater responsibility, was possibly sufficient. Additionally, she could take comfort from the fact that Diarmuid had a strong performance prior to resigning.

Perhaps the most disconcerting aspects of the research findings are the Organisation's and the Coach's inability to properly manage the coaching process and deliver full value to the executives and to the organisation via a results oriented coaching experience (Stern, 2004).

The following section puts forward the rationale for a revised conceptual model that reflects the findings from this research study.

5.4   A Revised Conceptual Model

5.4.1 Introduction

Figure 3 proposes a revised conceptual model based on the key findings from this research study, thus it is empirically driven, but also builds on established theory. In the model, the Inputs are grouped into three broad categories (organisational, coach, and executive) which taken together are salient influences on coaching outcomes (Joo, 2005). The sub-components within each category reflect what facilitated and impeded the coaching process for a small coterie of executives who engaged in a coaching programme designed to develop/enhance leadership skills. Inevitably, these views are subjective and reflect the dynamic, relational and constructed nature of executive coaching (Stewart et al., 2008). The Outcomes are presented as two categories, one that benefits the executive (and potentially the organisation) and the other that considers the outcomes for this particular organisation.

5.4.2 Inputs

Organisational support

Authors stress the significance of organisational support for coaching as a facilitator of leadership development (Gray, 2006; Alfman, 2007) and as an input into positive coaching outcomes (Wasylyshyn et al., 2006; Kombarakaran et al., 2008; Baron & Moran, 2009). The findings from this research suggest that three organisational factors contributed to influencing executives' perceptions of coaching, both positively and negatively.

1) A positive learning environment. Within M&V, in a structured and strategic way, considerable resources were devoted to both leader development and leadership development (Day, 2001) which according to research participants contributed to a learning environment.

2) In line with systems theory that suggests that relationships within the organisation influence the complex coaching process (Kilburg, 1996; Orenstein, 2002; Feldman & Lankau, 2005), the findings from this research indicate that poor interpersonal relationships between senior management and one of the executives (Fiachra) militated against that executive establishing a trusting relationship with the coach. (Poor internal relationships soured Fiachra's attitude towards the coaching).

3) While many aspects of how the coaching programme were organised to meet best practice specifications (Knudson, 2002), neither the CEO nor the HR Director challenged the coach to address evident weakness in his approach, e.g. although the CEO himself was 'frustrated' with both a lack of continuity (Turner, 2006) and a dearth of progress, he continued with the coaching. According to one executive (Paul) the HR Director made no attempt to check-back with him on how his coaching was progressing and although the CEO knew that some executives were less than happy with the coaching, he appeared to take no action. Thus, once the process was in place and perhaps seen as initially successful, senior managers seemed to take a laissez-faire attitude to monitoring the coaching. A firmer hand might have ensured better value for the organisation (Knudson, 2002). Such an approach could include challenging the coach to deliver a quality service that meets the needs of executives and encouraging executives to rise to the challenge of implementing change on foot of coaching.

Qualities of the Coach

Findings from this research suggest that qualities the executives valued and expected from the coach included coaching skills and good advice; what some of them sought, but did not get, was a results oriented experience which contributes to the success of coaching (Stern, 2004; Gregory et al., 2008; Olson, 2008). The CEO had additional issues with the Coach, i.e. he felt that the Coach failed to engage with industry dynamics and that he had behaved unprofessionally by breaching confidentiality. Thus the critical inputs are:

1) Coaching skills such as relationship building (Kilburg, 1997; Sherman & Freas, 2005), establishing trust (Alvey & Barclay, 2007), providing quality feedback (Kiel et al, 1996; Gregory et al., 2008), emphasising strengths, listening proactively, being empathic (Hedman, 2001), and having insightful, questioning techniques (Zeus & Skifffington, 2002).

2) Insightful, pertinent guidance on how leaders should behave (Styhre, 2006; Olson, 2008).

3) A results oriented experience (Stern, 2004). For three of the executives what was missing was the coach's capacity to manage the process to produce a results oriented experience. As some of the executives describe it, the coaching process was discontinuous, executives had multiple goals, and the coach failed to monitor and motivate them to achieve targets (Grant & Cavanagh, 2004).

4) Ethical behaviour regarding the boundaries of confidentiality (Alvey & Barclay, 2007).

Qualities of the executives

As mentioned previously, because of the limited sources of information (mostly self-report) about the qualities of the executives, it is difficult to be certain about the specific executive qualities that ensured positive coaching outcomes. For example, personal issues were a distraction for one executive and performance issues were problematic for two of the executives, yet all executives benefited to some extent. Nevertheless, it could be argued that had events in their lives been more equitable, coaching gains might have been greater. However, the findings do indicate that certain executive qualities appeared to foster coaching readiness:

1. Initially, levels of motivation may have varied across the group, but the majority of the executives were open to learning, which is a critical input to the coaching process (Brotman et al., 1998; Battley, 2007b; Johnson, 2007).

2. Feedback orientation varied but the executive most resistant to feedback and most reluctant to follow the coach's suggestions, asserts that the coaching returns were poor. Conversely, the two executives who were open to feedback and eager to implement the coach's advice were the most positive about the coaching experience. Between the coach and executive, feedback should be interactive and executives should be willing to (and encouraged to) give feedback to the coach on their levels of satisfaction with the coaching intervention (Gregory et al., 2008).

3. Self-confidence encourages executives to practise new leadership behaviours (Hogan & Warrenfeltz, 2003). Executives who expressed confidence in their abilities were those who enacted a variety of new behaviours.

4. An executive's propensity to reflect on behaviour is considered to be both an important facilitator of leadership development (Hogan & Warrenfelts, 2003; O'Connor et al., 2006) and a critical outcome of coaching (Kilburg, 1996). Diarmuid refers to how the coach acted as the mirror initially, but now he has the ability to hold up the mirror to himself. Paul, who 'wouldn't be great' at reflexivity, tends to discount coaching outcomes and wonders did he get anything tangible from the experience.

5.4.3 Outcomes

The Desirable and Unwanted Outcomes depict three categories of outcomes that encompass the organisation, the executives and how the Coach is perceived. The Desirable Outcomes for executives, based on Hogan & Warrenfeltz's (2003) leadership competency domains, represent the range of skills enhancement that flowed from the coaching. These positive outcomes have the potential to benefit the company, but are personal and portable in that executives may leave the organisation and take these enhanced skills sets with them (which happened with two of the executives). Organisational Outcomes show the benefits that accrued to the organisation in this particular study which go some way to meet Kiel et al.'s (1996) assertion that the organisation must benefit from coaching in some recognisable way. The final category, Perceptions of Coach, suggests the ways in which desirable outcomes have the potential to enhance a coach's reputations. The Inhibitors and Unwanted Outcomes illustrate the flawed nature of the coaching as experienced by some of the coached executives.

Figure 3: A Model of Coaching Facilitators and Inhibitors and their respective Outcomes

<u>**Facilitators**</u>   <u>**Desirable Outcomes**</u>

Organisational support
- Create a learning environment
- Maintain positive relationships
-Manage the whole coaching process

Executive Outcomes
- Intrapersonal skills
- Interpersonal skills
- Leadership skills
- Business skills

Qualities of the coach
-Coaching skills
-Credible Advice
-Results oriented
-Ethical behaviour

Impact on Executive Coaching

Organisational Outcomes
- Leadership development
- Performance improvement
- Increased commitment

Qualities of the executives
- Motivated to learn
- Positive feed-back orientation
- Self-confident
- Reflective
-Well-balanced

Perceptions of Coach
-Skilled professional

<u>**Inhibitors**</u>   <u>**Unwanted Outcomes**</u>

Organisational Issues
-Blame culture
-Poor relationships
-Laissez-faire attitude to
   coaching feedback
-Boundaries of confident-
   iality not respected

Executives
-Unacknowledged progress
-Few behavioural changes
-Poor evaluations of
   coaching

Impact on Executive Coaching

Organisation
-Conflicting evaluations of
   coaching
-Move towards issued-based
   coaching
- lower expectations of
   executive coaching

Coach Issues
-Allows unlimited objectives
-Is not results oriented
-Fails to benchmark progress
-Does not solicit feedback
-Fails to provide continuity
-Breaches confidentiality
Executive Issues
-Lacks self-awareness
-Unrealistic expectations
-Rejects feedback and advice
-Has serious personal/ inter-
   personal issues
-Fails to implement change
-Fails to address concerns
   about progress

Perceptions of Coach
-Unprofessional
-Disinterested in industry
   dynamics
-Unfocused
-Not results oriented

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5.5   Overall Conclusions

This Chapter has discussed the findings to both research questions. The Executive Coaching Forum Handbook (2008) defines executive coaching as a leadership development intervention designed to achieve short and long-term organisational goals. It goes on to suggest that to maximise results, all parties to the coaching process must act in partnership. As this research study illustrates, executive coaching is a complex process vulnerable to organisation, coach and executive foibles. Within the rhetoric of cooperation, I have no doubt that, if asked, all parties would most likely pay lip service to the concept of partnership; unfortunately, the reality of partnership was somewhat different due mainly to a dearth of interactive feedback.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the inhibitors and facilitators to the coaching process articulated by the executives were mostly associated with the Coach. All executives (to varying degrees) recorded positive outcomes from the coaching, but similarly, all bar one expressed dissatisfaction with aspects of the coaching. However, had a true partnership arrangement been in place, then the executives and the HR/CEO would have communicated their needs to the Coach for a more results focused experience. This in turn would most likely have enhanced the outcomes for all parties to the process. Thus, the findings from this research suggest that a process that encourages interactive feedback between all the parties would hone the partnership aspect of the executive coaching process.

According to the executives and the Divisional HR Director, this particular executive coaching programme achieved many positive leadership development outcomes. According to the Divisional CEO, it achieved little. While this view may be coloured by the CEO's disillusionment with the Coach, it highlights the challenges of interpreting various responses to the same phenomenon. It also makes a case for involving colleagues in the coaching feedback process so that the executive continues to be motivated to implement change and colleagues have a heightened awareness of change taking place.

The following Chapter outline the conclusions, recommendations and implications for professional practice that fall out of this research study.

Chapter 6
Conclusions, Recommendations, and Implications for Professional Practice

6.1 Introduction

This Chapter presents a series of conclusions and recommendations based on Document 5's research findings, with concomitant implications for professional practice.

As the discussion chapter illustrates, many of the findings from this research study resonate with, and support, positive coaching approaches found in other research studies. As a counter-point to this, however, research participants' stories told of aspects of coaching within M&V that fell short of best practice, thus, the coaching experience in M&V provides insights and cautionary tales for organisations, coaches and executives.

The Chapter draws together a set of conclusions that aims to distil insights from the research. Each conclusion is followed by appropriate recommendations and by a brief exposition of the professional implications that the findings have for HR practitioners, for coaches, and for executives who may be engaged in, or considering engaging in, coaching as a leadership intervention strategy. The conclusions, recommendations and professional implications broadly follow the structure established in the discussion chapter. The Chapter also considers the strengths and limitations of this research study and the ways in which it contributes to the body of knowledge on executive coaching. The Chapter concludes with suggestions for further research.

6.2 Conclusions, Recommendations & Implications for Practice

Organisational Support

Two key conclusions emerge from the findings and discussions that addressed organisational support:

- **There is a symbiotic relationship between coaching and a learning environment**

According to all accounts, M&V has a positive learning environment that emphasises leadership development. Coaching is now widespread within the Division and the wider

Group, and individual coaching underpins most modular developmental programmes. Thus, it could be argued that there is a symbiotic relationship between coaching and the learning environment in that each supports the other. In the instance of this research study, an executive coaching programme initiated the learning environment, now this learning climate is underpinned by coaching at many levels throughout the Division.

- **To ensure coaching effectiveness, senior management need to manage and monitor the coaching process, and agree success criteria.**

It is fair to say that available evidence suggests that the HR Director and the CEO made sustained efforts to facilitate coaching, and much of their approach resonates with best practice (Lambert, 2001). The CEO was part of the coaching programme, thus sending a positive message about the value of coaching. High calibre candidates were chosen based on 360-degree feedback and performance reviews. The HR Director hired the coach based on personal experience and reputation. Both the HR Director and the CEO knew what they wanted the executives to achieve from the coaching and conveyed this to the Coach. However, in his interview, the Coach suggested that, post an analysis of the qualitative 360s, executive agendas might change. While this may be a reasonable, even a good procedure, in a partnership arrangement, changes in agenda should be shared with the HR Department, otherwise it may be impossible to gauge accurately whether coaching is working.

Within organisations, the notions of competencies and goals and objectives form part of the dominant discourse, and thus predispose management thinking (Garvey, et al., 2009). While a number of executives had extensive agendas, the CEO asserts that when the coaching agendas were specific, the coaching worked best; Diarmuid (a coachee) is also of this view. It could be argued that, unfortunately, the most critical shortfall was management's failure to seek explanations from the Coach and the executives as to why progress was variable and their failure to look for means to remedy whatever deficits were causing the problem. Thus managing the programme may involve not being lulled into complacency by initial success, but continuously supporting the coach and the executives to achieve maximum benefit from the coaching.

In line with the partnership view of coaching as expressed in the Executive Coaching Forum Handbook's (2008) definition of executive coaching, all parties to the coaching process should seek to agree criteria against which to judge coaching outcomes. Schlosser et al's

(2006) research study found that coaches, coachees, and managers differed in their targets for coaching. While this research study did not identify differences in targets, per se, it is surprising (and fascinating) that the two senior managers most linked to the coaching have such divergent views on the benefits of coaching for the Division. One possible explanation is that different criteria were being applied and while the HR Director is satisfied that coaching has groomed two successors, the CEO is upset (naturally) that his budget was spent on two executives who subsequently left the company. Had these two executives remained with the company and exhibited the benefits they claim to have gained from the coaching, then his assessment of the coaching outcomes may have been kinder.

While the HR Director claims that a 360-degree survey subsequent to coaching is the litmus test for gauging the effectiveness of coaching, it is likely that this survey comes after the end of the coaching programme. Thus it is a judgement on it, rather than a process that facilitates coaching. Suggestions to engage designated colleagues to provide progress feedback on specific objectives appears to overcome this hurdle (Sherman & Freas, 2004; Goldsmith, 2008).

Because external coaching underpins all leadership development programmes within M&V, it is reasonable to suggest that the company should encourage coaches to engage in supervision (Hawkins & Schwenk, 2006).

The CRF's 2008 report on coaching flags potential tension hotspots that may develop between an organisation's purpose and the needs of executives. It warns against HR departments taking a rigid and dogmatic approach to managing the coaching process, to the detriment of all concerned. Thus, the following recommendations that favour a pro-active approach to managing a coaching programme, also acknowledge the need for sensitivity and tact.

Recommendations

- Coaching objectives should be limited (Goldsmith, 2008), specific, and agreed by all parties (Knudson, 2002; Downey, 2003). In the spirit of partnership, and to facilitate a fair evaluation of coaching outcomes, substantial changes to the coaching agenda should be shared with HR.

- With the agreement of all parties, and to ensure a results oriented experience (Stern, 2004), coaching benchmarks and targets should be explicit, and occasionally evaluated .

- As a form of motivation, and to highlight progress, peers and direct reports should be encouraged to provide occasional evaluation of progress on specific objectives (Goldsmith, 2008).

- Senior management must be willing to ask questions of the coach and the executive when outcomes appear inadequate, and to offer them appropriate support.

- The Organisation should encourage coaches to engage in supervision (Hawkins & Schwenk, 2006).

Implications for the Organisation

This research study is a live example of what happens when a coaching process is not sufficiently results oriented. Although many aspects of M&V's coaching programme management meet best practice requirements, both the HR Department and the CEO failed to act on information available to them and failed to hold either the executives or the coach accountable for drift. It could be argued that this failure adversely affected the potential extent of coaching outcomes, thus reducing the payback value of coaching. It also affected research participants' evaluations of the potential of coaching, thus reducing the credibility of coaching generally (Lambert, 2001).

Qualities of the Coach
- **Qualities of the coach can concurrently facilitate and inhibit coaching effectiveness**

The qualities of the coach had a forceful impact on the coaching process, both positively and negatively. As attested by the executives, in addition to being a likeable person, the Coach had many fine coaching skills that he used to good effect, and in line with other research findings (Turner, 2006; Styhre, 2008) executives acknowledged and appreciated his ability to offer insightful, pertinent guidance on how they should behave in a leadership capacity.

Unfortunately, his negative traits were coaching inhibitors. While the Coach's lack of discretion with the Group HR Director may have been a single miscalculation, Paul's initial

inability to identify any positive outcomes from coaching could be interpreted as a failure by the Coach to prompt reflection. Such reflection might, in turn, have helped Paul recognise and acknowledge changes in his attitude and behaviours, thus improving his overall evaluations of coaching. If Paul had kept a reflective learning journal that he shared with the Coach, then perceptions of meagre outcomes would have been visible and could have been addressed. An equally serious issue is the Coach's lack of preparation, which three executives remarked on. Despite his rhetoric about a 'structured approach', executives mention the *ad hoc* nature of the coaching sessions, their discontinuity and lack of cohesion. Thus, despite his business background, the Coach failed to meet the pragmatic expectations of progress that executives are likely to have (Peltier, 2002; Stern, 2004). The Coach's inability to manage the coaching process in a results oriented way, resulted in the CEO and many of the executives commenting negatively on his approach. As Lambert (2001:5) puts it, 'there are threats to the perception of coaching in particular if evaluation fails to show results over time'.

Based on Diarmuid's comments that the Coach was 'having a whole pile of difficulties', it is reasonable to infer that the Coach would have benefitted from having a coaching supervisor (CIPD, 2007) or some form of coaching support system (Garvey et al, 2009). Furthermore, Hawkins & Schwenk's (2006) *Coaching Supervision Report* contends that coaching supervision fortifies a coach to withstand pressures to breach confidentiality, a pressure that Martin was unable to withstand.

Recommendations

- Coaches should help clients to set attainable objectives that provide the agenda for coaching sessions (Day, 2001; CFI, 2003; Downey, 2003, Olson, 2008).

- Coaches and clients should agree benchmarks based on feedback (Gregory et al., 2008), and the coach should be consistent in measuring results and discussing progress (Lambert, 2001).

- The boundaries of confidentiality should be explicit, agreed, and respected (Alvey & Barclay, 2007).

- The essence of coaching is about inculcating reflexivity (Gray, 2006; Du Toit, 2007; Styhre, 2008) thus coaches need to encourage executives to be reflective.

- Coaches should consider encouraging executive reflection via a reflective learning journal that monitors changes across intrapersonal, interpersonal, leadership and business skills.

- To protect their own reputation, coaches should be willing to walk away from assignments if progress is neither visible nor acknowledged (Ulrich, 2008).

- Coaches should encourage their executive clients to appraise the coaching process via interactive feedback (Gregory et al., 2008).

- Coaches should engage in coaching supervision (CIPD, 2007; Clutterbuck, 2008; Garvey et al., 2009).

Implications for the Coach

The Coach had many admirable coaching qualities, years of experience, business acumen, and considerable success in achieving positive outcomes and transformational change. The most impactful aspect of the Coach's qualities appears to have been his ability to establish a bond with the executives (Downey, 2003); his ability to raise reputational self-awareness (Hogan & Warrenfeltz, 2003) via his qualitative 360s, and his ability to give valued advice. Despite these positives, a number of M&V executives expected more from him and they were vocal about their sense of disappointment and frustration. They considered the Coach's approach flawed. In addition to the breach of confidence (which was only an issue for the CEO), the Coach too often failed to co-create workable agendas that gave executives a sense of purpose and progress, and failed to challenge them to reach their potentials. Despite the rhetoric of his 'structured' approach, he failed to find a method that invariably encouraged reflection, thus his enacted theories often failed to live up to his espoused theories (Argyris & Schron, 1978) of developing self-awareness and conscious competence. His failure to manage the coaching programme in a way that produced a results oriented (Stern, 2004), satisfactory experience, for many of the executives is an object lesson for coaches on how not to behave if they want to enhance their coaching reputation. It is also a cautionary tale for coaches that should encourage them to engage their clients in on-going appraisal of the coaching process (Gregory et al., 2008) rather than work on the assumption that silence equates with satisfaction.

Qualities of the executives and perceptions of coaching outcomes

- **Qualities of the executives both facilitated and impeded the effectiveness of the coaching intervention.**

The executives brought many diverse qualities to the coaching experience, which undoubtedly influenced their receptiveness to the process. While it is possible to infer that some qualities were facilitative and others were likely to impede the process, it is impossible to be definitive about this. Initial attitudes to coaching appeared to make little difference to how the coaching progressed, but it was noticeable that the two executives who were most enthusiastic about coaching, who were most responsive to feedback and who had the clearest recall of the coaching process; were the strongest endorsers of coaching. Executives who were struggling in some aspect of their lives, had imperfect recollections of the coaching, who questioned the Coach's advice, or who lacked self-confidence and the ability to be reflective, were generally more reticent about the benefits to be had from coaching. However, it would be wrong to suggest that executives who exhibit these qualities would not benefit from coaching. Coaching can provide support in times of need (Lambert, 2008), can build self-confidence, and can develop reflexivity (Gray, 2006; du Toit, 2007; Styhre, 2008).

- **Qualities of the executives influenced perceptions of gains, but all executives benefitted from the coaching process**

Executives who are enthusiastic, motivated, self-confident, responsive to feedback and reflective are likely to articulate the most benefits, but irrespective of their personal qualities and circumstances, all executives benefitted from coaching. Towards the end of the literature review (Chapter 2), I made the point that coaching appears to be simultaneously robust and fragile. It is robust to the extent that, although the executives came to the coaching process with a range of temperaments, attitudes, motives, life and work circumstances, all of them articulated positive outcomes. In some cases this was despite a combination of adverse conditions.

- **Executives favoured a directive style of coaching.**

Irrespective of their personal qualities or circumstances, executives appeared to favour a directive style, even if they sometimes rejected the advice. Downey (2003), referring to his push-pull model of possible coaching conversation styles, suggests that, although a coach may occasionally be directive when dealing with senior executives, a non-directive pull style is more appropriate at this senior level, i.e. the coach encourages the executive to find his own solutions. This view has been overtaken by the 2008 CRF Report on Coaching that

shows a move away from the purist pull approach towards executives favouring a more directive approach. This research study supports the latter position. Executives were vocal in their appreciation of the Coach's advice and in the direction he gave them on how to behave in   leadership   positions.

- **Executives who are dissatisfied with progress will not necessarily act on this dissatisfaction**

The majority of executives, including the CEO, had reservations of some kind about how the Coach managed the coaching process, yet none challenged his approach nor discontinued the coaching. It could be argued that, if the executives had broached their concerns and these concerns had been addressed, in this win-win scenario, positive coaching outcomes might have been maximised exponentially, and the Coach would have been given a chance to rescue his reputation.

- **Even when conditions are less than perfect, coaching is capable of bringing about positive leadership development outcomes and transformational change.**

Although executives' coaching experiences may not have been ideal, they experienced an extensive range of positive, leadership oriented, outcomes. Two executives described themselves as radically different people, post coaching. (Unfortunately, they were also the two who left the company).

Recommendations
- Executives should be aware that coaching is a working partnership and that the success of coaching depends in large measure on their willingness to engage with the process, and on their ability to respond to feedback (Battley, 2007a; Gregory, et al., 2008; Kombarakaran et al., 2008).

- Executives should engage with the coach in establishing benchmarks and targets and look for evaluations that measure their progress (Day, 2001; CFI, 2003; Downey, 2003; Olson, 2008).

- Executives should encourage respected peers to provide feedback on behaviour change (Goldsmith, 2008).

- Executives should consider keeping a reflective learning journal that documents outcomes from coaching.

- If the coaching process falls below expectations, then the executive should dialogue with the coach and discuss the problem.

Implications for executives

Executives can gain a lot from coaching. The M&V executives came to the coaching process with variable profiles and issues. All executives developed rapport with the Coach, all gained a number of positive outcomes from the coaching, and some claimed that coaching radically changed their behaviour. These gains happened within a flawed process where executives had extensive agendas and were prepared to accept an *ad hoc* approach from the Coach. It is reasonable to speculate that executives' liking for, and belief in the expertise of the coach, may have inhibited their critical faculties. This research highlights the importance of executives being pro-active in claiming their right to on-going, quality coaching that develops reflectivity, establishes meaningful benchmarks, stays focussed on agreed objectives, and measures progress.

6.3 Strengths and Limitations of the Research Study

This research study is constrained by several limitations. The research is exploratory, the number of research participants is small, and wide generalisations are inappropriate. Thus, the recommendations reflect the conclusions drawn from this particular research study, although many of them resonate with established theory. The research was a retrospective snapshot of a coaching programme that had finished some time previously. Despite the (apparent) willingness of executives to relate their coaching stories, the passage of time created memory trace problems for some. It is also necessary to factor in the inevitably selective nature of my input into the research study, plus the extent to which my background makes me familiar with, and perhaps a victim of, the dominant organisational discourse of objectives and outcomes.

Goldsmith (2008) argues that the litmus test of a coaching intervention is the assessments of behaviour change by peers and direct reports. While the CEO's and the HR Director's assessments provide a counterpoint to that of the executives' own assessments, the absence of inputs from direct reports of the coached executives is disappointing, but unavoidable. This

avenue of investigation was not open to me because all of the executives had moved from their original positions.

The above limitations are balanced by some strengths, for example, the contained nature of the study formed a microcosm of a particular pilot programme and although it was a retrospective snapshot, subject to the fallibility of research participants' memories (Willig, 2008), it equally bore witness to the idiosyncratic nature of people's personal perceptions and responses to situations. Unlike the research in Document 3, the coaching process was not contaminated by any other form of leadership development intervention, thus it met the research brief. Fortuitously, I was able to sample the complete set of executives, even those who had left the company, and thus had access to a variety of views, which provided a form of triangulation that validated aspects of the coach's approach.

6.4 Adding to the body of knowledge

The primary aim of this research study was to give voice to executives' perceptions of coaching and to elicit their views on what worked and did not work for them in pursuit of their coaching objectives. Chapter 4 is replete with research participants' viewpoints and the voices of the executives provide rich, deep data that illustrates the positives of coaching, but also illustrates their experiential concerns about aspects of their coaching. This contrasts with many case studies that report exemplary examples of coaching in action (e.g. Kilburg, 2008; Peterson & Millier, 2005) and thus provides a counter-view to the ideal scenarios presented by practitioner writers. Additionally, to the best of my knowledge, this research study is the first of its kind in an Irish context.

While the research findings support prior research that maintains that executive coaching works most of the time for most people (Kilburg, 2004) in that all the coached executives experience a range of positive outcomes, they also support the contention that practitioners can be mistaken in their interpretations of interventions (Lowman, 2005; Olson, 2008). The contrast between the Coach's description of his structured approach and some of the executives' evaluations of his approach highlights the need for coaching feedback to be an interactive process (Gregory et al., 2008) wherein coaches actively solicit progress feedback from clients. The Coach's failure to provide continuity, to establish benchmarks and to monitor and mark progress was a recurring theme and is a live example of how executives favour a focused and results oriented approach (Stern, 2004).

While the study affords insights into how executives responded to a particular coaching approach, a salient finding is that a CEO and some executives opted to continue a coaching programme even when the returns appeared small, but subsequently delivered poor evaluations of both the Coach and the coaching outcomes. Furthermore, the case gives a real life example of how pressure from senior members of an organisation can intimidate a coach into indiscrete disclosures. It thus endorses the need for principles of ethical behaviour that guide both coaches and senior management (Executive Coaching Handbook, 2008) and supports the contention that coach supervision has a role to play in helping coaches manage ethical and confidentiality boundaries (Hawkins & Schwenk, 2006).

I would argue that the findings from this research have ecological validity in that they portray the subjective experiences of the research participants (Bryman & Bell, 2003) and thus they contribute to bringing the voice of executives to the fore. This research adds to the current body of knowledge on executive coaching by presenting a coaching model that reflects the facilitators and inhibitors of a coaching programme, and their outcomes. It suggests a range of circumstances and behaviours that enhanced and detracted from a coaching programme and thus it informs HR professions, coach practitioners and executives on how they might maximise the benefits from coaching.

6.5 Implications for further research

Although the research study succeeded in eliciting executives' views across many aspects of coaching, it could be argued that it also raised issues about when to draw the line in qualitative research. Prior to the CEO's interview, my view was that the Coach was completely trustworthy. Subsequent to that interview, I can only speculate that, although there was a breach of confidence, executives were able to rationalise this and continue to benefit from the coaching. Research into the nature of trust has shown that trust is a complex, multi-faceted concept (Meyer, et al., 1995). Alvey & Barclay's (2007) research into the nature of trust in dyadic coaching relations found that trust was a function of several factors: organisational, coach related and executive related. Because the findings from my research study are counter-intuitive regarding the resilience of trust, further qualitative research might help to explicate the nature of trust in executive coaching.

While the interviews undoubtedly gave voice to the executives, and provided 'thick descriptions' and 'multiple realities' (Stake, 1995:43), a serendipitous result was the chasm

revealed between the approach the Coach professed to take, and that experienced by the executives. This discrepancy appears to validate the view that there is 'no certainty that tales of coaching accurately reflect practice' (Olson, 2008:151). Further research that takes a microcosmic case study approach that gives voice to executives might uncover whether discrepancies between coaches' espoused approaches and executives' coaching experiences are a common phenomenon.

Evaluation of coaching outcomes also offers opportunity for further research. Although targets for coaching were agreed between the three parties (Executives, the Coach and the Organisation), the research study revealed discrepant evaluations of coaching outcomes, across all participants. Hogan & Warrenfeltz (2003) make the point that self-evaluation has the potential to be seriously flawed. Thus future research would benefit if, in addition to including executives, HR personnel and senior management, direct reports of coached executives were also invited to assess the outcomes. The role of reflectivity in influencing evaluations is another research area that would yield insights into executive coaching.

Finally, this exploratory research study validates calls for the voice of the executive to be heard and further research that explores the subjective world of the coaching triad can only contribute to the body of knowledge on executive coaching.

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Appendix A   Summary of Research Results

Appendix A offers a thumbnail sketch of various research studies into Executive Coaching which have been published since 2006. The most recent studies are presented first.

Baron & Morin (2009). This study empirically investigated the links between the coach-coachee relationship and the success of a coaching intervention in an organizational setting. Data were collected from two samples: 73 managers who received executive coaching for a period of eight months and 24 coaches. Results from 31 coach-coachee dyads were analyzed. Results indicate that the coach-coachee relationship plays a mediating role between the coaching received and development of the coachee's self-efficacy. Findings also show four significant correlates to the coach-coachee relationship: the coach's self-efficacy with regard to facilitating learning and results, the coachee's motivation to transfer, his or her perception of supervisor support, and the number of coaching sessions received.

Bono, Purvanova, Towler, & Peterson's (2009) study compared the practices of psychologist and non-psychologist coaches, as well as the practices of coaches from various psychological disciplines (counselling, clinical, and industrial/organizational). Results of surveys completed by 428 coaches (256 non-psychologists, 172 psychologists) revealed as many differences between psychologists of differing disciplines as were found between psychologist and non-psychologist coaches. Moreover, differences between psychologists and non-psychologists were generally small (average $d = .26$). The survey also revealed some differences in the key competencies identified by psychologist and non-psychologist coaches.

Cortvriend, Harris & Alexander (2008) present a mixed-methods approach of self-reported pre and post coaching surveys and ten semi-structured interviews with coachees at the end of the coaching. Using a local government context, this study explored the links between leadership development coaching and performance. The research found that coaching impacts positively on individual and organisational performance. It enhances well being and reduces stress as well as helping coachees to move towards a more transformational style of leadership. The executive surveyed believed that outcomes for the public had been enhanced as the result of the coaching.

De Haan (2008a; 2008b). A total of 69 critical moments as reported by inexperienced coaches are content analysed. These critical incidents were gathered over a four year period from coaches who attended a coaching programme and subsequently transcribed from Dutch into English. The critical incidents threw up a range of doubts (instrumental, relational and existential) which the coaching process opens for coaches. De Hann suggests that CIPD may help coaches become aware of, explore and lay these doubts to rest. He considers that the most promising methodology for doing this seems to be coaching supervision, conducted in the safest possible environment. He points up the paradox of a coach needing to be simultaneously thicker and thinner skinned.

De Haan (2008c). This paper is related to and builds on the research conducted with inexperienced coaches. de Haan looks at how moments and incidents that feel critical for experienced coaches differ from those of relatively inexperienced coaches (who experience various kinds of doubt). He concludes that 'the quality of an experienced coach's work is determined primarily by their ability to tolerate and deliberately inquire into tensions within

coaching relationships; else they are in danger of simply becoming good conversation partners' (de Haan, 2008c:106).

Kombarakaran, Yank, Baker & Fernandes (2008). This research, which looks at the effects of executive coaching, combines quantitative and qualitative approaches. Findings suggest that, because of executive coaching, changes occurred in five areas: people management, relationships with managers, prioritization, engagement and productivity, dialogue and communication. The authors emphasise the importance of coach selection, executive commitment to behavioural change, and the role of good program and environmental support. A well-designed coaching program can lead to leadership development and to talent retention.

Liljenstrad & Nebeker's (2008) quantitative, web-based survey research was undertaken to learn more about coaches from varying academic backgrounds and how they may differ in their approach to coaching. Two thousand, two hundred and thirty one (2231) coaches completed a web-based survey that examined coaching practices. The survey found significant differences in coaches' personal attributes and attitudes (academic background, age, gender, and experience; preparation methods, income and titles; marketing approaches and client bases; attitudes towards certification and ethics). However all groups believed that coaches should be required to adhere to ethical guidelines, although the researchers speculate that ethical debates in the media may have inflated the social desirability of ethical guidelines.

McPherson (2008) McPherson presents a case study of an executive coaching initiative at Lancashire County Council. Two consultants facilitated the purpose of the exercise, which was to cascade leadership throughout the organisation, over a four year period. Thirty senior managers received executive coaching and these managers are now acting as mentors. McPherson contends that organisations are looking for a new leadership model where the charismatic leader is replaced by a type of leadership in which all managers are leaders.

Styhre, (2008). The paper reports on a year-long study of the coaching of site managers in construction projects. The study shows that coaching actively helped the site managers to relate to their previous experiences and modes of operating and to conceive of new and effective ways of leading their work. In particular, the site managers appreciated being able to discuss their problems with an 'external interlocutor'. Styhre's paper aims to draw on the social systems theory of Niklas Luhmann and argues that the distinction between first and second-order observations is central to the practice of coaching.

Alvey & Barclay's (2007) qualitative study explored the development of trust in executive coaching relationships. They interviewed 27 high level executives who had voluntarily engaged in executive coaching to develop their leadership skills. From these interviews, they developed a theory about the characteristics of dyadic trust in executive coaching. They found that trust was influenced by the interplay of relational, situational, and behavioural factors. Trust was highest when (a) the client was willing to disclose honest feelings and thoughts to the coach and was met with a supportive, nonjudgmental reaction from the coach; (b) the organization was supportive of the positive leadership development that could occur in executive coaching; (c) the coach and client were clear about expectations of confidentiality and outcomes; and (d) the coach supportively confirmed the client's developmental needs, and challenged the client's leadership behaviours.

Bowles, Cunningham, De La Rosa & Picano (2007). This research study was concerned with testing the effectiveness of coaching for middle and executive level managers within a large recruiting organization. The sample consisted of 30 middle managers and 29 executive managers involved in US Army recruiting. Outcomes included measures of coached participants' achievement of quota and personal goals, and assessment on nine leader competencies and buy-in over the one-year coaching period. The study found that coached managers outperformed un-coached, but experienced counterparts. The strongest impact of coaching on performance was for middle managers and their subordinates.

Finn, Mason & Bradley (2007). This research study explores the effects of executive coaching on leaders' psychological states and transformational leadership behaviour. Participants were taking part in a yearlong leadership-training programme, of which executive coaching was one component. The researchers established a control group and an experimental group. Leaders who had completed executive coaching reported higher self-efficacy, developmental support, openness to new behaviours, and developmental planning than leaders who had not completed coaching. In addition, team members gave higher ratings of transformational leadership behaviour to leaders who had completed executive coaching than to leaders who had not completed executive coaching.

McPherson (2007). This paper describes Lancashire County Council's strategy for managing racism in the workplace by developing managers' people-management skills based around one-to-one executive coaching and mentoring. The paper advances the view that if all staff feel valued, respected and treated fairly, the organization they work for is unlikely to be characterized by bullying, harassment and discrimination.

Mackay (2007). Mackay presents a case study of individual coaching and the use of 360 degree feedback for the MD and full executive Board of Menzies distribution. He describes this as taking the first steps to becoming a "*future proof*" organization. The 360 instrument used behavioural analysis of eight (8) competencies across 18 skill sets. Executives rated themselves and then asked peers, bosses and direct reports to rate them across the same competencies. The case highlights how 360-degree feedback was a necessary first step to get a clear picture of the talent across the business before any management-development and coaching could begin.

Dagley (2006). HR practitioners completed structured interviews to elicit their perceptions of the overall efficacy of executive coaching, the specific benefits derived and drawbacks experienced from the programmes, their estimates of the cost/benefit of the programmes, and their interest in using executive coaching in the future. Practitioners indicated strong support for the use of coaching in the future, and all rated their programmes as at least moderately successful. They also identified a large range of benefits for the executive and a smaller range for the organisation. Dagley describes some of the HR practitioners' attitudes as counter-intuitive in that their positive attitudes towards coaching does not appear to reflect the reality of what coaching delivered.

Jones, Rafferty & Griffin (2006). This exploratory study investigated the influence of executive coaching on managerial flexibility in order to build a stronger theoretical and empirical basis for executive coaching research. About eleven leaders participated in a leadership development programme and received executive coaching over a three-month period. Leaders were surveyed prior to coaching, during coaching, and post coaching.

Analysis revealed that self-reported managerial flexibility increased throughout the duration of executive coaching. The authors note the limitations of self-reporting.

Jones & Spooner, (2006). This investigation used semi-structured interviews with coaches and high achievers from business and sports to identify (1) common characteristics of high achievers that are important to take into account when coaching them, (2) the coaching needs of high achievers, and (3) key implications for the practice of coaching high achievers. Findings suggest that a "one-size-fits-all" approach to coaching may be inappropriate and a number of factors need to be taken into account when coaching high achievers. Of fundamental importance is the need to establish a coaching relationship built on trust and mutual respect. The impact of the coaching is determined by a number of factors, including the coach being challenging, flexible, and adding value quickly.

Libri & Kemp (2006). Case study of one 30-year-old Australian male employed as a full-time finance sales executive. This single case design found that coaching using a cognitive behavioural approach enhanced his sales performance, core self-evaluation and global self-ratings of performance.

Orenstein (2006). This paper describes the application of C.P. Alderfer's & L.D. Brown's (1972) "Empathic Organic Questionnaire" to executive coaching by summarizing a case in which it was adapted and used. The case details how the instrument was constructed and administered and reports the results of paired sample t tests rated by 20 respondents. The author claims that the article demonstrates that executive coaching efficacy can be measured empirically. Orenstein's findings support her hypothesis that behaviours directly related to stated coaching objectives are rated as changing the most.

Parker-Wilkins (2006). Parker Wilkins presents a case study of executive coaching outcomes within one organisation where coaching produced intangible elements, but also produced monetary benefits and an ROI of 689 percent. This ROI study consisted of a three-step process: understand the business value expected by the firm's senior leadership; document what staff have learned from coaching; explore how staff applied what they learned from coaching to create intangible and monetary value for the business.

Schlosser, Streinbrenner, Kumata & Hunt (2006). This research study found that coaches, coachees, and managers differ in their targets for coaching. Research was conducted via an on-line survey and follow-up interviews. Of the managers' top 10 priorities for capabilities and behaviours, only five were shared with the coachees, and only four with the coaches. One of the conclusions was that managers needed to be heard for executive coaching to be better tied in with targets at the next level.

Turner (2006). This research study investigated executive coaching from the standpoint of the executives. Turner uses dialogue from three executives to illustrate views. Executives identify five significant benefits from coaching: continuous one-on-one attention, expanded thinking through dialogue with a curious outsider; self-awareness, including blind-spots; personal accountability for development and just in time learning. Executives mentioned four limitations: a lack of clarity about the process; a lack of continuity between the coaching sessions; the use of specialist language and a failure to measure results. The critical success factors are: a willing executive, a skilled coach, and realistic expectations.

Wasylyshyn, Gronsky, & Haas (2006). This research study surveyed a group of 33 coachees who had completed a customised coaching programme between 1996 and 2002, and 44 of their former and current line managers. The coaching focus was specifically on emotional competence. Survey results indicated that programme participants had sustained learning and behaviour change over an extended period. These successful outcomes appeared to be related to carefully choosing participants, a collaborative model which involved the coachee, his/her boss, the HR department and the coach, an insight-oriented coaching approach, and persistent efforts to brand the programme as a developmental resource. The authors recommend emotional competence as a continuous developmental focus for senior managers, irrespective of coaching method.

Appendix B   Summary stories

The HR Director's story

Caroline joined M&V in late 2005 as HR Director for the Division; she is the only female director on the Divisional Board of Directors. Before taking up her position, Caroline worked in a senior HR capacity for a large multi-national company. This company used executive coaching as a leadership development intervention.

On her arrival in M&V she noted that, while there were training programmes at staff level in the Division, very few development opportunities were offered to Directors. She found that, even though the Division is very customer focussed and has very strong commercial management, *there were some gaps in the leadership team in this Division.* In early 2006 Group HR introduced a three-hundred and sixty degree feedback process (360) for Directors based on eight, *fairly standard leadership competences*: Customer focus, Commercial acumen, Strategic thinking, Managing complexity and change, Impact and influence, Teamwork, Learning agility and Developing others. Part of the education around the 360 was aimed at getting people to accept that *ticking all your peers and directors at 5 is not helpful to them, or not helpful to you ... It's great for the budget, but nobody's going to be developed.* She is satisfied that the process works well because *In general, people are very constructive and M&V is a very safe environment compared to other environments I would have worked in.* Each director had a performance review meeting with the Divisional CEO who was previously Group HR Director. He *would be very good at having performance conversations with people and would be very good at bring people on – he is a business leader for 10 years now.*

A very positive approach was taken with this exercise: *you're great at the customer piece, you're super at the commercial piece, but you've a gap in the people management area – so reflect on it, how do we manage people, etc.* She thinks that one way of addressing that is to say that M&V managers need to become better at coaching teams and individuals: *so we need to develop coaching skills from the top down. ... To some extent there's a responsibility on us if we put people into people management roles that they didn't have the skills for, or we didn't develop'.* This is the second year the Division has gone through a full 360 process for all the Directors and when you look at the 360 scores right across the business the dominant need is people development, both teams and individuals.

Why coaching?

Succession management is a major issue for the company and a directive has come down from the Group CEO that every senior manager is responsible for developing a number of people who could take over his or her job. Caroline sees it as her role to have a number of successors in place when the Divisional CEO comes to retire and *sees a real value in coaching in moving people to this next level*.

People coming into a new role would complete a range of psychometrics out of which would come a development plan *a very structured development plan for the individual, so it's not just going through psychometrics, you're in and you're out, and that's the end of it.* It was not just about coaching, other developmental needs would also be identified, if some people needed to be given a chance to run a business, this could be arranged.

The company is growing fast, so there is a big focus on internal talent and on developing people. It is critical for every company, but it is even more critical for M&V, because the business is so unique: *It's just such a complex business so for people to come and get their head around it and be effective quickly is not an easy job, and not everybody gets the business aspect of it.* While the focus is to bring on people internally, hiring strategy has also changed: *we also have a hiring strategy to hire at a higher calibre and a higher level than we have before so we have the material to work on.* Sometimes HR employs people from the UK, but it's very difficult to get the right staff: *For M&V, and certainly for this Division, the secret is growing your own. I guess my challenge as a HR Director is to make sure I have successors.*

Rather than each Division '*doing its own thing*', Group now have a Group Talent and Resourcing Manager who was hired two years ago. She has been *'instrumental in creating what is called our leadership pathway'.* The process is comprehensive and encompasses graduate trainees right up to those identified as future leaders. In steps 1, 3 and 4, coaching is incorporated to reinforce module learning. For the final step, the Strategic Leadership Programme, the coaches need to be, and are, very good at getting people to the next level.

Steps on the leadership pathway:

1. The Graduate Programme
2. The Professional Development Programme: this is '*a fairly standard programme*' that includes performance management, communications, and other modules that people managers need to have.

3. The Leadership Development Programme is really the first step of management and is build around the M&V leadership qualities.

4. The Strategic Leadership Programme is for people whom the company has identified as high potential and future leaders. The programme focuses around strategy, and commercial aspects of the business. Its purpose is to enable people to take the step to the next level and entails giving them whatever experiences they need to achieve this. This may be coaching, but if needs be, it also gives them the opportunity to run a business.

Coaching for Directors

Post the 2006, 360 process and following on from the performance review, coaching was offered to *three of the senior team.* Caroline based her decision to offer coaching on her previous positive experiences with executive coaching; it just seemed *a natural approach* for her to take:

> *I guess, from being on senior teams over my career, when you look at the development of key individuals on the teams, it just probably evolved without me giving it much thought.... I can provide a suite of courses, but if you're really talking about developing potential, it is about coaching.*

The original 360s and performance reviews have now been extended to include staff at D-1 level (people who report to Directors) and where appropriate some of these are being offered coaches. At present between 10 and 15 people in the Division are in a coaching programme and that may increase to 20 by next year, depending on the developmental need.

However, coaching is now less likely to be a first resort because other leadership development programmes are in place. Group have developed a number of '*bespoke programmes'* programmes around leadership qualities*,* e.g. a two day programme for developing impact and influence. So, despite *very, very positive feedback on coaching*, now her first response to a 360 gap in leadership *is to refer them to a programme instead of running off and getting in a special coach.*

The work of the coach

Coaching is *pretty individual based* because the needs are so varied. She uses it principally *for senior managers to develop an aspect of their competency in a senior management role* and sometimes Caroline employs specialist coaches; she sees coaching as *very bespoke to the*

needs of the individual. As an example, Caroline used a coach who specialises in communication to work with a Director who was *new in a big, big job, to help him communicate his vision for the business, connecting with the new team, articulating his strategy for the business.*

Who to choose for coach?

Caroline uses a *couple of key people* for the coaching and if she doesn't have the coach she needs, she'll network with colleagues in other areas of the Group *to see who I might get.* Currently the Talent Management Team in Group Headquarters is compiling a panel of coaches. As part of the vetting process, Caroline interviews coaches and checks references; when she uses a new coach, she would normally put him/her with an executive that would give her feedback on whether the coach is good. Most of the coaches she uses are business people and the emphasis is on strategy, on performance, and on managing teams. None is a psychologist, but all bar one have a qualification in coaching, and all have some kind of assessment tool that they use. She recently employed a coach who had no coaching qualifications: *He had a Masters in Science, or something. The guy is absolutely fabulous, coaches at a very senior level, in senior organisations and has a fabulous track record but it is working out superbly and I will use him to coach other people.* She thinks it is important that the coaches understand the M&V business so that *when they're suggesting development activities, etc. it's grounded in the business, rather than just the theory*. She is looking at employing a very well regarded, London-based international coaching company for work at Director Level. However, she is wary of using this firm because they do not know the business and she intends to make time in her diary so that *they can come and spend a number of days in the business, to understand the business, before they would start coaching people*.

Learning from experience

Rather than have the executives leave the building for coaching sessions, coaches work within the business; she sees this as efficient, cost effective and easier to monitor. A coach is normally employed for three months or six months and executives engage in coaching sessions every two weeks for a three or six month period. However, good executive coaches are *always at the end of a telephone or they schedule additional meetings if people need it.*

Looking back and reflecting on her previous use of coaches, Caroline thinks: *I was not clear enough about the objectives and I let it drag on too long, so the coaching becomes a crutch for the person.* So now, she is very clear: *here's the development need, here's the behaviour I need to have changed or the skill I need to have developed.* However, the time schedule is flexible and if either the coach or the executive feels the need for extra time, that *is not a problem.*

How the process works for Directors

If the CEO's 360 performance review conversation with the Director identifies a leadership competency gap, then the executive comes to HR and identifies what he needs to work on. Caroline may offer coaching, but only people who want to be coached are coached. She then sources a coach who meets with the CEO and with the executive.

Following the 2006 360 performance reviews, Caroline invited three Directors to engage in coaching. She had a coach in mind for the Directors and was confident that her chosen coach could deliver at senior management level. She was familiar with his work and his results and thought him very good on strategy and on building performance; he coaches from a work-life balance perspective: *He would be superb on how to run a business, on strategy, on behaviours, on how you work at Director-level in an organisation.*

The coaching agenda
From the HR Director's perspective, identified gaps in the nine leadership competencies underpin most agendas. However, although wanting the coaching to be focused on the business, she acknowledges that coaching is likely to be wide-ranging:

> *I say to the individual, we're assigning you a coach, here's what we need you and the coach to work on, here's what we need to be clear about, what's going to change or what we're going to develop. But when you're working with a coach, he could end up working on everything, your personal life, your home life, your marriage, your work-life balance with your kids, whatever it is, so you work with your coach on whatever you believe is important.*

She finds that people can be *so woolly – and I'm talking about managers – woolly about what they want to achieve* so she focuses their minds by asking *what is the behaviour – if it's a behaviour issue – that you expect to see different from six sessions or after three and a half months, or whatever it is.* By doing this *the individual is clear, the coach is clear what they're working on, and the managers know what they expect to see.*

Although she has not seen it happen in M&V yet, in other companies where she has worked, occasionally coaching has resulted in executives leaving the company. She is quite philosophical about the problems of replacement and she pulls in the M&V values to support her position:

> *Ok, it does cause an issue, and you have to go out and replace that individual, but it's the right thing for the person and if you have a value of openness and honesty and integrity and long term stable relationships, then you have to accept that.*

Feedback from the coach
Feedback from the coach is at the very general level of:

> *Is it working? It's at a top level – to say this is really working well, or this person could really be helped by moving into a different role or have you thought of this for them, or whatever, or I've encouraged them to come back to you and challenge you guys in the company.*

She would not expect any breach of confidentiality.

Getting a return from the coaching
The company has invested a lot of money in coaching and has trebled its budget over the last two years: *I guess the question from my boss to me is: Is it working? Are we getting a return on our investment?* She monitors how coaching is progressing for Directors; at Director level, *there's absolutely a follow-up ... because we're so clear about our objectives and we need to see those objectives achieved.* Either she or the CEO *touch base with people just to make sure the coaching is working* and the CEO would have very open conversations with the individuals to see how they are progressing. She asks the coach to make sure that the person is engaged fully and that there is no resistance: if there is *any lack of engagement, I need to hear about it.* Sometimes results are hard to see. She remembers one individual where the coach was convinced the process was working and he wanted to extend the coaching: *it probably took six months to actually see the change, which I absolutely see now, but it was worth it.* She is also cautious that executives might be *just getting into the habit of meeting someone that they can have a nice chat with on a bi-weekly or monthly basis.*

At Director level, it has been a success story and people have done very well: *Absolutely, without a shadow of a doubt, we can clearly see the results.* Some senior people have moved roles, not necessarily just because of coaching, they obviously have ability, but the coaching either gave them confidence or closed a competency gap.

Coaches have told Caroline that she is *probably stricter on discipline than other HR people.* She is very conscious of the need to get value for money:

> *I have a finite budget and I absolutely want to make sure that when I'm spending money, I am going to get the return on my investment. I am probably more curious, and I would be asking the manager does he see a change and if he doesn't, I'd be picking up the phone to the coach and saying - the manager doesn't see a change, is there any reason why this isn't happening. Now ultimately, it's the next performance review in any case where I would see a change, better results, better 360 review, or if behaviour was an issue.*

Her utopia

Caroline sees herself working toward is a time when she can dispense with external coaches:

My ideal or my utopia I suppose would be in two or three years time that, at the very least, we would have identified people in our business who could be coaches. Caroline undertook a coaching programme and now has a coaching qualification and she has coached some D-1 executives, but this has not always worked.

She knows it is early days yet, but in three years time she wants to have reduced the Division's dependency on external coaches and to have developed managers' coaching skills: '*not all dancing, all singing coaches, but that we would have developed their skills'.* In response to a probe as to whether the participants on the Strategic Leadership Development Course (the fourth stage of the leadership pathway) understood that they would be expected to coach, she said:

At this point probably not – it's a very good point – we're finalising the programme and it's probably not as drawn out as I'd like.

The Coach's Story

Career decisions

Maurice is working as a business coach for 12 years. Prior to changing career, he worked twenty-one (21) years in IT in a variety of different roles: technician, sales and marketing, general management and managing director of an American Corporation. When this company decided to withdraw from their international operations, he was involved in a management buy-out, and a couple of years later he was bought out himself. Then in his mid- thirties, he decided to try his hand at something different.

> *And I fell into coaching to be honest with you. I've always liked working with people and the subject of coaching came up and it was suggested to me that I had the right temperament for it so I decided to use the opportunity of leaving corporate life to try it out. And I started up as a sales coach.*

He went on to realise that the people who want coaching are not sales people, but executives, and so he repositioned his proposition. Very few coaches have actually held down senior positions in industry and the fact that he has, has helped him '*an awful lot because I can say to most people I meet, I've done your job at one level or another; I've sat in your seat so I do kind of get why it might be a problem*'. However, while it helps him build credibility, that said, it probably does not make '*a massive amount of difference'. Maurice has been* coaching at senior management level now for 10 years and he gets '*a lot of rising talent work'.*

His business model

Maurice runs a tight, three person business; he employs a content person, an administrative person, and he delivers the coaching himself; having Associates did not work out. His business is based in England, but he works with International companies and flies to Ireland and mainland Europe to coach executives. Coaching contracts are based on a fixed cost, quarterly basis: '*It's a fixed cost per person no matter how much time we spend together'.* Assignments tend to last a minimum of a year with a time commitment from the executive of two, two hour meetings a month. He requires free access to people at all levels of the company to build his own profile of the executive and to study the company, understand the culture, the history, the values, and what drives the business performance. Because coaching is '*an exceptional spend'* it is often financed out of the budgets of heads of departments or initiated by CEOs. HR departments rarely initiate coaching, their budgets are concentrated on providing training. He is '*absolutely*' against the notion of signing up exclusively with a big company and thinks that part of his value is his ability to bring in ideas from outside, but

also a big part of the value for executives is their being able to talk to somebody who is never going to work there: *'No politics'*. No single company forms more than twenty-five per cent of his portfolio.

Taking advantage of his IT skills, Maurice has designed a sophisticated website that allows executives to track his availability and make arrangements for telephone conversations and video conferences. He keeps records of all his interactions with executives and each executive has coded personal space on the company website. Executives can post comments and reactions on this shared space and reflect on what is working or not working for them'. (These web pages are a recent innovation and were not available in 2006 when he coached the M&V Directors). The web-site also contains a list of recommended leadership books and he supplies executives with DVDs and hard copies of book that he thinks will benefit them – *'we act like a library'*.

Self-development
Self-development is a major investment. He has qualified in *'the major psychometrics and good techniques for a 360'* and every year he goes away for a month *'to refresh my academia'*. He became interested in psychology in his late 40s, and now the subject fascinates him. He has just completed his Psych B. with the British Psychological Society (BPS). This course *'teaches you a lot of the basic psychological techniques of coaching. So it's the nearest you can get to having a high level psychological education for coaching'*. He has also completed a course with the BPS on emotional intelligence. Business in general is not interested in looking for qualifications and he thinks that: *'I wouldn't have lost a single piece of business had I not gone on a single course, because no one has ever really asked me or challenged me. They're almost amazed I've got any (*qualifications*)'*.

Thoughts on executives
Senior executives are *'naturally cynical about the whole process* (of coaching). *They don't do development'*. Making them willing to spend time with a coach is a big challenge, and they expect a lot back. A two-hour coaching session is the equivalent of a fifth of their day, and they have very high expectations of what they could achieve in that time span: *'they'll only give you that once if it wasn't worth it, and I'm asking them to give it up every other week for a year'*.

Executives come with various dispositions. Some of them have '*had smoke blown at them for so long, they think they're invulnerable and they don't realise that what they're doing is neither effective nor very nice'*. Others are hard on themselves: '*they look for the things they do badly and kick themselves'* and life can be hard for them. The pressures of work do not allow for quality reflection. Furthermore, the quality of feedback they get from the company and the quality of time they get from their bosses is often poor and only focused on business results. '*They don't get the chance for the quality reflective discussion, which is often what I do. And it's funny how we use the words mirror and reflection, but that is exactly what I do'*. Executive often do not realise that everything they do has an effect: '*That's why I say I don't do time management, I do time control, behavioural control. Be in charge'*.

His approach to coaching
Inputs

Maurice identifies 3 inputs to a coaching programme: What the company wants (return on investment), what the executive wants, which may be different to what the company wants, and what the coach can bring to the process (fresh ideas). *Ideally, the three of us should come together at the beginning and set out very clear objectives for the programme. ... 'The next time we might come together will be some way into the programme to do a progress report, but it would always be together.* The decision on whether to engage in coaching is finalised by himself and the executive. He has '*a very firm principle that irrespective of what the company chooses, we choose whether to work together or not'*.

The coaching plan should not be rushed. *'We don't know each other and you have to as a coach not believe anything you've been told, even if it's all true you still have to go and figure it out'* and it also takes time to study the company, understand the culture, the history, the values, and what drives the business performance..

Stages in the process

There are four stages to his coaching work: Stage 1, the foundation stage, is about building trust and proving that coaching '*can and will help'*. This is easy to do, '*the hard bit is getting them to turn ambition into action'*. The second stage is to deliver the win for the business, so that the company is happy to continue to sponsor the coaching. The executives must be seen to be doing their job better than before. Companies are '*naturally impatient'* and want results far earlier than is reasonable '*so you have to work to do that'*.

> You see in phase two I want them to be able to do their jobs at least as well
> as they're doing it now, in about eighty-five per cent of the time and effort

that they're doing it now, 'cause in stage three I take that fifteen per cent and we do the big thing. The real reason why we're working together, whatever that is. So there's no point me doing that at the beginning. It will just fall off the plate. I need to release some space first in their heads to take on the big thing, which is what we do in stage three. Stage four we anchor it. We embed it. Then maybe we go around the loop again. So, you deliberately go after anchoring, it isn't accidental.

Coaching schedules

While the formal contract specifies a fixed coaching schedule, performance coaching is '*very hands on*'. The coach needs to be in frequent contact to encourage small improvements. As a business coach he has one maxim: '*Business always comes first. Coaching is not supposed to get in the way of them doing their jobs*'. Maurice's commitment to the executive is open-ended: '*We operate on a minimum, but with no maximum. They can call me whenever they want, and I have to be responsive. So it's very intensive, it is an intimate relationship. We talk a lot. Contact once a week would be normal*'. A member of his staff works full-time on re-rostering his diary to accommodate executives.

Measuring return on investment

Everybody asks about measuring the return on coaching. It is quite easy to show a return, '*you've just got to be sophisticated about picking the measures*'. You can choose business performance metrics or personal metrics, like 360s. You have to put measurements in place near the beginning of Stage 1 and measure again at the end of Stage 1 to show an improvement. Stage 1 is tricky:

> *I have to work very hard to make sure they feel stuff is happening for them – while you're working in the background to put a line down, deciding what to measure, figuring out what they are all really about...'*

The coaching model
Coaching Techniques

Maurice sees himself as a '*very structured person*' who uses tools and techniques '*to hold up a mirror to the executive in a scientific or semi-scientific way*'. His study of psychology has helped him understand how people think and given him the way to get inside people's psyche. He also has had some of the '*finest sales training in the world ... and that has helped me a lot*', so he knows that '*You never sell anybody anything, you get them to want to buy*'.

No one particular coaching model dominates. He uses a combination of approaches:

> *Made up, adapted, borrowed, stolen; it's a combination of twelve years of figuring out what works and what doesn't work, to be honest with you. You soon know what doesn't work so we stop doing that very quickly. I sometimes think: 'There should be one right way to do this'.*

One-to-one three-sixty (360) in-depth interviews with five or six diary reports who interact with the executive are an important part of his approach and he sometimes, but not inevitably, also gets executives to complete psychometrics. The results of these conversations are distilled, written up, and shared with executives. A viewpoint is used only if two people articulate it.

Maurice is a great believer in the science of cause and effect: '*Once you know that if you do that, this will happen, then you have the power to decide if you want it to happen'.* He thinks that most of us have lost that connection. A simple question the executive needs to ask is: '*Are people seeing in me what I need them to see in me in order for me to achieve my objectives? You need to adjust your behaviour so people see in you what you intended them to see in you'.* The Coach sees role play as a *'great way of holding the mirror up'.* Shadowing executives in various roles is also something he does frequently. *'I need to see them on their feet, I need to see the way they relate to their people in their natural environments and I give them feedback on that'.*

A big part of his coaching is teaching executives that they can *'do their jobs really, really well without doing all of the things they're actually doing'.* They must learn '*it's just not about time management, it's about time control'.* One of the biggest life skills executives have to learn is not so much knowing what to do, '*it's knowing what not to do: choosing how you spend your time on what'.*

Executives read or listen to pod casts of particular books.

> *By making it part of the programme I can then enforce it. So I give them a book, I make them read it. So I will question them on on it. I have Power Point versions of all the books I work with, so we go through it as well and I question their understanding of the book.*

Steven Covey's *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* is required reading for executives He likes Covey's definition of responsibility: *'the ability to choose your response'.* He is aiming

for them to be *'consciously competent. Instilling disciplines like self control and self awareness are big parts of what I do'.*

He takes an interest in training courses that executives attend: *'I'd coach them into it and I'd coach them out of it. I'd often go and visit them on the course, make sure they were using their time well'.* He sees it as:

> part of my duty to the company to make sure that if they invest in these people something changes when they come back ... If it's on my watch, it becomes part of the programme. Anything they do becomes part of what we do.

The coaching relationship

The early part of the relationship is about winning trust, winning confidence, gaining commitment to the process and meeting expectations. *'They have to trust that I will tell them what I see and no motives, no interest'.* The essence of a good coaching relationship is that the executive is free to say exactly what they are thinking, and there are no consequences. Once you get to that point, it is very easy to hold the mirror up to them because all you have to do is ask the right questions. *'Coaching is not about teaching them anything; it is about helping them figure things out'.* These are all very bright, decent people; they just don't take the time to ask themselves obvious questions like: *'Why am I doing that?'*

It is important not to get too close to anyone. Never socialise, never go to Christmas parties. With coaching, it's so easy to become too close to them. *'You have to fight that all the time'.* He sees keeping that distance as a big part of the value, *'I'm here to be hard to them, I'm here to be horrible to them now and again. It's part of my job. I have to say to them: It looks crazy to me – Why are you doing it?'*

What leadership is about

Leadership development is difficult because the theoretical aspects of leadership, which can be picked up in bookstores, is far different to the practical aspect of leadership. A leader's job is to get people to want to do what he/she needs them to do. That involves *'sophisticated skills that senior executives just haven't got'.* Often today's executives are still the old guard, trying to deal in a structured way with an unstructured world, with matrix management and virtual teams. He tells the story of when he first went into a management role:

> 'On the very first day I was made from an individual contributor to a manager of a team of eight, I said to my boss: Can I have a management course? And he laughed at me. He said, maybe in a year'.

Leadership is a big leap for some people. '*You don't get a lot of help, I mean you are on your own, by definition*'. He still get the comment regularly, '*it's great just to have someone I can sit down and say it out loud to, who is not going to give me a line, they're not going to try and just agree with me, they are going to tell it as it is*'.

Resilience and consistency are important leadership characteristics. Inconsistent leaders '*cause people an awful lot of problems*' because it is very difficult to anticipate what you're going to get when the leader '*is all over the place*'. *Inconsistency confuses people*'.

Where the coaching profession is now

He has never found himself in competition with a coach. In fact, it is very difficult to find good coaches, one who can hold their own at board level: '*If you're playing at this level it has to be high value and too many coaches don't offer high value*'. Very few companies employ more than two coaches at the same time and this is probably because they cannot find good coaches. He is often asked to recommend a coach for a sister company, but he does not move in coaching circles. From his own experience, he thinks that industry expectations are low and coaches are rarely challenged about their competencies. The demand for coaches in the UK has probably reached a plateau.

Working for M&V

M&V employed him in 2006. Although he knew the HR Director from a previous coaching assignment in a different company, he thought the company '*went through a reasonable vetting process*' with him, which is something he would encourage. He took on to coach four executives at Director level. The CEO of the Division was '*happy to talk to me*' but was not interested in being coached.

He is reticent about speaking about the M&V culture but comments that M&V is not one company and over time he has been exposed to two or three sections. But he thinks the M&V culture in Dublin is a reflection of the Divisional CEO's attributes, that the leadership team has not yet '*put its stamp on the business*'. Maurice describes the CEO as a '*very very nice man, but he has a particular style and so the business is in the image of the leader. It's not a collegial image, it's an individual image*'.

DOCUMENT 1:

Executive Coaching: A Research Proposal

1. Overview

The concept of executive coaching is well established in the literature on learning oriented organisations. Coaching encourages self-directed learning and double-loop learning. The ability to coach effectively is linked to leadership skills and emotional intelligence. Although many benefits fall out of the coaching process, implementing a coaching programme within an organisation can be problematical. Negative pre-conceptions about coaching, rigid organisational structures, command and control style management, and managers' mental models about their role as facilitators of learning will all influence how the coaching programme develops.

The focus of the DBA research is to uncover the facilitators of and barriers to introducing a corporate wide coaching culture within an organisation. The organisation in question is the C & C Group Plc, a multi-divisional company that operates in the alcohol, soft drinks and snack sector. C & C Group has implemented an Executive Coaching Programme as part of a Leadership and Succession process. The intention is to introduce a corporate wide coaching culture.

Following a critical review of the literature, three strand of research will underpin this project. Initially, qualitative research based on semi-structured interview with various personnel within the C & C Group will elicit perceptions and attitudes around the coaching process. The outcomes from this research will generate hypothesis that will be tested via a quantitative survey of a representative sample of C & C Group personnel. Finally, the third piece of research will use a critical incident technique to uncover the mental models that managers have of their role as facilitators of learning.

The outcomes from this research will deepen understanding of the dynamics of the coaching process and will benefit all stakeholders – the participating organisation, the researcher, academics and industry professionals.

2. Organisational Context

C & C Group plc (formerly Cantrell and Cochrane Group) is an Irish based company established over 150 years. C & C Group floated on the Dublin and London stock exchange in May 2003. Prior to this it was part of the Allied Domecq Group and was owned by private venture partners between 1991 and 2003. The company is headquartered in Dublin and employs approximately 2,000 people. It is primarily an alcohol business with significant interests in soft drinks, snacks and water. The company manufacturers, markets and distributes branded beverages and savoury snacks. In addition to its Irish operations, it exports to over 80 overseas markets. The Group's turnover was 750 million euro in the financial year 2005.

As part of its business strategy a Group HR Director was appointed in 2001 with a remit to enhance overall business performance by bringing C & c Group's *People Plan* into line with best practice. One of the main focuses of this plan was Leadership and Succession. Potential future leaders were identified and plans were put in place to develop them. A critical part of this plan was the introduction of executive coaching for all senior managers and a desire to see a corporate-wide coaching culture prevail.

3. Topic Area

Executive coaching is a relatively new business practice that had its genesis in the 1980s. In the UK, it appears that its present growth is exponential. The 2004 UK CIPD Survey 'Coaching and Buying Coaching Services' highlights the benefits of coaching and reveals how coaching is being used. The survey found that 79% of respondents use coaching and 77% report an increase in their use of coaching. An even higher number (99%) say coaching can deliver tangible benefits.

However, the situation in Ireland would appear to be radically different. There is a dearth of information on the use of coaching in Irish companies and what little research there is suggests that the process is not much valued. Heraty and Morley (2000:28) in their article on *Human resource development in Ireland: organizational level evidence* found that "The least

popular HRD delivery mechanisms among respondents include mentoring and coaching". They suggest that this may be due to the large commitment of time and resources required for coaching and mentoring.

Although much has been written about the benefits of coaching, many writers acknowledge that some ambiguity (and possibly antipathy) exists about the role of coaching in organisations. Whitmore (2002:2) suggests that over-eagerness to introduce coaching has 'resulted in hastily and inadequately trained managers, or so called coaches, failing to meet the expectations of those they are coaching' and failing to achieve the intended results. Gallwey (2002:202) say that many corporations try to "roll out" courses on executive coaching, 'only to find that it took a great deal of effort, time, and money to train coaches, and that there was relatively little responsiveness on the part of those being coached'. The notion that some people are reluctant to be coached, that others perceive that coaching is for failures and that confusion between the roles of coaching and management can lead to management paralysis are issues raised by Downey (2003). Peltier (2001) also suggests that coaching may be perceived to have an element of counselling to it and that this aspect does not appeal to executives because counselling is associated with weakness.

Research also indicates that structural aspects of an organisation and the prevailing management style within organisations influence how individuals feel about organisational change initiatives. Other writers suggest that managerial beliefs are key influencers in determining responses to organisational change and that bounded rationality, theories in use and naive theories are salient to determining responses to organisational initiatives.

C & C Group has invested considerable resources to implement a coaching style culture in the organisation. This research should provide the Human Resource Department with the specific knowledge it needs to manage the coaching initiative successfully. It aims to identify which facilitators and inhibitors are strategic to success or failure thus enabling management to take informed decision on variables which need to be encouraged and others which need to be changed or eliminated.

4. Research Objectives and Research Questions

Primary Objective

This project seeks to establish both the nature and strength of the variables that influence employee response to the coaching process. Its primary objective is the gain an understanding of the barriers to and facilitators of executive coaching within the C & C Group.

Specific Research Questions include:

- How is coaching perceived across the organisation?
  - What aspects of coaching are perceived positively, what aspects are perceived negatively?
  - What beliefs and assumptions underpin these perceptions?
  - What cues do people use to come to these judgements?

- What are the organisational attributes that shape employees' responses to coaching?
  - What cues do people use to define these organisational attributes?

- What effect has coach training had on the management style of executives?
  - What has been the nature of the learning outcomes from the coaching process?
  - What are the beliefs of managers that influence their behaviour when they see themselves as facilitating learning?

- What does senior management need to do to facilitate a company-wide coaching culture?

5.   Literature Review

Introduction

Executive coaching is a relatively new business practice that had its genesis in the 1980s. Because it was an emerging discipline, practitioners drew on existing theory in associated disciplines such as sports coaching theory, psychology, organisational development, learning theory, and management and leadership writings. Each of these disciplines is underpinned by extensive theories and each has contributed nuggets of knowledge and know-how to the coaching process.

Parsloe and Wray (2000:1) describe how writings on coaching and mentoring have grown since the 1990s to the extent that in 2000 a small transit van would be needed 'to carry all the books, journal articles, news stories and Internet references'. Thus coaching theory has come of age and is now a net contributor to management literature.

Types of coaching

While personal coaching, career coaching, spiritual coaching, new leader coaching, and many others have all become popular within the last 20 years or so (Stern 2004:157) this literature review is concerned only with Executive Coaching (EC). Tobias (1996) distinguishes between consulting and coaching: when consulting the focus tends to be on the entire organisation, when coaching the focus is more on a single individual. Diedrich (1996:62) argues that the executive coaching process should be viewed as a 'value-added' activity that provides practical and tangible benefits for the client organisation.

Definitions of coaching

Definitions of coaching vary from wordy and detailed:

> Executive coaching is an experiential, individualized, leadership development process that builds a leader's capability to achieve short and long-term organizational goals. It is conducted through one-on-one interactions, driven by data from multiple perspectives, and based on mutual trust and respect. The organization, an executive, and the executive coach work in partnership to achieve maximum learning and impact (Executive Coaching Forum Handbook, 2004:19)

to short and succinct:

'Coaching is unlocking a person's potential to maximize their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them'

(Whitmore, 2002:8)

Factors affecting success

Potentially, many factors appear to affect the success or failure of the coaching process. Stern (2004:161) suggests that, in addition to the qualities of the coach, other factors such as the readiness of the executive, support from senior management, from the organisation, and from the Human Resource function all impact on the coaching situation. Bluckert (2005) presents five critical factors that underpin successful coaching:

1. Sound coaching principles
2. The design and delivery of a good coaching process
3. The coach's competence, presence and professionalism
4. The coaching relationship
5. Client factors/coachability

Coaching and the Learning-Oriented Organisation

The ideas surrounding Adult Learning Theory have now been extended to organisations and much is written on 'Organisational Learning' and the 'Learning Organisation'. One of the key characteristics of a 'learning organisation' is its ability to survive in a turbulent environment, to be pro-active about change, and to learn on a strategic level via single-loop, double-loop and deutero-learning (Tjepkema, et al, 2002:10). In the context of coaching, Zeus & Skiffington (2000:188) advocate the use of double-loop learning to 'reshape and restructure a coachee's underlying beliefs so that they are capable of doing things differently'. Triple-loop learning encourages personal transformation or taking a different view of oneself.

Tjepkema et al. (2002:12) also argue that becoming a learning oriented organisation requires changes in organisational structures (e.g. process-oriented structure instead of functional), changes in culture (e.g. moving towards a learning culture) and changes in management styles (e.g. from hierarchical styles towards a coaching style).

Pearn et al (1994:187) say that the learning organization is likely to display certain features that include 'establishing a climate in which learning in general and from each other is supported and actively encouraged'. Senge (1990:8) makes the point that in learning organisations 'people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire' and 'people are continually learning how to learn together'.

Drawing on case studies of UK companies designated as learning-oriented organisations, Sambrook & Stewart (2000) identify learning inhibitors and facilitators as two-sides of the same coin, depending on individual perception. In addition to organisational culture, they identify senior management commitment and managers' skills and employees' positive or negative attitudes towards learning as factors that influence learning. Antonacopoulou (1999:217) raises the link between the learning organisation and individuals learning within organisations. She suggests that the interactions of personal and organizational factors create conditions that affect individuals' receptivity to learning.

Parsloe and Wray (2000:17) postulate that the 'Learning Organisation' is now the blueprint for how all organisations will need to be in the 21st century' and that coaching and mentoring will be an essential part of this blueprint.

Managers' Beliefs

Ellinger and Bostrom (2002) define beliefs as closely held assumptions or generalizations about the world that guide reasoning and action. Senge (1990) refers to beliefs as mental models or world views that influence how we see the world and how we act. He argues that within organisations often the best ideas never get put into practice because they conflict with deeply ingrained ways of thinking and action. As he puts it: 'The inertia of deeply entrenched mental models can overwhelm even the best systemic insights'(1990:177). Senge advocates 'surfacing, testing and improving our internal pictures of how the world works (1990:175) and claims that it is not so much the gap between espoused theories and theories in use that creates a problem, but the fact that the gap is unacknowledged. The danger lies in believing that 'we've learned something just because we've got the new language or concepts to use, even though our behaviour is completely unchanged' (Ibid:202).

Ellinger & Bostrom (2002) make the point that few empirical contributions have explicitly examined the roles and behaviours of leaders and managers in affecting learning within the

context of learning organizations. They also argue that moving from traditional management control mental models to a more learning centred model involves a radical shift in thinking style.

Management Style

Whitmore (2002:5) believes that there is a need for a fundamental transformation of management style and culture and that only when coaching principles govern or underlie all management behaviour and interactions, will the force of people's performance potential be realised.

Perne et al (1994:187) contend that a 'command-and-control style of management' inhibits learning and that developing coaching and facilitating skills in managers leads to a more open and consultation style of management and is a key ingredient in empowerment. They also advocate coaching as a support mechanism for continuous learning. In a study into the contextual factors shaping informal workplace learning, Ellinger (2004:87) found that 'an overwhelming influence on informal learning seems to be contingent upon learning-committed leadership/management'. Inter-alia this commitment manifested itself in managers/leaders who serve as coaches and mentors, who give positive feedback and recognition and who encourage risk-taking.

Emotional Intelligence

The issue of style is closely related to emotional intelligence and leadership ability. Hargie, Dickson & Tourish (2004:22) describe emotional intelligence well:

> Emotional intelligence includes the ability to persuade and motivate others, to empathise and build relationships, to handle one's own and other people's emotions, to give open and honest feedback sensitively, to form alliances, to monitor one's own behaviour, and to read organizational politics. It refers to the core skills of social awareness and communication.

Danial Goleman (1998, 2002) has written extensively in the area of emotional intelligence and leadership. His position is that while IQ and technical skills are important, 'emotional intelligence is the sine qua non of leadership'. A study on derailed executives shows rigidity and poor relationships as the primary cause of failure (Peltier 2001).

Benson (1998:89) describes ten traits of dynamic leaders as self-knowledge, open to feedback, eager to learn and improve, curious, risk takers, learn from adversity, can balance tradition and change, has an open style, works well with systems, and serves as models and mentors. Many of these traits echo the competences of emotional intelligence. Downey (2003:112) is more circumspect about the nature of good leadership, arguing that effective leadership is dependent on the personality of the leader and the followers, the culture of the organisation and the nature of the business. Thus it is important for a coach to understand the particular leadership needs that define the role of an executive client and to appreciate what style of leadership will be most effective in that organisation's context (Saporito (1996:97). In the modern organisation, leadership expectation is no longer confined to senior executives, but is now part of the line manager's role (Peltier 2001, Downey, 2003). However, in some organisations where there has been an initiative to develop a coaching culture, line-managers have seemingly lost the right to manage; they can only coach, often resulting in a loss of appropriate control and endless conversations on issues that are not negotiable (Downey, 2003).

Coachability

Levels of motivation, aspiration, openness, urgency and many other factors affect how individuals respond to coaching. In an article that examined the perceived barriers and facilitators to transfer of learning within organisations, Belling, James and Ladkin (2004:239) found that the top three barriers were financial short-termism, day-to-day pressures of work and lack of time for planning; the top three facilitators were an individual's own determination, awareness of personal strengths and weaknesses and recognising the benefits of applying their learning.

Conclusion

The foregoing brief literature review highlights the multifaceted nature of the factors that may impact on executive coaching. A more detailed, critical review of the literature, will deepen the researcher's understanding of the field and set the scene for research into the barriers to and facilitators of coaching within the C & C Group.

6.   Methodology

The overall approach

The chosen approach for this DBA research project is a single case study, sometimes referred to as a 'revelatory' case because it focuses on one organisation. Although the research will be concerned with barriers to and facilitators of coaching within the organisation, the unit of analysis is at the individual level and seeks to explore what individuals within the organisation perceive as barriers and facilitators of a coaching culture.

Criteria for evaluating research

Bryman and Bell (2003) suggest that reliability, replication, and validity are the most prominent criteria for the evaluation of business and management research. However, they also cite Lincoln and Guba (1985) as proposing that alternative terms and ways of assessing qualitative research are required. According to Lincoln and Guba, trustworthiness is an overarching criterion by which to judge a qualitative study.   It addresses the following issues:

> *Credibility* – how believable for the findings?
> *Transferability* – do the findings apply to other contexts? *Dependability* –
> are the findings likely to apply at other times? *Confirmability* – has the
> investigator allowed his or her values to intrude to a high degree?
> Bryman and Bell (2003:35)

The criterion of relevance is also significant. Relevance refers to the importance of a topic and the contribution it makes to the literature of its field (Hammersley, 1992a cited in Bryman & Bell, ibid.)

Ecological validity is concerned with the question of whether social scientific findings are applicable to people's everyday, natural social settings. Business research is sometimes criticised on the basis that while findings maybe be valid at one level, they have 'little to do with what happens in people's every day lives' (Bryman & Bell, 2003:34). The fact that structured interviews and questionnaires may affect ecological validity can be a matter of concern, although less directive interviews traditionally associated with qualitative research pass the test.

The chosen research questions also need to be clear and specific and relate to each other so as to form a coherent set of issues (Bryan & Bell 2003:37).

Each of these criteria will be borne in mind as the methodology is refined and implemented.

Case Studies

While case studies tend to be developed via qualitative research, in many instances both quantitative and qualitative research can be successfully combined. Writing in the context of case study research, Bryman & Bell argue that whether case study research is inductive or deductive tends to be affected by whether a quantitative or a qualitative research strategy is employed.

> 'When the predominant research strategy is qualitative, a case study tends to take an inductive approach to the relationship between theory and research; if a predominantly quantitative strategy is taken, it tends to be deductive.   (Bryman & Bell, 2003:54)

Because both an inductive and deductive approach will underpin the research, the best of both world should apply as each will complement the other.

In researching this case a critical concern will be to generate theoretical arguments that are incisive and based on sound data (Fisher, 2004:76).

Interpretivist research

Interpretative research has been classified as Gnostic by Fisher (2004:18) because it rejects orthodox or standard interpretations of topics and emphasises 'plurality, relativism and complexity'. Although the case research methodology employs three different facets, i.e. qualitative, quantitative and critical incident technique research, it could be argued that it is firmly in the interpretivist mode in that one of the key reasons for the research is to discover the clues and process by which people decide on the reality of the coaching situation. The research is driven by an interest in the particularities of the situation with C & C Group (Ibid). Kramer (1996:238) argues the case for more "naïve theories" that are based on mental account of people studied. He describes "naïve theories" as those theories that "individuals, conceptualised as lay epistemologists, carry around inside their heads…As such naïve

theories presumably play a central role in their attempts to retrospectively make sense of, and learn from their experiences (Kramer, 1996:238)

Triangulation

Triangulation can operate within and across research strategies (Bryman & Bell, 2003:291). Traditionally associated with quantitative research, it is now applied to qualitative research and 'increasingly is being used to refer to a process of cross-checking findings deriving from both quantitative and qualitative research (Deacon Bryman and Fenton, 1998 quoted in Bryman & Bell, 2003:291). In this case study it is intended that triangulation will provide a checking mechanism across the three research projects. The research project will start with the qualitative interviews that generate hypotheses about why people have a particular view of coaching within the organisation. In this sense the interpretivist research is a 'ground-clearing operation that precedes a piece of realist research' (Fisher, 2003:50). Data from the qualitative interviews will be formulated into a survey to validate and generalise the findings. The third piece of research, using the critical incident technique, will revert to the interpretivist mode. This technique will allow people to tell their stories and give access to how individuals make sense of the coaching process. This will further validate the findings and help to establish ecological validity.

7.   Proposals for Documents 2, 3, 4, 5 & 6.

Document 2

Document 2 will be a critical review of the literature on facilitators and inhibitors of organisational learning in general and executive coaching in particular. This review will focus on integrating related strands of literature, e.g. the characteristics of learning-oriented organisations, managerial beliefs and their influence on attitudes and actions and the role of executive coaching in the learning organisation.

Document 3:

Objective: To explore various perspectives on how members of the organisation view the coaching process in terms of barriers and facilitators. These interviews are likely to elicit subjective views at variance with each other.

Method: A series of 9 in-depth exploratory interviews will be conducted with

        (a) Senior HR Managers within the organisations

        (b) Senior executives who have been chosen for coaching

        (c) Senior executives who have not yet experienced coaching

        (d) External consultants to the coaching process

- Conversations with senior HR Managers will yield management rationalisation for introducing coaching and give an overview of the policies and procedures used to support the process. These interviews will also glean an understanding of management's appreciation of the potential barriers to introducing coaching and their experiences to date.

- Interviews with senior executives who have been chosen for coaching will seek to elicit experiential facilitators and barriers around the coaching process. These executives will have personal experience of attending a coaching programme, of being coached and of coaching in the workplace.

- Interviews with senior executives who have not yet experienced coaching will seek to elicit attitudes towards and preconceptions about coaching that may positively or negatively impact on the coaching process.

- The interviews with the external consultant will provide background information on the coaching programme and on the skill sets intended coaches should have. Opinion will be sought on barriers and facilitators to the coaching process in general and in particular to C & C Group plc.

With the permission of the respondents, the interviews will be taped, transcribed and analysed. The barriers and facilitators will be categorised and compared to those suggested in the literature review. Tentative conclusion may be drawn about the prospects for organizational wide coaching in the C & C Group.

Following these interviews, it should be possible to generate a number of organisation specific hypothesis that can be tested by surveying a wider audience.

Document 4

Using the information derived from the exploratory interviews and from the critical literature review, a questionnaire will be constructed and issued to all senior executives in the C & C Group and to a representative sample of employees across divisions. The purpose of the questionnaire will be to test a number of hypothesis generated from the interviews and to bring the concepts explored in the interviews to a wider organisational audience. The thrust of the survey will be to identify the extent to which there is consensus on the barriers and facilitators to coaching within the organisation.

The number employed in the organisation is 2000. Settling for a margin of error of +/-5 per cent, the number of questionnaires returned should be 322 (Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2002:156) in Fisher (2004:160). This is an aspect of the research that will be examined in detail when access to the breakdown of senior executives, line managers and employees is available.

The questionnaire responses will be analysed using SPSS. The analysis will focus on frequency breakdowns for the variable as the objective is to find out which facilitators and which barriers score highest and lowest. Then results from each category of respondents will be compared to the overall frequency breakdown and compared and contrasted with each other. This will improve the scope of the research and create contrast. The resulting data will be interpreted to gauge what C & C Group personnel perceive as the most significant facilitators of and barriers to coaching.

Document 5

Document 5 will explore the extent to which managerial beliefs act as facilitators or inhibitors of the coaching process. A Critical Incident Technique approach will be used to explore how managers' views of the coaching process act as inhibitors or facilitators to coaching, e.g. managers will be asked to relate both positive and negative incidents associated with coaching. Some of the outcomes from this research might reflect Simon's theory of bounded rationality where people focus on the few single cues instead of many

complex ones (Simon 1955), on Arygis & Schon (1987) Espoused theories verses theories in use, on Ellinger and Bostrom's (2002) theory of how managers' beliefs affect their roles as facilitators of learning, and Kramer's (1996) contention about naive theories.

Document 6

Document 6 will be compiled on an ongoing basis and will reflect the nature of the experiential learning and the extent of personal growth fostered through the DBA programme.

8. Ethical Issues

'Ethics in business research refers to a code of conduct or expected societal norm of behaviour while conducting research' (Sekaran, 2003:17). Most discussions about research ethics concern the use of qualitative methods. This comes about because the researcher's presence is more intrusive in the process of qualitative research and because the use of qualitative research methods may put the researcher in a considerably more powerful position in relation to individuals (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Lowe (1991:64). Researchers must take ethical issues into consideration from the start of an investigation through to the final report (Kvale, 1996).

The nature of the DBA research project is mainly qualitative, thus all of the ethical issues discussed here are pertinent. Informed consent, confidentiality and consequences are ethical issues that may arise at different stages of an interview project (Easterby-Smith et al, 1991, Kvale, 1996, Saunder & Thornhill, 2003).

Informed consent involves the interview participants being informed of the nature and purpose of the interview. Kvale (1996) suggests that with semi-structured interviews informed consent can be problematical in that by their nature these interviews rely on the possibility of following up unanticipated leads from the subjects and of posing questions not prepared in advance. Thus fully informed consent is difficult to achieve. Another issue in relation to interviews is the amount of control vested in the researcher; control about what information is gathered, how it is recorded and how it is interpreted . Ethical issues also

involve the question of whether the subjects should have a say in how their statements are interpreted (Kvale, 1996).

Confidentiality is critical and must be assured. This involves making sure that anonymity is maintained and that private data identifying the subjects will not be reported. It may be necessary to change names and identifying features when reporting interviews, and also when reporting on organisations (Sekaran, 2003:136).

Fisher (1989)) contends that because studying managerial beliefs is so personal, the potential to be intrusive is exacerbated. Obviously this is an aspect to which the researcher must pay due cognisance.

Consequence is closely linked to confidentiality and is concerned that participants do not suffer adverse consequences as a result of the research. Ideally there should be reciprocity in what subjects give and what they receive from participation in a study. Again, the personal closeness of the interview situation makes it imperative that the interviewer be sensitive to the needs of the interviewee regarding how far to go in questioning. Saunder et al (2003:137) urges interviewers to 'avoid overzealous questioning and pressing participants for a response' as such tactics may make the interview stressful for the participant.

Finally and crucially, the researcher must remain objective during the course of the research as lack of objectivity will reflect on the validity and reliability of the research. The key here is to collect data accurately and fully and avoid subjective selectivity in what you record (Saunder et al p.135). This may be easier said than done in that all of come to research with preconceptions or mental models that affect what we see and affect what we do. As Senge (1990:175) puts it, the tendency to observe selectively is 'no less true for supposedly "objective" observers such as scientists than for people in general'. However, being conscious of this allows one to examine mental models in pursuit of objectivity and thus to improve the process.

9.   Research Outcomes

The outcomes from this research should advantage all stakeholders. In the first instance, the C & C Group as the sponsoring company has a genuine interest in understanding how the

coaching process is perceived within the organisation and senior management appear eager to smooth the way towards a coaching culture.

Secondly, in addition to gaining a highly regarded professional qualification, the researcher expects to gain insights into a subject that is of personal interest. She also expects to enhance and hone research skills across both qualitative and quantitative research and to benefit intellectually from a supervised period of rigorous study and research. The depth of learning should be very satisfying.

Thirdly, because of the dearth of research into coaching in general and into coaching in Ireland in particular, the findings from the research should be of interest to both academic researchers and professional practitioners.

10.   Reflective Section

What I have learned from the process so far.

A late enrolment meant that I missed the initial DBA two-day seminar and so missed out on meeting the entire cohort of DBA students. Because my pattern was out of sync with the group, I didn't get to meet the study group set until the January seminar.

The two-day seminar in January was good. I enjoyed meeting all the different personalities (and nationalities). I really liked the new ideas around interpretation and found most of the sessions stimulating, insightful and thought-provoking. I also took the opportunity to talk to fellow students about the nature of their projects. Many of them had submitted a draft for comment so I heard about the feedback they were getting from their supervisors. This gave me a feel for supervisor expectations.

Although I knew the broad area of my topic, I was trying to get a fix on what aspect of the topic would be most doable and would yield best results. There is very little empirical research in the area of coaching so in a sense I was starting with a clean slate. Initially my thoughts were to assess the outcomes of coaching, but the variables are difficult, if not impossible, to control or to quantify. I had lots of conversations with lots of people (I'm

being avoided in the corridors), all the time looking for an angle that appealed. Two incidents moved me in the direction of facilitators and barriers. One HR person told me that his company's investment in coaching was lagging because it was impossible to gnerate a demand for coaching, and a colleague said her husband wouldn't consider being coached – he would see this as being on the 'fluffy end' of the spectrum.

Parallel with seeking an appropriate angle for research, I was constantly networking to find a company involved in coaching and open to allowing me access for research. Just shortly before the research proposal was due for submission, I met the HR Director of C & C Group Plc. and following a conversation, he agreed to allow me access. This was a long road, but I was very satisfied that I eventually succeeded in finding a company with the ideal profile for my research topic.

Reading into the area of facilitators and barriers brought me into the nature of learning organisations and also into the area of managerial beliefs and the work of Argyris and Ellinger. I found these writers and their subject areas really interesting and decided to pursue managerial beliefs via a critical incident technique in the final piece of DBA research. If I can do this well, this will be serious double-loop learning for me.

Actually writing the research proposal was challenging –I had never written a research proposal and so it was informative to become acquainted with the format and to struggle with the content.

Except for one very low point, the overall experience has been positive. Finishing the Research Proposal is very satisfying and I'm looking forward to coming to terms with a critical literature review.

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Document 2:

Critical Literature Review

1.0   Introduction

Executive coaching is a relatively new business practice that had its genesis in the 1980s, became popular in the 1990s and is presently enjoying an explosion in growth across 3 continents (Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD), 2004; Grant and Jackon, 2005; International Coach Federation (ICF), 2006). The 2004 UK CIPD Survey '*Coaching and Buying Coaching Services*' highlights the benefits of business coaching and reveals how coaching is being used. The survey found that 79% of respondents use coaching and 77% report an increase in their use of coaching. An even higher number (99%) say coaching can deliver tangible benefits. However, the situation is somewhat different in Ireland where executive coaching lags behind other executive development interventions (Heraty and Morley, 2000).

Executive coaching focuses on improving the performance of senior executive in organisations (Kilburg, 2004:203). It is a complex concept that means somewhat different things to different people (Stern, 2004). This one-on-one relationship between a coach external to the organisation and the executive is described as a customised process that is 'focused and relevant to the concerns of the executive and the organisation' (Tobias, 1996:87). Although much has been written about the benefits of executive coaching (Kilburg, 1996, 2004; Judge and Cowell, 1997; Orenstein, 2002; Kets de Vries, 2005) the concept is not un-problematical (Berglas, 2002; Sherman and Freas, 2004). Many writers acknowledge that some ambiguity (and possibly antipathy) exists about the role of coaching in organisations (Peltier, 2001; Whitmore; 2002, Gallwey, 2002). Sherman and Freas, (2004:82-83) liken executive coaching to the 'Wild West of yesteryear: the frontier is chaotic, largely unexplored, and fraught with risk, yet immensely promising'.

There is wide agreement that executive coaching is chiefly concerned with developing self-awareness, and enhancing learning ability with a view to performance improvement (Kilburg, 1996; Joo, 2005). Joo (2005:468) proposes that despite different interpretations the 'common purpose of executive coaching could be reduced to behavioural change, self-awareness, learning, and ultimately career success and organizational performance.' Thus executive coaching theory and practice has been informed by a variety of discipline perspectives: by sports coaching theory, by different psychological theories, by adult learning theory, by

systems theory and by new paradigm management theories such as emotional intelligence (Senge, 1990; Kolb, 1996; Peltier, 2001; Whitmore, 2002; Goleman, et al., 2002).

Executive coaching is a performance driven intervention designed to ultimately improve organisational performance. The challenges facing executives are formidable (Levinson, 1996; Kets de Vries, 1989; Orenstein, 2005). *Inter alia*, the turbulent state of many industries and the changing nature of valued competencies in today's organisations may require executives to seek or accept help (sometimes reluctantly) from executive coaches. The personal characteristics of individual executives are salient in the coaching process (Hall et al., 1999; Stevens, 2005). Motivation and receptivity to feedback are traits that facilitate coaching (Knudson, 2002:193l Peterson, 2005). Not all executives who engage in executive coaching are enthusiastic participants (Quick and Macik-Frey, 2004; Stevens, 2005), or are ready to benefit developmentally from the coaching experience (Laske, 1999). However, when conditions are right, research studies show that the potential outcomes of executive coaching are varied, extensive and mainly positive. They include increased self-awareness, improved self-efficacy, enhanced interpersonal skills, changes in behaviour and improved performance (Laske, 1999; Gegner, 2001; Kampa-Kokesch, 2001; Paige, 2002).

The qualities of the coach are also considered critical to the process, as is the relationship that develops between the executive and the coach (Hedman, 2001). In addition to coaching skills, coaches need to have business acumen and psychological insight (Levinson, 1996; Wasylshyn, 2003, Kets de Vries, 2005). Facets of the coaching process influence coaching outcomes (Bluckert, 2006) as does support from Human Resource Departments and from direct superiors (Sherman and Freas, 2004).

The volume of published articles on executive coaching is considerable. However, despite its general growth and popularity, there is a paucity of rigorous empirical research underpinning the practice of executive coaching (Kilburg, 1996, 2004; Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson, 2001; Feldman and Lankau, 2005:830; Joo, 2005).

1.1   Research Focus

Background to the research: For some time I have been looking for a topic that would engage my interest over the span of a three year DBA programme. As an academic lecturing

in the area of interpersonal skills and management development, my interest in executive coaching springs from a general interest in coaching as a skill set for managers. As part of my own development, I recently had the opportunity to enrol on a one-year post-graduate course on 'Executive Coaching and Mentoring'. This course involved the participants in coaching and being coached, thus giving some insight into what the process felt like. This very worthwhile course whetted my appetite to understand the world of executive coaching more fully and influenced my decision to settle on executive coaching as the topic area for the DBA.

I needed then to find a company engaging in executive coaching and willing to allow access to a researcher. This proved quite difficult; it seemed as though the practice of executive coaching was too fragile to allow inspection. Through the goodwill of the team leading the Executive Coaching and Mentoring Course, I was put in touch with a course participant from the previous student cohort. This man was HR Director for The C & C Group plc, an Irish company with international interests. The company has instigated an executive development programme to ensure succession and retention of talented executives. Participants in the executive development programme can choose to avail of the services of a coach external to the organisation. This coaching programme is running for two years and is now being supplemented by workshops on emotional intelligence.

The focus of my research interest has shifted somewhat since the research proposal. Initially I was interested to uncover the barriers and facilitators of executive coaching from the executive's perspective. However, on foot of insights from the critical literature review, now my research is concerned with the impact that executive coaching has on executives, what they perceive as the outcomes of coaching and the antecedents of successful outcomes.

Much of the published material on executive coaching takes a practitioner perspective and very little quality research has been conducted on how executives experience coaching (Kilburg, 2004; Lowman, 2005; Stevens, 2005). Furthermore, the extant research appears to emanate mainly from the United States of America and from Australia. This DBA project intends to provide initial insights into how Irish executives experience the coaching process, what outcomes they associate with coaching and what antecedents they perceive help or hinder the coaching process. While some research in the UK validates business coaching (Jarvis, 2004), empirical research into executive coaching is at an embryonic stage in Ireland.

Thus this research will add to the body of knowledge on executive coaching in general and will mark a first attempt at gauging the perceptions of Irish executives to an executive coaching process. For the C & C Group plc, already engaged in the coaching process and partners in this research, the research findings will deepen the HR Director's understanding of the executive coaching intervention; for other companies contemplating executive coaching as an executive development intervention, the research results may prove insightful.

The research seeks to uncover executives' perceptions in three key areas:

1. How do executives interpret the experience of executive coaching?
2. What outcomes do executives associate with coaching?
3. What antecedents are perceived to be most significant in influencing coaching outcomes?

The following critical literature review provides a basis for the research study. The review is structured as follows:

Section 2 of this paper reviews the history of Executive Coaching and presents the arguments that account for its current popularity.

Section 3 gives an insight into the theoretical foundations underpinning executive coaching.

Section 4 examines the focus of the extant literature, identifies the emerging themes and discusses key empirical research studies.

Section 5 considers the extent to which executive coaching can forge a clear conceptual identity and the ways in which it resembles other helpful executive development interventions.

Section 6 establishes the framework for the conceptual model presented in Section 6.

Thus section 6 looks in some detail at what academics and practitioners agree are the variables most likely to impact on executive coaching: qualities of the coach, coachability of the client, the coach-client relationship, the coaching process itself, and the organisational climate within which coaching takes place. It also considers the outcomes that emanate from effective executive coaching.

Section 7 develops a conceptual framework that falls out of the preceding literature review, outlines research propositions and specific research questions, and briefly considers a methodology to take the research study forward.

Section 8 discusses the learning that fell out of the critical literature review.

2.0   The History of Executive Coaching

Because executive coaching has only recently received attention in the literature, its history is difficult to track (Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson, 2001:207; Sherman and Freas, 2004:84). Although writers on executive coaching tend to refer only briefly to its origins, they mainly agree that the genesis of executive coaching lay in the mid-to-late 1980s and that since this time it has become more and more popular to hire coaches for promising executives (Tobias, 1996; Judge and Cowell, 1997; Berglas 2002:87; Corporate Therapy, 2003). Berglas (2002) estimates that the number of professional coaches in the USA will grow from 10,000 to 50,000 by 2007 and the ICF (2006) refer to its increase in membership of 25% as 'hyper-growth'. The CIPD, the largest professional body in the management and development of people in the United Kingdom, expect strong growth to emerge over the next 5 years in the United Kingdom (Jarvis, 2004).

However, the situation in Ireland would appear to be different. Anecdotal information on the use of executive coaching in Irish companies indicates that interest in this intervention is growing. However, what little research there is suggests that the process is not much valued. Heraty and Morley's (2000:28) article on *Human resource development in Ireland: organizational level evidence* found that: "The least popular HRD delivery mechanisms among respondents include mentoring and coaching". They suggest that this may be due to the large commitment of time and resources required for coaching and mentoring.

2.1   Early Coaching Literature

Evered and Selman (1989) provide a useful review of the development of early management coaching literature. Efforts to explore coaching as a management function began in the late 1950s with the writings of Mace and Mahler (1958) and Mace (1959). This early coaching literature focused on the value of equipping supervisors with coaching skills to develop the work skills of subordinates 'through a master-apprenticeship relationship'. Indeed, for much of the period 1937-1992 the focus of published papers is on supervisory coaching as a means of improving performance (Grant, 2005). The early approach to coaching is described as hierarchical and embedded in the traditional management control paradigm (Ellinger and Bostrom, 1999; Evered and Selman, 1989; Feldman and Lankau, 2005).

In the early days, executive coaching wasn't perceived to have *gravitas*, but its image improved over time. Smith and Sample (1993:126) describe how in the early 1980s the title of executive coach was associated with people who 'helped the boss pick a hairstyle or deliver a speech without notes…' but that, by the 1990s, the image of the coach had progressed to that of an outside counsellor employed to 'improve an executive's managerial skills and straighten out his personality disorder, not his wardrobe'. Taking a more serious stance, Evered and Selman (1989:16) describe how the late 1980s saw the discussion centring on the use of a consultant as managerial coach and on the creation of an organisational climate for coaching. They hailed this as a new management paradigm. The early 1980s also saw the formal introduction of what might now qualify as 'executive coaching'. *Personnel Decisions International* (PDI) based in the USA is identified as the first management-consulting firm to offer a structured and personally tailored coaching program for executives (Peterson 1996:78).

Popper and Lipshitz (1992), Peterson (1993) and Sperry (1993) would appear to be among the first authors to address executive coaching per se. They mark the difference between directive forms of coaching suitable for simple tasks and more challenging coaching suitable for leadership. Peterson's (1993) PhD study evaluates the effectiveness of an individualized coaching program for managers and executives. The research found that coaching is effective in enhancing on-the-job behaviour and improving effectiveness (Grant, 2005:2). Sperry's (1993) paper takes a psychological perspective as it describes the inner world and needs of executives and how psychologists and psychiatrists can respond to their need for consulting, coaching and counselling.

Grant's (2005) annotated bibliography is a useful resource for tracking the growing popularity of coaching literature. His bibliography includes workplace, executive and life coaching and he restricts his source to scholarly papers from the behavioural science literature as presented in PsychInfo and Dissertation Abstracts International (DAI). The first peer-reviewed paper on workplace coaching was published in 1937. Between 1937 and March 2005, Grant identified a total of 175 published papers, 78 of which contained empirical studies and 44 were PhDs.

The annotated bibliography clearly shows the growing interest in executive coaching. Of the 29 papers detailed in the bibliography and published between 1995 and 1999, 14 have the words 'executive' and 'coaching' in their titles (Diedrich, 1996; Foster and Lendl, 1996; Katz and Miller, 1996; Kilburg, 1996, 1997; Levinson, 1996; Peterson, 1996; Saporito, 1996; Tobias, 1996; Witherspoon and White, 1996; Olivero, Bane et al, 1997; Brotman, Liberi, et al, 1998; Hall, Otazo, et al, 1999; Laske, 1999) and a further 3 papers link coaching with leadership (Kiel, Rimmer et al., 1996; Sperry, 1997; Giglio, Diamante, et al., 1998). The *Consulting Psychology Journal*'s special issue on executive coaching in Spring 1996 (Vol. 48, No. 2) made a significant contribution to the volume of publications between 1995 and 1999.

From 2000 to March 2005, 96 papers were published, 32 of which directly address the issue of executive coaching; 12 of the 32 publications are PhDs. (A further two special issues on executive coaching by the *Consulting Psychology Journal* were published in 2001, (Vol. 53, No. 4) and 2004 (Vol. 56, No. 4) and *The Occupational Psychologist* devoted a special issues to coaching psychology (No. 49, August, 2003).

Even though the practice of executive coaching is still in its infancy, it has undergone one major transformation. Originally conceived as an intervention to save 'a derailed manager', the process is now 'both remedial for average executives and performance enhancing for high-potential managers' (Judge and Cowell, 1997:72). It could be argued that executive coaching has come a long way and is now seen as a means of 'facilitating learning and moving executives from excellent performance to peak performance' (Feldman and Lankau, 2005:830).

2.2   Rationale for Executive Coaching

Executive coaching aims to develop the potential of executives with a view to bettering business results; this dual focus is integral to executive coaching (Sherman and Freas 2004:85; Stern 2004:157). Thus a company's decision to invest in executive coaching is rarely altruistic. Feldman and Lankau (2005:830) see the emergence of executive coaching in the 1990s as a response intervention designed to change the behaviour of middle and senior level managers and mitigate the high failure rate (50%) of senior executives in American

businesses. Kilburg (1997:287) refers to this failure rate figure as 'staggeringly high' and find it an indication that organisations are 'woefully under-prepared to help managers perform well in their jobs and succeed in their careers'.

Although Judge and Cowell (1997) say that executive coaching has moved beyond being purely a remedial intervention for derailed executives, Giglio, Diamante and Urban (1998:93) suggest that organisations, working to a deficiency model, provide coaches for executives who are in trouble. They identify three elements common to most coaching situations: (a) the perceptions and expectations of the executive are no longer in line with that of the organisation, (b) people who interact with the executive are being damaged emotionally, (c) the executive is seen as a 'destructive force within the organisation'. They argue that coaching should not be limited to 'dysfunctional executives' – all executives should periodically be coached to help 'focus and direct their vision and plans'.

Executives work in highly pressured environments and the nature of business today, with its emphasis on change and flexibility, demands stellar characteristics from its executives. Laske (2002:570) suggests that strategic executive development is a shift from the Darwinian ideology of 'survival of the fittest' to 'development of the fittest'. Levinson (1996:116) highlights the multi-faceted challenges of the executive role. This encompasses managing the 'inevitable ambivalence of subordinates and the rivalry of peers and superiors … and the troublesome behaviour of customers, clients and their own superiors or board members'. Simultaneously they also must be able to 'maximise support' and avoid 'sacrificing authority to the need to please'. In addition to honing these Machiavellian skills, Saporito (1996:96) adds the leadership challenges of building an organisation, motivating staff, changing corporate culture and meeting the expectation of shareholders for growth and improved profitability; as he puts it: 'This is the stuff that keeps executives awake at night'.

To complicate matters further, as executives climb the corporate ladder the functional and technical skills that underpinned their ascent and encouraged their leadership styles may no longer be appropriate (Judge and Cowell, 1997:76; Goleman, 2002). Quick and Macik-Frey (2004:71) make the point that the 'complexity of emotions and emotional life' can be alien territory to executives, but that 'toxic emotions and 'emotional pain' can do substantial damage to an organization's bottom line. They also note that many executives lack introspection and that 'self-awareness born of introspection is a key element of emotional

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competence' (2004:68). Few senior executives are 'psychologically minded' and many even hold a fair amount of distrust or disdain for the 'soft' side of leadership. Thus in any stressful situation, 'most executives habitually turn to leveraging the hard side – they focus on numbers and the bottom line and, in general, rely on the formula that worked in the past' (Kiel et al, 1996: 68). Ket de Vries (1989:5) speaks of the 'psychodynamics of leadership and the vicissitudes of power'. He talks about 'loneliness of command', the tendency to lose touch with reality, and the sticky end that many top executives come to because of isolation.

Pearn et al (1994:187) contend that a 'command-and-control style of management' inhibits learning and that developing coaching and facilitating skills in managers leads to a more open and consultation style of management and is a key ingredient in empowerment. Because the focus now is on achieving *through* others, functional and technical skills need to give way to greater focus on *developing others* (Kiel et al, 1996:70). Axelrod (2005:120) talks of guiding the development of the 'hard-charging middle manager' - typically males in their mid-30s to early 40s. He describes them:

> They are long on drive and ambition and rather short on people skills such as active listening, persuasion, consensus building and conflict resolution. They tend to be results-oriented, project driven, and highly focused. They admit that they 'do not suffer fools gladly' and have difficulty tolerating divergent opinions when the solutions to problems seem so obvious. These executives are typically abrasive, and in remedial cases, abusive. They are often "all business" and don't show enough of their more human (and humorous) side.

Problems with management style may be compounded because, as many authors identify, senior executives rarely get honest feedback on how their interactions affect others; in fact, a major drawback of being in a senior position is isolation from meaningful feedback (Kiel et al., 1996; Katz and Miller, 1996; Hall et al, 1999**;** Goleman et al, 2002; Sherman and Freas, 2004). Hall et al. (1999:41) also makes the point that executives find it 'hard to be vulnerable and to just "think out loud" when others are waiting for your words of wisdom so they can react". Fast-track executives learn 'that the higher they are in the organisation, the more difficult it is to talk to others about their issues and concerns' (Kets de Vries, 2005:62). Stevens's (2005) study found that executives at the top level of organisations appreciated the objective perspective provided by an executive coach. Executives know they need to change with the times and now are acknowledge a subtler set of competencies: the communication and interpersonal skills necessary for influencing employees, adaptability to rapid change,

and respect for people of diverse backgrounds (Katz and Miller, 1996; Sherman and Freas, 2004). Joo: (2005: 463) puts forward lack of transfer in learning and lack of sustained behavioural change as pointing the need for more individualized, more engaged, more context-specific learning.

2.3   Executive coaching programmes

In addition to the somewhat remedial views expressed above, executive coaching is now seen as a strategic developmental tool for succession planning and talent retention (Kilburg, 2000). Executive coaching is often used to complement executive development programmes (Judge and Cowell, 1997:71) and Olivero et al's (1997) study tentatively supports coaching as a worthwhile support to executive development programmes.   While not all candidates assigned to executive development programmes truly want to be there (Stevens, 2005), executive development programmes that emphasis coaching appear to get general approval. Sherman and Freas (2004:85-89) suggest that a systematic coaching programme aimed at developing the entire rank of senior executive allows an organisation 'to deepen relationships with its most important employees while increasing their effectiveness'. They offer advice on how to maximise success and insist that the organisation must be clear about its coaching programme objectives and must design systems to support the programme.   Coaching 'to advance strategic aims or embed values' must be integrated with other initiatives such as 'compensation, evaluation, and job assignment'.   When coaching is designed to further the organisation's perspectives, then busy executives need 'compelling business reasons' to engage whole-heartedly in the coaching programme. Sherman and Freas insist that coaching programmes should 'start with the CEO and top management and then spread across organisational boundaries'.   They hold that the 'most valuable coaching fosters cultural change for the benefit of the entire organization'.

Kiel et al (1996:71) claim that an externally led development programme has many benefits, including objectivity and the ability to provide a safe environment in which executives can explore needs and get impartial help and direction. They make the point that when coaches come from outside the organisation, senior executives may not feel the same level of pressure to present as always confident and competent and may not feel that displaying a weakness makes them vulnerable to the personal agendas of colleagues. Hall et al's (1999:40) study

found that external coaches are most useful when confidentiality and anonymity are required, or when someone is needed to 'speak the unspeakable'.

Kets de Vries (2005:61) advocates leadership group coaching to create high-performance teams. He argues that this approach is: 'an antidote to organizational silo formation, helps put into place boundaryless organizations, and makes for true knowledge management'.

As the foregoing suggests, both the reasons for introducing executive coaching and forms of executive coaching can differ. However, its exponential growth suggests that, from a HR perspective, coaching has rapidly become a significant part of many organizations' learning and development strategy.

3.0   Theories underpinning executive coaching

As an emerging practice, executive coaching practitioners draw on existing theory in associated disciplines such as sports coaching theory, psychology, organisational development, learning theory, and management and leadership writings. Each of these disciplines is underpinned by extensive theories and each has contributed nuggets of knowledge and know-how to the coaching process (Peltier, 2001; Sherman and Freas, 2004). This section of the paper briefly overview the ways in which the theories from other disciplines have contributed to executive coaching practice.

3.1   Sports coaching theory

Several authors (Downey, 2003, Peltier, 2001, Whitmore, 2002) credit athletic and performance coaching as the forerunner of executive coaching. Peltier (2001) makes the point that sports coaching has common themes that resonate with business: getting the fundamental right for the executive, using flexibility and ingenuity to treat each client as an individual, encouraging executives to play against themselves, to visualise success and to learn from defeat are approaches that have their genesis in sports. He posits the view that most successful business people are driven, as are top sports people.

While the sports coaching approach has proponents, Parsloe and Wray (2000:3) suggest that this approach is challenged by some who contend that motivation in sport often derives from 'personal competitiveness and pleasure' and that these qualities may be absent from the world of work. Thus, it is argued, a sport coaching approach may suit high achievers, but raise false expectations for others.

Gallwey's *Inner Game of Work* (2003) is seen as the most significant input to Executive Coaching from the world of sport (Downey, 2003, Peltier, 2001, Whitmore, 2002). Indeed Whitmore (2002:10) claims that most senior UK coaches have 'either graduated from or were profoundly influenced by the Gallwey school of coaching'. Gallwey's background as a renowned tennis player and coach provided the experience that allowed him to recognise that traditional approaches to learning, i.e. instruction to eliminate errors, led to deteriorated performance. He subsequently transferred the lessons learned from coaching players to the world of business and the concepts of potential and peak performance are now common

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themes in executive coaching literature (Downey, 2003; Ellinger and Bostrom, 1999; Evered and Selman, 1989, Feldman and Lankau, 2005).

3.2   Psychology and executive coaching

Perhaps the most comprehensive exposition of the influence of a psychological approach to executive coaching is to be found in Peltier's (2001) book *'The Psychology of Executive Coaching'* which reviews various psychological sub-disciplines and assesses their contribution to executive coaching theory. He posits the view that psychology's emphasis on developmental thinking provides the coach with a framework for assessing the qualities associated with a healthy executive, e.g. willingness to trust others, accurate perceptions, self-awareness and self-management, energy and focus. In the course of the book he reviews, among others, Freudian theory (Psychoanalysis), Behavioural Theory, Cognitive Behavioural Psychology, Family Therapy (linking it to general systems theory), and Humanist psychology (client centered therapy and the work of Carl Rogers).

Psychoanalysis (Freudian Theory) is concerned with creating self-awareness and personal understanding, which resonates well with the philosophy of executive coaching. The main argument in favour of psychotherapy is that because much of our behaviour is determined by our unconscious mind, we are often unaware of why we behave in particular ways. Levinson (1996:118) expresses it thus: 'The consultant should help clients recognize decisions motivated by unconscious guilt, unconscious rivalry, and other irrational behaviours that would likely invoke negative behaviour in others'.

Behavioural Learning Theory: As its name suggests, behavioural theory focuses on observable behaviour, as against internal, psychological states and the angst associated with them. The emphasis on measurement and metrics suits corporate culture and behavioural goals and objectives can be SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and within a time span), which appeals to action driven executives. Useful concepts from behavioural theory include the powerful nature of primary re-enforcers, such as smiling, thanking people and using their name. Because executives are a 'central driving force for many employees' their behaviour can act as positive or negative re-enforcers (Quick and Macik-Frey, 2004:69). Also the notion of shaping behaviour – rewarding approximations of the desired behaviour, and vicarious reinforcement – role modelling to improve performance, are behavioural

concepts easily absorbed into the coaching process. Bluckert (2005:173) makes the point that:

> The behavioural change focus to coaching is one of the key differentiators from those who come from the learning and development modality; and this is where the psychological agenda more strongly enters the frame.

Cognitive psychology: Cognitive Psychology is a complex area concerned with how the mind works. However, cognitive therapy, a more recent discipline, holds the core concept that 'people can learn to notice and change their own thoughts with powerful emotional and behavioural benefits' (Peltier 2001:82). Cognitive therapy focuses on conscious thinking, rather than unconscious. Because it is relatively simple to explain and to teach it is often the subject of what is called 'pop psychology'. The rationale is that when thinking changes, feelings and behaviour follow suit. The task for the coach is to help clients become aware of thoughts that cause negative emotions or problem behaviours and 'then substitute effective ones for the negative and irrational ones' (Peltier, 2001:85).

Person-centred approach: Carl Rogers is known as the father of the person-centred approach. The central theme to his approach requires the therapist to use active and reflective listening to achieve accurate empathic understanding and to be non-judgemental and fully accepting of the client's internal frame of reference. (Hedman, 2001). Hedman (2001) argues that a person-centred approach is the ultimate prerequisite for successful coaching. Indeed he suggests that a coach who models Rogers' approach provides an excellent role model for the client. However, Peltier (2001:117) makes the point that 'Active listening, restatement and reflection, and accurate empathy (in spite of their undeniable value) are occasionally viewed with scepticism in the corporate consulting arena'.

Consulting Psychology: It could be argued that consulting psychology's best-known contributions to organisational life are two-fold: psychometrics to provide feedback to executives and organisations and the concept of emotional intelligence as a critical determinant of leadership (Kilcaid and Gordick, 2003). The emphasis on psychometrics can clearly be seen in the coaching case studies presented in the special 'Executive Coaching' edition of the *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, Vol. 48, No. 2, Spring 1996. Most of the cases start with a description of psychological tests and 360-degree

feedback as a way of informing both the client and coach of strengths and current limitations and of the client's impact on colleagues and superiors.

Emotional intelligence, already identified as a leadership competency, (Goleman, 1995, 2002, Newman, 2005) is firmly established as part of the new management paradigm. The components of emotional intelligence are self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation (personal competencies that determine how we manage ourselves) and empathy and social skills (social competencies that determine how we handle relationships). Brotman et al. (1998) describes emotional intelligence as encompassing 'candid self-awareness, openness to learning, and competencies that foster interpersonal effectiveness'.

Systems theory: Many writers on executive coaching (Kiel et al. 1996; Kilburg, 1996; Saporito, 1996; Peltier, 2001) look favourably on a systems approach. Peltier (2001:100) argues that 'culture' can best be understood using the tools of systems thinking. Within this approach, the individual's behaviour is understood in the context of organizational dynamics, where the behaviour is a response to the demands of the system. This approach is different from traditional psychotherapy. Coaches with a systems point of view behave and think like traditional organisational development consultants and are particularly suited to help 'naïve or politically inept clients to appreciate organisation politics' (Peltier, 2001:116). On the other hand, a systems approach can leave the client feeling powerless if they decide the work system is dysfunctional and unlikely to change (Peltier, 2001:117). Tobias (1996:88) contends that coaching needs an organisational context to do justice to the process. Similarly, Orenstein (2002:355) argues that executive coaching is not just about the executive. She considers executive coaching to be a 'complex process that encompasses multidimensional interrelationships among the individual, the organisation, and the consultant'. In essence she combines a systems approach and a psychodynamic approach. Feldman and Lankau (2005:840) suggest that the systems approach is the most complex and comprehensive approach to coaching. Kilburg's (1996:138) model titled 'The foci for executive coaching' takes a systems approach (**see Figure 1**). The model has 3 foci: an executive focus, an organisational systems focus, and a mediated focus that encompasses the relationship and behavioural factors that mediate all interactions between the manager and the organisation. This model helps to illustrate the complexities that can surround executive coaching. Kilburg suggests that the executive focus should be primary for the executive coach. This focus

addresses the 'traditional issues of leadership style, personality, and character.' (Kilburg, 1997:285).

Figure 2 The Foci for Executive Coaching

System Focus
Executive Focus
Mediated Focus
Structure
Process
Content
Input
Throughput
Output
Rational Self
Conscience
Idealized Self
Instinctual Self
Relationships
Past
Present
Focal
Cognition
Emotion
Defenses
Conflict
Behavior
System
Whole Organization
Subunit
Organizational
Work Unit
Group
Individual
Knowledge
Skills
Abilities
Personality
Styles
Jobs
Roles
Tasks

Towards a conceptual understanding and definition of executive coaching (Kilburg (1996:138)

3.3 Learning Theory

Adult learning theory sees the learner as the primary role player in the process of learning, and the teacher or coach as the facilitator. It is now well accepted that adults learn best when actively engaged in the learning process, when they have time to reflect on what has been learned, draw conclusions from the learning outcomes and test out the lessons learned (Parsloe et al. 2000:25).

Executive coaching practitioners and academics frequently refer to the influence of learning theory. Diedrich (1996:61) claims to draw heavily on 'learner-centred' principles to provide a frame of reference for his executive coaching activities. Zeus & Skiffington (2000:182) say that one of the fundamental premises of coaching is that 'life is a learning opportunity' and Tobias (1996:87) claims that coaching allows for 'ongoing, continuous learning, offering support, encouragement, and feedback as new approaches are tried and new behaviours are practiced. Kolb (1997:270) suggests that the ability to adapt and master the changing demands of the job, i.e. the ability to learn, is the distinguishing characteristic of the successful executive. Laske (1999) makes the point that executive development is adult

development in the workplace and Parsloe and Wray (2000:17) postulate that the 'Learning Organisation' is now the blueprint for how all organisations will need to be in the 21st century' and that coaching and mentoring will be an essential part of this blueprint.

3.3.1 Single, double and triple-loop learning

The concept of single and double-loop learning was introduced by Arygris (1977) and subsequently developed by Arygris and Schon, (1978). Argyris defined organizational learning as a 'process of detecting and correcting error'. Single loop learning takes place within the boundaries of existing norms and minor adjustments that allow targets to be met. Argyris (1977:116) likens single loop learning to a thermostat's response to variations in temperature; it is limited in that it gives you 'more of or less of the same' (Pedler, 1994:149). Double-loop learning, on the other hand, requires questioning and radical thinking. It occurs when 'error is detected and corrected in ways that involve the modification of an organization's underlying norms, policies and objectives' (Argyris and Schon, 1978:3). Triple-loop learning encourages personal transformation or taking a different view of oneself. In the context of coaching, Zeus and Skiffington (2000:188) advocate the use of double-loop learning to 'reshape and restructure a coachee's underlying beliefs so that they are capable of doing things differently'.

Although learning theory is a well-trodden path for many, its application is virgin country for some. The traditional methods of delivering learning have gone on for generations and engrained ways of thinking are difficult to change (Parsloe and Wray, 2000:17, Gallwey, 2003:xiv). Managers still in the traditional 'control' paradigm are likely to operate in 'tell' mode, acting on what Senge (1990:8) calls 'mental models' or deeply ingrained assumption that influence how they see the world and how they act.

As the foregoing discussion illustrates, many theories inform the practice of executive coaching. However, not all approaches are uniformly welcomed either by practitioners or organisations and individual approaches have their own strengths and limitations (Peltier, 2001). It would be fair to say that all the theory assimilated into coaching practice is potentially positive and each in its own way is capable of making a contribution to personal growth, learning and development, performance improvement, and behavioural change.

4.0   Executive coaching literature: reviewing the reviewers

A series of literature reviews (Kilburg, 1996; Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson, 2001; Kilburg, 2004; Feldman and Lankau, 2005, Joo, 2005) illustrate individual authors' perceptions of clusters and dominant themes in the executive coaching literature. These reviews also provide individual author's opinions on the nature and quality of the empirical research into executive coaching. Each author's review is considered briefly.

4.1   Dominant themes in the literature
Kilburg's (1996:134) review of coaching literature published in the *Consulting Psychology Journal*'s special issue on executive coaching takes an unusual perspective. His review initially looks at the psychological literature on the topic of coaching in general, covering topics such as athletic coaching and 'the application of coaching techniques to change the problem behaviours of various populations'. He finds the review of this latter topic reassuring and reasons that if coaching can be successful with 'socially rejected early adolescents, schizophrenics …and a variety of other troubled and normal people…they can be equally successful with managers and senior executives…'(p.135). He clusters the writings on coaching in the field of management and consultation into 3 related areas: (1) research studies, (2) articles that advocate methods and techniques, and (3) articles that focus on the manager as coach. Kilburg (1996:135-136) then reviews the literature that 'exhorts managers to exert themselves to add coaching to their roles…' and a related series of articles that focus on the topic of 'coaching subordinates for high performance'. He makes the point that all of this literature is 'based on a little over a dozen empirical studies that just explore the role of managers as coaches'. He goes on to briefly describe a number of articles that discuss executive coaching from 'the vantage point of a consultant working with client manager'.

A further brief literary review (Kilburg, 2004) forms part of the introductory article to the 3rd *Consulting Psychology Journal's* special issue on executive coaching. This review of the PsycINFO database revealed 96 entries on executive coaching since 1996. He concludes that the literature consists mainly of first-person accounts of coaching approaches and a very modest set of empirical support underpinned by graduate students. He contends that coaching books and articles 'tend to focus on the what and the how of various methods' (p.204).

Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson's (2001) review claims to provide a comprehensive and critical review of the executive coaching literature. Their sources for the review are three databases (PsycLit, ERIC, and Wilson Business Abstracts) and additional references from reviewed articles and books. From their review they determine that the executive coaching literature clusters in the areas of psychology, training and development, and management. The literature from these three clusters is merged to produce six themes, which are identified as: (a) definition and standards, (b) purpose, (c) techniques and methodologies used, (d) comparison with counselling and therapy, (e) credentials of coaches and the best way of finding them, and (f) recipients of services (Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson, 2001:208). The review then elaborates on each theme, proffering and synthesising the perspectives of various writers.

Feldman and Lankau's (2005) review takes an approach similar to that developed in the latter part of this paper. They consider what has been written about the construct and distinctiveness of executive coaching, discuss coaches and their background, the recipients of coaching services, the outcomes of executive coaching, phrases in and approaches to the coaching process, and the coaching relationship. Out of this analysis they suggest an agenda for future research that touches on each of the themes.

Joo's (2005) review focuses on published research on executive coaching in the workplace. Using the key words executive coaching and coaching, Loo interrogated Business Source Premier, PsychArticles, Interscience, and Science Direct databases. He also reviewed the reference list of each article. Loo makes the point that practice journals such as Consulting Psychology Journal and the Harvard Business Review published 71% of the articles, while 15% were found in academic journals and 14% in magazines. Loo reviewed a total of 78 articles. His content analysis found that 40% of the articles were written on the basis of therapy or clinical psychology and 60% were written from a management or HRD perspective. He categorises the extant literature as follows: (a) definition and designation of the practice, (b) description of specific executive coaching methodologies by practitioners in the field, and (c) case studies of executive coaching.

It is interesting to see how, no matter the route taken, the different authors arrived at more or less the same conclusions. All mark the rise in popularity of executive coaching as a topic for practitioner articles and agree that the focus tends to be on definitions and distinctions of

executive coaching, on the purpose or rationale for executive coaching, on coaching competencies, on the recipients of executive coaching and on the practitioner case-studies that illustrate coaching in action.

4.2   Extant Empirical Research

To a greater or lesser extent, reviewing authors (Kilburg, 1996; Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson, 2001; Kilburg, 2004; Feldman and Lankau, 2005; and Joo, 2005) comment on the nature and quality of the empirical research on executive coaching. Their assessments and conclusions have a lot in common; most welcome the surge of interest in executive coaching but lament the dearth of empirical research on the efficacy of executive coaching. They also question the rigour of the existing research. Joo (2005:464-465) makes the point that most research on executive coaching has taken place within the last 10 years. Grant's (2005:1) position is representative of popular sentiment: He asserts that there is an 'emerging body of empirical support for the effectiveness of workplace and life coaching', however, he also acknowledges that the 'majority of empirical investigations are still uncontrolled group or case studies, and more randomised controlled studies should be conducted'. **Table 1** (page 28**)** provides a summary chart of the research themes, methods and major findings from current empirical studies.

Kilburg (1996:134) comments that most research studies on coaching in management are outputs from graduate dissertations that focus on: (1) managers or leaders as coaches, (2) demonstrating management skill improvements as an outcome of specific coaching programs; (3) coaching studies that enhance transfer of management and skills training into the workplace. He also acknowledges a variety of non-dissertation research. All this research, although not directly linked to executive coaching, suggests that coaching of various types is successful in improving work performance. However, he concludes that although there is an extensive history of coaching and broad empirical support for coaching in general, executive coaching lacks an empirical foundation and he questions whether executive coaching 'is simply the newest label' consultants are using in their work with executives. Eight years later, Kilburg (2004) holds that most of the research is still down to graduate students but concedes that their findings suggest that executive coaching 'has started to accumulate some modest empirical support for its efficacy' (p. 203). However, despite growing research, Kilburg contends that 'what actually happens in coaching engagements remains quite

mysterious'. He makes a call for more case studies that illuminate what practitioners actually do with their clients.

Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson (2001) review seven empirical research studies that were conducted between 1996 and 2000 (Foster and Lendl, 1996; Garman, Whiston and Zlatoper, 2000; Gegner, 1997, Hall, Otazo and Hollenbeck, 1999; Judge and Cowell, 1997; Olivero et al, 1997; Laske, 1999). The first study (Foster and Lendle, 1996) was concerned to discover whether eye-movement desensitisation reprocessing could help executives deal with workplace stress and develop positive beliefs and does not fall within the remit of executive coaching. Following their review, Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson (2001:222) make links between the studies and the practice-based literature. In their review they describe in detail the purpose, methods, findings and conclusions of each study and critique the research. This portion of their article is extensive (Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson, 2001:213-222).

Joo (2005) reviews what he describes as 11 research studies. In addition to those reviewed by Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson, he comments on Witherspoon and White, (1996); Orenstein (2002), Luthans and Peterson (2003), Smither et al. (2003) and Wasylyshyn (2003). He uses three themes to classify his summary of the research literature on executive coaching: (a) coach and/or coachee characteristics, (b) coaching process, and (c) coaching outcomes. Joo presents his analysis in a summary chart that covers themes, authors, methodology and major findings. He makes the interesting point that his search of the literature did not source a single article about executive coaching in the HRD journals, although there are some articles about the manager as a coach.

It could be argued that Joo misinterprets two of the research papers. Grant (2005) designates Witherspoon and White's (1996) paper as a discussion article where the case studies are used to illustrate points raised in the discussion. A reading of Witherspoon and White's paper suggests that Grant's interpretation is right. Similarly, Orenstein's paper uses 'three illustrative excerpts' (Orenstein, 2002:355) to make her point.

Feldman and Lankau's (2005:830) review of the literature suggests that academic research on executive coaching has lagged far behind the practitioner literature and that 'fewer than 20 studies have investigated executive coaching with systematic qualitative and/or quantitative methods'. In addition to studies already mentioned, these authors also review research

carried out by Kampa-Kokesch (2001), McGovern et al, (2001), Anderson (2001), CompassPoint, (2003) and Sue-Chan and Latham (2004). The authors acknowledge that this latter study does not address executive coaching per se. Feldman and Lankau's (2005:845) review of the literature concludes that:

> There is something of a 'black-box' feel about much of the current coaching literature; we know it can work but often do not know why it works or how it could work even better. Without a stronger theoretical foundation and empirical research, coaching runs the risk of falling into a passing trend that has no advocates because it has no evidence.

Studies not covered by the aforementioned reviewers include Thatch (2002), Paige (2002), Grant and Jackon (2004), Blow (2005), and Stevens (2005).

Williams and Offley (2005) authored the NHS commissioned report on issues arising from research into coaching effectiveness and evaluation of leadership programmes with a strong coaching and mentoring component. In a section titled: 'The Business Case for Coaching', the findings from various coaching studies (Arnott and Sparrow, 2004; Sutherland, 2005) are used to illustrate the benefits of business coaching. *Inter alia*, all the reports refer to the positive outcomes for individuals and the organisation emanating from the coaching process. However, while Williams and Offley's report mentions leadership coaching, it does not refer explicitly to executive coaching.

4.3   Clustering the empirical studies

Twelve research studies that focus on the outcomes from executive coaching claim positive results (Gegner, 1997; Hall et al., 1999; Laske, 1999; Anderson, 2001; Kampa-Kokesch, 2001; Paige, 2002; Luthans and Peterson, 2003, Smither et al., 2003; Thatch, 2003; Wasylyshyn 2003; Blow, 2005; Stevens, 2005). While the breakdown between qualitative and quantitative methods is evenly divided, the research studies vary widely in their approaches (see Appendix 1 which provides some detail on each study).   Five of these studies take a quantitative approach (Anderson, 2001; Luthans and Peterson (2003); Smither et al., 2003; Thatch, 2002; Wasylyshyn (2003), 5 take a qualitative approach (Hall et al., 1999; Laske, 1999; Paige, 2002; Blow, 2004 and Stevens, 2005) and 2 studies (Gegner, 1997; Kampa-Kokesch, 2001) combine both quantitative and qualitative methods.

Despite the insights provided by the various research studies, some either do not address the research issues at the heart of this paper or are not solely concerned with executive coaching. Garman et al.'s (1997) content analysis research looks at media perceptions of executive coaching. Olivero et al.'s (1997) action research study involves a small number of participants in a management development programme being coached-up to deliver coaching to fellow participants. Thus the normal expectation of an executive coach as a professional person external to the company is not met. Laske's (1999) PhD dissertation focuses on the developmental effects of executive coaching on the executive's professional agenda. While this is a fascinating study, its approach is psychological and it is reasonable to infer that only a qualified psychologist could attempt to replicate his research. Grant (2005:17) comments that implicitly, Laske's study 'suggests the need for consulting psychologists and organizational psychologists to become expert in adult-developmental assessment'. Grant and Jackon's (2004) study is mainly concerned with profiling coaches in terms of their professional background and Blow's (2005) study is concerned with coaches helping experts describe their intuitive understandings. Stevens's (2005) study focuses on how CEO's perceive coaching.

Judge and Cowell's (1997) research goes partway towards being relevant to my research focus. Their survey sought to develop a better understanding of the practice of executive coaching, but focused exclusively on information provided by coaches. Sixty coaches participated and answered questions on their qualifications, backgrounds, the nature of the coaching industry (fees and contractual arrangements), and the process and assessments used in coaching. Judge and Cowell also looked at the profile of typical executive coaches, why executives engaged in coaching (valued by the company, but having difficulty in one or two areas; needed to enhance leadership skills; the issues that dominated coaching sessions (modify interaction style, deal more effectively with change, build trust) and what one should look for and expect in an executive coach. While both interesting and informative, Judge and Cowell's study takes the practitioner's perspective only and the perspective of the client is reported indirectly. Both Stephens (2005) and Lowman (2005) make the point that practitioners can be mistaken in their interpretations of interventions and call for more research into client perspectives.

All of the reviewed studies provide data that supports the efficacy of executive coaching. Coaching has been found to be a positive experience and generally beneficial to participants

(Gegner, 1997; Hall,et al, 1999; Laske, 1999; Kampa-Kokesch, 2001; McGovern, 2001; Paige, 2002; Stevens, 2005) and benefits from executive coaching are reflected in improved ratings from direct reports and superiors (Luthan and Peterson, 2003; Smither et al., 2003; Thatch, 2002). Coached executives self-report improved job performance and increased productivity (Gegner, 1997; McGovern, 2001; Kampa-Kokesch, 2001). Individual learning (both skills and developmental) is reported by Gegner (1997), Hall et al, (1999), Laske (1999), and Kampa-Kokesch (2001). Leadership effectiveness is positively influenced by coaching (Kampa-Kokesch, 2001) and coaching plus 360-degree feedback increases leadership effectiveness (Thatch, 2002), and may lead to improved performance (Smithers et al, 2003; Luthans and Pearson, 2003). Modest improvements in organisational outcomes and behaviour change are both reported by Anderson (2001) and McGovern (2001).

However, as mentioned previously, many of these studies are thought to be defective in some way. Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson (2001:218) comment that Hall et al's (1999) study provided only limited information on the nature of the sample, on the methodology and on the analysis, their findings should be regarded as tentative. Joo (2005:470) makes the point that some of the research reviewed 'is flawed as a result of limited information regarding their methodologies and samples that in turn limits the applicability and generalizability of the studies'. In fact only one piece of research, (Smither et al. 2003), gets a positive mention from Joo because it is a correlational study using inferential statistics. Joo supports Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson, (2001); Kilburg, (1996, 2004); Orenstein, (2002), and Sherman and Freas, (2004) in contending that little empirical research has been conducted on the practice of executive coaching, 'even if there are a number of case studies portraying successful instances of executive coaching' (Joo, 2005:465).

Aside from reservations expressed by researchers themselves, Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson (2001) and Kampa-Kokesch and White (2002) comment on the methods used by Gegner (1997), Laske (1999), and McGovern (2001). They take issue with Gegner on three counts: her definition of sustained behavioural change (self-rated and not considered over time), the fact that she did not specify the number of coaches who had been approached to participate and distribute survey materials (potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings), and 'the fact that multivariate analyses were not conducted to determine whether a combination of variables was more effective for enhancing executive performance' (Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson 2001:218). Referring to Laske's research, Kampa-Kokesch and White (2002:148)

suggest that the sample size (7 executives) and lack of independent corroboration of the interview findings limits its usefulness. They also suggest that because McGovern's study was sponsored by a coaching consultancy firm, this could be seen as a limitation. Feldman and Lankau (2005:836) also comment on the flawed nature of part of McGovern's research, e.g. 'to assess learning the study asked participants and stakeholders to identify their top two development priorities'. This measure of learning represents 'desired learning but not actual changes in knowledge or skills themselves'. They use this as an indicator of difficulties inherent in undertaking quality research on executive coaching.

Table 1: Summary of Practitioner Research

Focus of research	Author	Methods	Major finding
Coaching Outcomes	Gegner (1997)	Qualitative and Quantitative – n = 147 executives surveyed; 25 interviewed	More skills, more self-confidence, better able to handle change
	Olivero et al. (1997)	Action research Quantitative n = 31	Coaching benefited participants and agency
	Hall et al. (1999)	Qualitative – interviewed 75 executives and 15 coaches	100% 0f executives reported learning more about themselves or gaining new skills
	Anderson (2001)	Quantitative n = 47 executives	Coaching had positive effect on business measures
	Kampa-Kokesch (2001)	Quantitative and Qualitative n = 50 executives	Leadership ratings: Slight diff-erence in transactional leadership, significant difference in 3 trans-formational leadership measures.
	McGovern (2001)	Qualitative – telephone interview n =100	All very satisfied with coaching. Greatest benefit: interpersonal skills
	Paige (2002)	Qualitative n = 5 senior executives	Coaching benefited the individual and the organisation
	Blow (2005)	Qualitative and Phenomenogical n =19	Coaches can help experts describe their intuitive understandings
	Stevens (2005	Qualitative n = 7 CEOs	Very positive about coaching
Coaching and 360-feedback	Thatch (2003)	Longitudinal Action Research n = 281	Multi-rater feedback plus coaching increased leadership effectiveness by up to 60%.
	Smither et al (2003)	Quasi-experimental field study n = 1361 senior managers	Executives who worked with coaches set more specific goals, solicited feedback more often and had slightly better performance ratings.
	Luthans and Peterson (2003)	Quantitative-descriptive n = 80; 20 managers & 60 workers	360-feedback plus coaching may lead to improved attitudes and improved performance
Coach and/or Coachee Characteristics	Judge and Cowell (1997)	Quantitative-Descriptive n= 60 coaches	Coaches come from variety of professional background; what executives want from process
	Garman et al. (1997)	Quantitative – content analysis – 72 articles	Psychologists not held in high regard as coaches
	Laske (1999)	Qualitative – n = 7 executives interviewed	Developmental level of coach and coachee are important for facilitating transformational change
	Wasylyshyn (2003)	Quantitative - surveyed coaching clients n = 87	Top criteria for successful coaching – coaches need both business background and knowledge of psychology.
	Grant and Jackon (2004)	ICF survey Quantitative N = 2529 members	Profile of coaches – 40% engaged in corporate coaching; varied backgrounds

Within the context of my research focus, Gegner (1997), Anderson (2001), Kampa-Kokesch (2001), McGovern (2001), Paige (2002), Thatch (2002), Luthan and Peterson (2003) and Smither et al.'s (2003) approaches are potentially relevant. All of these research studies sought to either elicit the view of executives as to the outcomes of executive coaching, or sought to determine what impact executive coaching had had on the perceptions of peers and employees. Gegner (1997) designed a coaching survey instrument that asked executives to rate the effectiveness of the coaching process across eight components. She subsequently held in-depth interviews with a selection of executives to gain deeper insights into aspects of coaching. Anderson and McGovern's studies sought to establish the outcomes from executive coaching. McGovern used Kirkpatrick's (1996) typology of outcomes to assess coaching effectiveness and Anderson sought to discover the business benefits that flowed from a leadership development programme. At the moment, I propose to use Kirkpatrick's (1996) typology as a structure for investigating coaching outcomes. Luthan and Peterson (2003) hypothesised that improved self-awareness as a result of executive coaching should result in manager's having a more accurate perception of their impact on others. This is an aspect of Luthan and Peterson's research that I hope to incorporate into Document 4. Similarly, Thatch (2002) and Smither et al (2003) look at executive coaching from a 360-degree feedback perspective, which also feeds into my approach to Document 4. The topic areas chosen by Paige (2002), correlate closely with what I have in mind for Document 3. However, her phenomenological approach doesn't appeal.

Overall, the range and variety of approaches taken by the research studies has introduced me to new possibilities and different measurement instruments which can be explored in more depth as the research study progresses.

5.0   Executive Coaching: distinguishing and defining the concept

The foregoing discussion on how executive coaching literature is structured identified dominant themes and foci of interest to academics and researchers. Two themes appeared consistently in almost all discussion and research papers: the ways in which executive coaching differs from other helpful interventions, and the multitude of possible definitions for executive coaching. This section of the papers takes a closer look at these themes.

5.1   Distinguishing Executive Coaching from associated concepts

Ferdinand de Saussaure (1974:117) expresses the view that concepts 'are defined not by their positive content but negatively by their relations with the other terms of the system. Their most precise characteristic is in being what the others are not'. This precept is taken to heart by writers on executive coaching. The difficulty of establishing executive coaching as a distinct concept is well documented. Feldman and Lankau (2005:840-41) say that although executive coaching 'can be distinguished from business advising, career counselling, mentoring and clinical therapy', that in practice 'coaching can blend into other types of developmental relationships'. Orenstein (2002:373) talks of the 'grey area that exists between therapy and coaching' and urges consultants to be vigilant to maintain the appropriate role'. Tobias (1996:88) suggests that the term coaching 'can be used so broadly as to encompass virtually any useful intervention that the consultant may do'. Following a review of the literature, Kilburg (1996:138) suggests that within the broad approach of helping a person with authority and responsibility to improve their organisational performance, it is 'almost impossible to differentiate executive coaching from other forms of consultation, training, and organization development'. (However, Kilburn does end that article with what is now a much-quoted definition of executive coaching). Stern (2004:161) refers to the confusion around defining the concept of executive coaching and suggests that attending a single conference on coaching points up the multiple interpretations of the term 'Executive Coaching' by both practitioners and clients.

Having acknowledged the difficulties inherent in separating out the various developmental areas, many authors go on to mark what makes executive coaching different from other helping relationships such as consulting, workplace coaching, mentoring, and therapy (Tobias, 1996; Parsloe and Wray, 1999; Peltier, 2001; Feldman and Lankau, 2005; Kets de Vries, 2005; Joo, 2005).

Cosulting: Tobias (1996:88) suggests that 'focus of activity' distinguishes coaching from consulting; that coaching focuses on the individual, consulting focuses on the organisation. Joo's (2005) review of the literature on executive coaching categorises consulting and coaching as being opposite ends of a continuum of coaching. He concludes that executive coaching belongs in the consulting end, because:

> Although there are slight differences in nuance, in most articles, the terms *therapy, counselling, and remedial* are used interchangeably, whereas the words *coaching, consulting, and developmental* have the same connotations.
>
> (Joo, 2005:468)

He further argues that even these broad distinctions entail a degree of overlap in that counselling and consulting (therefore executive coaching) have common features. Both aim to change behaviour, both help raise self-awareness and learning and both are undertaken by people who seek to establish strong alliances of trust with their clients.

Workplace coaching: Feldman and Lankau (2005:831) make a distinction between workplace coaching (the manager as coach) and executive coaching. While workplace coaching may be seen as 'a legitimate *part* of a manager's job, a consultant's '*exclusive* responsibility is client coaching and they have *no formal authority* over clients'. Joo (2005:464) also suggests that a distinction needs to be made between executive coaching and the manager who acts as a coach: 'In manager as a coach, the manager plays a role as a coach', whereas in executive coaching 'the executive is being coached by a professional (mostly external) coach'

Therapy: Peltier (2001) argues that a key difference between coaching and psychodynamics is that 'coaching is goal or action oriented rather than reflective or introspective' and that 'business executives move at a pace not generally comfortable for psychotherapists'. Kets de Vries (2005:74) *inter alia* distinguishes executive coaching and therapy across focus, nature of activity, data sources, client relationship and confidentiality. Stern (2004:157) emphasises that while therapy focuses exclusively on the individual, 'the primary goal of executive coaching is for the business itself to become more successful' and may entail 'using interventions to help the organizational system become more effective'.

Mentoring: Many writers expend effort highlighting the similarities and differences between mentoring and executive coaching. Parsloe and Wray (1999:81-82) say the distinction lies in 'contextual roles, responsibilities and relationships as both are processes that enable or support and encourage learning to happen'. They make the further distinction that while 'coaching is an enabling and helping process, mentoring is essentially a supportive process'. Joo (2005:474-5) points up the similarities between coaching and mentoring, i.e., they 'both involve a one-to-one relationship that provides an opportunity for individuals to reflect, learn, and develop'. However, there are key differences in terms of personnel, purpose, and time. Executive coaches are normally external professionals, whereas mentors are senior executives internal to the company. Mentors can have diverse remits, from socialising new members, to advice and guidance, to career development and general management development. On the other hand, the primary purpose of executive coaching is raising self-awareness and learning to improve performance. In essence, mentoring tends to be 'people focused', while executive coaching is 'issue focused'. Another distinction is that mentoring can often be open-ended while executive coaching tends to have a finite time limit that is formalised in a coaching contract. **Table 2** (following page) synthesises the commonalities and distinctions between therapy, mentoring and executive coaching. The top half of the table clusters the commonalities between mentoring and executive coaching, while the bottom half marks the differences. As the table shows, therapy is more distinct from executive coaching than mentoring.

Table 2: Comparison of Therapy, Mentoring and Executive Coaching Approaches

Variables	Therapy	Mentoring	Executive Coaching
Focus	Past, present, future	Present, future	Present, future
Data source	Client	Client and organisation	Client and organisation
Client	Individual	Individual and sponsor	Individual and sponsor
Confidentiality	Absolute	Negotiated	Negotiated
Location	Therapist's Office	Varied settings	Varied settings
Length of sessions	Fixed (45-60 minutes)	Variable	Variable
Service provider	Psych-therapist	Internal Senior Exec.	External professional coach
Primary Agenda	Personal issues	Career support	Performance improvement
Client status	Private individual	Young executive	Senior executive
Relationship	Expert/client	Father figure/supportive	Collaborative/equals
Duration	Open-ended	Long-term	Defined contract
Payment	Private payment	None	Negotiated fee

5.2   Defining the concept of executive coaching

Among the spectrums of available definitions, one of the most widely quoted is that of Kilburg (1996:142):

> Executive coaching is a helping relationship formed between a client who has managerial authority and responsibility in an organization and a consultant who uses a wide variety of behavioural techniques and methods to help the client achieve a mutually identified set of goals to improve his or her professional performance and personal satisfaction, and, consequently, to improve the effectiveness of the client's organization within a formally defined coaching agreement.

Kampa and Kokesch (2001:208) assert that Kilburg's definition is a fair representation of what much of the literature describes as executive coaching.

Bluckert (2005:171) identifies different emphases that reflect the professional background of the writers. He proposes that academics, consultants, and those with a HR and organisational development background favour an emphasis on learning and development. Others writers from 'highly results focused environments such as sports and business' emphasise performance, and those with a psychological bent look to behaviour change as the primary

outcome.   He offers a broad-based definition of executive coaching that reflects the reality of his own coaching experience:

> Coaching is the facilitation of learning and development with the purpose of improving performance and enhancing effective action, goal achievement and personal satisfaction.   It invariably involves growth and change, whether that is in perspective, attitude or behaviour.
>
> (Bluckert, 2005:173)

Surprisingly, Bluckert's definition makes no explicit reference to a business context. Other authors offer somewhat different perspectives. Levinson's (1996:116) definition tends to focus on addressing weaknesses while Sherman and Freas (2004:85) place executive learning, growth and development firmly in the business arena. Laske (1990:142) takes a psychological approach. **Table 3** brings together a limited number of executive coaching definitions to illustrate different perspectives.

Table 3:   **Contrasting Definitions of executive coaching**

Peterson, (1996:78)	Executive coaching is the process of equipping people with the tools, knowledge, and opportunities they need to develop themselves and become more effective.
Levinson (1996:116)	Executive coaching usually involves coping with focal problems, mostly of maladroit executive behaviour that must become more adaptive.
Sherman and Freas (2004:85)	The purpose of executive coaching is to produce learning, behavioural change, and growth in the coachee for the economic benefit of a third party - the client that employs the coachee.
Laske, 1990:142	The mandate of coaching is to develop a cognitive-emotionally and behaviourally more flexible professional whose activity in the organization shows greater perspicacity and self-awareness; resulting in a more balanced approach to his or her job performance.

For the purpose of this paper, I consider that the following definition offered in the *Executive Coaching Forum Handbook* (although wordy) touches on all the particulars of executive coaching which will be developed as this paper progresses:

> Executive coaching is an experiential, individualized, leadership development process that builds a leader's capability to achieve short and long-term organizational goals. It is conducted through one-on-one interactions, driven by data from multiple perspectives, and based on mutual trust and respect. The organization, an executive, and the executive coach work in partnership to achieve maximum learning and impact.

<p align="center">Executive Coaching Forum Handbook, (2004:19)</p>

As the foregoing discussion illustrations, definitions of executive coaching are myriad. However, Parsloe and Wray (1999:41) make the salient point that despite shades of opinions about definitions, what is most important is that 'everyone in a specific organization should know the definition that applies to their particular situation'.

6.0   A framework for the conceptual model

Potentially, many factors appear to affect the success or failure of executive coaching. Stern (2004:161) suggests that, in addition to the qualities of the coach, other factors such as the readiness of executives, support from senior management, from the organisation, and from the Human Resource function all impact on the coaching situation.   Bluckert (2006) presents five critical factors that underpin successful coaching. He identifies these as sound coaching principles, the design and delivery of a good coaching process, the coach's competence, presence and professionalism, the coaching relationship and client factors/coachability. A sub-set of these themes surface in most articles on executive coaching.

For the purpose of this discussion, the factors deemed to influence the success or failure of executive coaching are: the qualities of the coach, the coachability of the client, the coaching relationship, the coaching process itself, and the nature and degree of support the executive receives from the organisation.

Authors are equally concerned with the outcomes from executive coaching. Expected outcomes include self-awareness, faster learning, personal growth, and sustained behaviour change, career success and improved organizational performance (Kilburg, 1996, Brotman et al., 1998, Joo, 2005).

6.1   Qualities of the Coach

Many writers on executive coaching refer to both the expertise and the personal characteristics of the coach as crucial ingredients in the mix of executive coaching (Giglio et al., 1998, Kets de Vries, 2005; Stevens, 2005). Debate on expertise generally focuses on the extent to which executive coaches need to have a background in psychology in addition to a sound knowledge of business principles (Kilburg, 1996, 2000; Berglas, 2002; Peltier, 2001; Downey, 2003; Sherman and Freas, 2004; Bluckert, 2005; Kets de Vries, 2005).   Authors also refer to the unregulated nature of executive coaching (Brotman et al., 1998; Berglas, 2002; Sherman and Freas, 2004) and worry that well-intentioned but ill-prepared coaches may damage the reputation of executive coaching (Berglas, 2004) or that senior executives may become over-dependent on coach confidants (Sulkowicz, 2004:66). Neither can it be

assumed that the calibre of available coaches is always good. Many people calling themselves executive coaches 'are really unfit professionally, morally and ethically to do this work' (Stevens, 2005:280).

Personal qualities of the Coach (coaching competencies): Sherman and Freas (2004:87) see coaching 'as much art as science, best practised by individuals with acute perception, diplomacy, sound judgement and the ability to navigate conflicts with integrity'. A person-centred approach is advocated and salient listening and the skills of questioning, empathy, reflecting, probing, challenging and summarising are considered critical to executive coaching (Peterson, 1996:79; Hedman, 2001:73; Hanson, 2003:20; Wright, 2005:327). Wasylyshyn (2003) provides a longer list. She argues that certain psychological skills such as interpersonal effectiveness, listening, empathy for diverse groups, patience, adaptability, analytical problem solving, creativity and humour underpin effective coaching. Bluckert (2005:173) makes the point that none of these skills are the prerogative of psychologists, but could reasonably be expected of any competent executive coach. However, some consultants prefer to use a team approach for executive coaching, arguing that different coaches have different skills and that a team of coaches has more to offer the client (Kiel et al, 1996:69).

Coaches must also be capable of developing the client's self-awareness and sense of responsibility. Awareness of underlying assumptions, belief systems, behaviours and attitude opens up choices for people. It is argued that while awareness of issues may not guarantee change, it is an essential precursor of change (Kiel, et al., 1996; Kilburg, 1997; Wright, 2005).

That coaches must focus on the client's potential and be able to act as facilitators of learning, rather than 'tellers', is a recurring theme (Gallwey, 2003:17; Downey, 2003), and has been referred to in the previous sections. A coaching mindset moves away from the 'fix-it' mentality to helping people reach their own solutions (Downey, 2003; Whitmore, 2004; Stevens, 2005).

The Expertise of the Coach: The literature is replete with a lively debate on the relative merits of different levels of expertise. While many writers consider that a knowledge of business coupled with an ability to understand the organisational life of the executive client is *de rigour* for successful coaching, often these same writers also advocate that executive coaches

should have a strong grounding in psychology (Kilburg, 1996; 2000; Levinson, 1996; Berglas, 2002; Orenstein, 2002; Wasylyshyn, 2003; Kets de Vries, 2005). However, there are reservations (Kilburg, 2000; Sherman and Freas, 2004; Kets de Vries, 2005).

The case for a business background: Being capable of aligning the executive's development with the business needs of the organisation is considered critical (Kets de Vries, 2005; Stevens, 2005). Levinson (1996:115) asserts that it is nigh 'impossible to coach someone about role behaviour unless one has a comprehensive understanding of organizations' and Saporito (1996:96-97) suggests that for coaching to be relevant to the executive, the coach must understand 'the unique context and business objectives of the client organisation' and appreciate that executive coaching is a practical process directly related to individual effectiveness and corporate performance. He further argues that executive coaches must understand 'the nebulous but powerful dynamics' that shape organizational life. Whether the success of the business is assessed as an improved bottom line, higher employee satisfaction, better labour relations, or progress in other business indicators, the organization must benefit in some recognizable way (Kiel, et al, 1996: 69).

The case for a sound grasp of psychology: Kilburg (2004:249) argues that:

> … unconscious material in the form of past experience, emotional responses,
> defensive reactions, underlying and unresolved conflicts, and dysfunctional
> patterns of thinking and behaving can contribute to poor leadership and
> consequently to decreased organizational effectiveness.

He goes on to list 15 situations and circumstances when the use of psychodynamic material and methods would be appropriate. Broadly these 15 situations encompass: patterns of dysfunctional behaviour in individuals, groups or whole organisations; people who are experiencing strong emotional states or are facing life-changing events; serious performance problems or family matters that create tension and conflict (Kilburg, 2004:253).

Levinson (1996:115) also asserts that 'a knowledge of psychological dynamics is particularly important when trying to understand the manager and Berglas (2002:87) goes so far as to state that 'in an alarming number of situations, executive coaches who lack rigorous psychological training do more harm than good'. Bluckert (2005:173) argues that coaches 'should have a psychological mindedness' which he describes as an 'umbrella term which denotes a person's capacity to reflect on themselves, others, and the relationship between', while Laske (2002:5) contends that, to be professional, coaches must fully understand the

developmental stage of their clients. Peterson (1996:79) says it is useful to have 'an appreciation of unconscious factors within the coaching relationship, for example, transference and counter-transference. Kilburg (2000:17), talks about the 'shadow side' and suggests that not many people engaged in the 'change management industry' have either formal training or experience in helping people in the workplace learn about and change behaviours. He makes the point that all consultants can benefit greatly from an increased knowledge of the unconscious dimensions that influence behaviour.

Reservations about psychologists: Peltier (2001:41) argues that 'Corporations expect to see clear and effective changes in their executives when they spend money on coaching, so the take is to translate observations into 'deliverables' and that it is unlikely that 'psychoanalytic principles alone could possibly be adequate to the challenge'. He colourfully suggests (2001:22) that some therapist approaches are 'more useful for the couch than the coach' and goes on to say that 'many clinicians operate on the unchallenged assumption that deeper interventions or interpretations are, de facto, better'. He argues that this assumption can ruin a coaching relationship, where, in the corporate environment, 'analysis is often less trusted than action'. Kets de Vries (2005:73), while favouring a psychological approach to executive coaching, makes the point that many psychotherapists will not have acquired the training to diagnose the wide range of organizational problems they are likely to encounter and Sherman and Freas (2004:87) caution that 'skilled psychologists may be too naïve about business to win an executive's trust'. Levinson (1996:115) maintains that it is important to avoid becoming psychotherapeutic. Although the executive may be dependent on the coach for 'advice, guidance, insights, and even formal information', in the world of business there is no time for a 'therapeutic alliance', dealing with issues such as transference and counter-transference. This view is a counter-point to Peterson (1996:79).

The best of both worlds: It is reasonable to infer that a coach with strengths in business and psychology/psychotherapy, is ideal executive coach material. Effective leadership coaches are expected to know not only the essentials of psychotherapy, but also the requirements of organizational management (Levinson,1996; Wasylyshyn, 2003, Kets de Vries, 2005). However, Garman et al's (1997) study that researched print media comment on coaches, found that psychology was not often mentioned as a desired qualification for executive coaching and that, in some cases, psychologists were viewed as making matters worse.

6.2   Concerns about the coaching profession

Judge and Cowell's (1997:72) study shows that executive coaches come from a wide range of educational backgrounds. These findings are supported by Grant and Jackon's (2005) study that found coaches had diverse career backgrounds. While this diversity has the potential to enrich the profession (Stevens, 2005), and standardisation of qualifications might be premature (Sherman and Freas, 2004), the lack of certification causes some misgivings and a general theme through much of the literature registers concern about the unregulated nature of the coaching profession (Judge and Cowell, 1997; Brotman et al., 1998; Berglas, 2002; Bluckert, 2005).

In addition to certification, concerns around executive coach qualifications address the issues of non-existent barriers to entry and the nature of coach training (Sherman and Freas, 2004:84). They claim that 'many self-styled executive coaches know little about business, and some know little about coaching'. They further argue that coaching certifications are difficult to assess. Judge and Cowell (1997) talk about aspiring coaches needing only a home office and a business card and predict that the turbulent nature of the market will fuel the demand for executive coaches.

Despite the calls for clarity around coach qualifications, some writers have reservations about too much standardisation (Bluckert, 2004, Sherman and Freas, 2004; Grant, 2005). As Bluckert (2004:55) puts it:

> On the face of it the professionalising process looks like a good thing. Yet it could have negative as well as positive consequences. Unless regulation can be achieved without excessive bureaucracy then creativity could be stifled. People may feel they have to fit a mould which is not really them. And, of course, there will be more forms to fill in and portfolios to be maintained.

6.3   Coachability of the client

The coachability of the client is a recurring theme through the literature. In trying to decide on the coachability of the client, Sherman and Freas (2004:87) suggest some basic questions: Is the executive motivated? Is there an important development need? Is the executive coachable? Does he/she have support? Is he/she valuable enough to justify the cost of coaching? Frisch (2005b:14-15) talks about the factors that can prevent or slow the coaching

process. Top of the list is significant personal or familial problems that can interfere with the executive's full commitment to the process. He suggests that coaching 'should not compete' with an executive's 'attention to the health and well-being of self or family'. Other factors, which he describes as 'scalable' are more akin to personality traits, such as risk tolerance, emotional resilience, psychological curiosity and insight, and level of motivation. Frisch makes the point that an executive who is 'totally satisfied with the current job is less likely to appreciate coaching'.

The personality traits of high-achieving executives sometimes conspire to make acceptance of coaching difficult. Kiel et al (1996:68) describe how typical senior executive clients 'score one or two standard deviations above the mean on measures of dominance and need for control'. Kilburg (1997) names the client barriers to successful coaching as severe psychopathology, severe interpersonal problems, lack of motivation, unrealistic expectations of the coach or the coaching process and lack of follow-through on homework or coaching intervention suggestions. While he considers that 'psychosis is rare in organisations', he goes on to say that behaviours such as 'workaholism, alcohol abuse, perfectionism, and features of narcissistic preoccupation with the self are fairly common' and are likely to be accompanied by 'high levels of resistance to change, major regressions, especially in times of high stress, and a general state of entropy in which it will be very hard to motivate or mobilize the client' (1997:297). Berglas (2002:88) offers a distinction between a "problem executive" who can be trained to function effectively and an "executive with a problem" who can best be helped by psychotherapy', rather than coaching.

Resistance to coaching may be blatant or passive. Blatant resistance takes the form of hostility, mistrust and unwillingness to engage with the coach. Passive resistance is more difficult to identify. The executive 'may appear to be compliant or even enthusiastic, but the coachee never changes and goals are never reached' (Zeus and Skiffington, 2003:202). Giglio et al. (1998) offer an approach for ameliorating resistance. They suggest that the coach should focus initially on job related areas and say that 'sticking to something concrete, tangible, and safe' allows the coach to begin to enter the executive's world and gains trust and respect.

There are different points of view on the feasibility of coaching in the face of resistance. Some writers argue that if the 'learner doesn't want to learn' (Gallwey, 2003:207) or if there

is no demand for coaching (Evered and Selman, 1989:21) then coaching will be a failure. One of the themes that emerged from Steven's research (2005:276) is that executives need to engage willingly in the coaching process and that 'demanding or forcing them to engage in executive coaching diminishes the potential value of it'. On the other hand, Natale and Diamante (2005) devote their first stage of coaching, what they term the 'Alliance Stage' to uncovering resistance and asking why the coach is needed and Giglio, et al., (1998) contends that resistance is to be expected and that it is responsibility of the coach to deal with problems and overcome resistance. He suggests that, *inter alia*, an executive may feel angry at being selected for coaching or be fearful of the process. In these circumstances, it is the responsibility of the coach to overcome rejection. This rejection may take the form of 'denial, blaming someone else, making light of the situation at hand, or an unwillingness to respond or work with' the coach.

6.4   The quality of the coaching relationship

It is almost impossible to overstate the significance that practitioner writers attach to the client-coach relationship. Downey (2003:136) goes so far as to say that 'the only thing that can cause coaching to fail is an insufficiently strong relationship' and he claims that almost every unsuccessful coaching intervention is the 'result of a ropey relationship'. Sherman and Freas (2004:87) speak of the chemistry needed between the coaching dyad and appear to rate this higher than the coach's business background or qualifications. Laske (1999:3), in a departure from his usual ontic/agentic/developmental stage focus, writes that the approach taken by the coach is less important than the quality of the working alliance established with the executive, although he also says that issues of compatibility will be influenced by 'the ontic-developmental maturity of the two parties'. In addition to chemistry and maturity, the degree of trust both parties bring to the relationship appears to be key to a successful outcome. Kilburg (1997:293), expresses the view that a good relationship will entail building a safety zone for the client and the coach 'in which reflection, creative exploration, and self-examination are encouraged and supported'

Edmondson & Moingeon (1999:158) define trust 'as the belief that relinquishing some degree of control over a situation to one or more others will not lead to personal loss or harm'. They argue that trust exists at two levels: trust in competence and trust in intentions. Hall et al's (1999) study found that when confidentiality is at stake, external coaches, who are seen as apolitical, are more easily trusted. Downey (2003) contends that trust is a two-way street and that the coach must be able to trust the player to be fully engaged in the process and to trust

that he or she is being as truthful as possible. He considers that trust is fundamental to all good relationships; without trust the person being coached will not feel safe enough to speak openly, or to reflect on mistakes and weaknesses. However, in the beginning of a consulting relationship trust is likely to be on shaky ground and building trust will take time (Winum, 1995:120). An effective coaching relationship requires that the coach *earns* a level of trust sufficient to allow the executive to be open to change and willing to be influenced and lower their barriers enough to say what they need to say and to feel vulnerable (Kiel et al, 1996:67, Peterson, 1996:79; Downey, 2003). The person-centred approach, empathic, non-judgmental and working from the client's frame of reference (Rogers, 1951:494) is thought to provide a solid foundation for trust (Hedman, 2003, Peterson, 1996).

6.5   The Coaching Process

Various practitioners recommend a variety of stages in the coaching process. These can vary from three (Kiel et al, 1996:69; Giglio et al., 1998) to four (Saporito, 1996:97-99), and to five (Natale and Diamante, 2005). Typically all the stages incorporate the same content under slightly different headings; all involve contracting with the organisation and the client, data gathering and feedback, developing a coaching agenda, engaging in coaching, and monitoring and evaluating progress.

6.5.1 Contracting

Contracting with the organisation and the client is the first step in the coaching process. Details of the contract may involve explicit coaching arrangements, fees and duration of coaching. Kilburg (1997:293) suggests that

> The issues of time, fees, places of meetings, confidentiality, requirements for self-report, participation, practice, follow-through and homework, cancellation policies, information exchange, and goals are made clear in a formal agreement.

While organisations are urged to checkout the credentials of the coach (Kiel et al, 1996, Berglas, 2002; Sherman and Freas, 2004) and are now becoming increasingly more likely to do this (Bluckert, 2004), before finalising the contract, many authors touch on the need to 'qualify' the client and the sponsoring organisation. Qualifying the client is an attempt to measure his/her responsiveness to coaching, while qualifying the sponsor considers the

integrity of the organisation in seeking coaching for the executive. (Kiel et al, 1996:71; Tobias, 1996:89; Sherman and Freas, 2004).

Ambiguity surrounding who exactly is 'the client' sometimes muddies the waters. Is the client the sponsoring organization or is it the person being coached? (Kets de Vries, 2005:74). Invariably all writers recognize the executive as the principal client, entitled to (negotiated) confidentiality and primary focus, but they also acknowledge the legitimacy of the sponsoring organisation's interest in the outcome. (Kiel et al, 1996:74, Sherman and Freas, 2004; Kets de Vries, 2005). Saporito (1996:97-99) is explicit in acknowledging the organisational context; his *Stage 1* of the coaching process involves working with the organisation and the individual to understanding the context within which coaching takes place. He talks about 'developing an overall sense of the organizational requirements, culture, philosophy and context within the industry'. He considers that three fundamental questions need answering: 'What are the key challenges facing the organisation? What are the success factors for the executive's role within the organisation? What are the behavioural requirements necessary to achieve these success factors?'

Executive coaching practitioners, in pursuit of openness, may require executive clients to give a verbal report to their sponsor on strengths and weaknesses and describe the work-related development goals they intent to pursue (Kiel et al., 1996:72) and schedule formal review meetings with superiors to discuss progress (Peterson, 1996; Wasylyshyn, 2003). These meetings are triangular, involving the client, sponsor and coach. Wasylyshyn (2003) is particularly strong about this point. She suggests that throughout the coaching the executive should share explicit information with both the HR department and the boss about progress and that the coach should maintain a strong liaison (subject to the boundaries of confidentiality) with internal collaborators. This notion of sharing the objectives of coaching with the sponsor is extended to sharing information with and seeking feedback from direct reports and colleagues. This process allows the executive to seek feedback on progress, helps direct reports, peers, and superiors to recognise improvements in performance and behaviour, which in turn may improve future ratings and act as a motivator for the executive (Thatch, 2002; Luthan and Peterson, 2003; Smither, et al. 2003).

6.5.2 Collecting data

Another universal stage involves personal interviews, psychometric testing and 360- degree feedback. Psychological testing and assessment is prevalent in organisations and 'corporations worldwide use psychologists for recruitment and selection to assess the 'fit' between an executive and that person's role within a specific organization' (Diedrich 1996:61). The psychological study attempts to capture a person's capacities, style, direction, level of emotional maturity, and the degree to which he or she capitalizes on basic potentials' (Tobias,1996:90), while the 360-degree feedback process allows the client to see how superiors, peers and direct reports experience his or her management style. Typically 360 degree feedback involves close work associates, peers, superiors and direct reports completing a questionnaire on the strengths and weaknesses of the executive (Hall, et al, 1999; Peltier, 2001; Saporito, 1996). Some coaches extend the 360-degree survey to family and friends (Kiel et al., 1996: Peterson, 1996).

The emphasis on conducting interviews and collecting psychometrics and 360-degree feedback data can clearly be seen in the coaching case studies presented in the special edition of the *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, Spring 1996. Most of the cases start with a description of psychological tests and 360-degree feedback as a way of creating self-awareness and informing both the client and coach of strengths and current limitations and of the client's impact on colleagues and superiors (Diedrich, 1996; Kiel et al., 1996; Peterson, 1996; Tobias, 1996).

6.5.3   Feedback

Giglio et al. (1998) make the point that the combination of interviews, psychometrics and 360 feedback gives the coach a strong sense of where the truth lies, as does observations of the executive's behavioural style. How feedback is handled on interviews, psychometrics and on results from the 360-degree assessments appears to be critical (Kilburg, 1997:296). Time allowed for feedback can vary from a one-hour session (Thatch, 2002) to insight sessions lasting 2 to 3 days (Kiel et al, 1996:69; Witherspoon and White, 1996).   In some circumstances, coaches prefer to extend the feedback process over several months (Diedrich, 1996:65).

Most practitioners consider this feedback the linchpin for a coaching agenda:

This picture pinpoints strengths and shortfalls and offers perceptions of the client's motivation, use of power and influence, decision making, expectations, handling of conflict, integrity, emotional competence, and other dimensions of person and professional effectiveness.

(Kiel et al, 1996:69)

Feedback should be specific, accurately detailed and refer to actual behaviour (Dietrich, 1996:62). While the results of the 360-degree form the basis for the coaching agenda, too much negativity can be counterproductive (Hall et al., 1999; Peltier 2001). Hall et al's (1999:48) study found that negative feedback, feedback only with no action ideas, and 'touchy-feely' feedback that invaded privacy worked least well from the executive's perspective. Giglio et al. (1998) suggest that to provide objective feedback, the coach should just 'unfold' the information that has been collected from all the sources and then build on the strengths of the data, and lay the groundwork for alternative explanations that eventually allows the executive to realise the true explanations. 'The coach should be supportive, help clarify the situation, but should not get in the way of letting the client accept responsibility for his/her role in the quagmire'. Sometimes the coach may need to use 'confrontation techniques' to enable the client to recognize and accept responsibility for the issues (Hall et al., 1999; Judge and Cowell, 1997).

Sherman and Freas (2004:84) make the point that while providing objective assessments and candid feedback may be seen as essential to an executive's development, outside of a coaching situation, quality feedback is rarely forthcoming. They explain this lack by suggesting that 'candour generates emotion, and emotion can be scary'. Goleman (2002) writing about emotional intelligence in the context of leadership styles, suggests that dearth of feedback is a significant inhibitor of executive development and the higher up the organisation an executive climbs, the less likely he or she is to get honest feedback on their management style. Thatch's study (2002:211) shows that receiving objective feedback was rated very highly by executives and she contends that with 360-degree feedback and 'the support of a talented coach, leaders can be developed; high potentials managers can continue to hone their skills; and derailing executives can be saved' (Thatch, 2002:213). On the other hand, Smither et al's research (2003), which used a control group, found only a very slight improvement in ratings when 360-degree feedback was combined with coaching.

Despite the general enthusiasm for 360-degree feedback, Laske (1999), Peltier (2001) and Luthan and Peterson (2003) raise some issues around this process. Peltier feels that because third parties are introduced at an early stage into the client/coach relationship, the relationship might suffer. He also makes the point that confidentiality can be an issue and that some feedback can be motivated by spite. Laske (1999) appears to be sceptical about the process. Returning to his theme of developmental stages, he says that the present uses of 360-degree feedback ignore the fact that an executive's ability to accept and process feedback depends on his or her ontic-developmental level. Luthan and Peterson (2002) mention the possibility of the executive lowering his self-rating because of demoralising feedback.

6.5.4 The Coaching Agenda

The coaching agenda falls out of the personal interviews, psychometric tests and 360-degree survey information available to the coach and the client. Based on this information, the coach works with the executive to target areas for development (Kiel et al, 1996:69). This collaborative process will aim to produce specific plans that contain specific and measurable goals and action steps. Downey (2003:140-141) suggests that the quality of the goals and success measures (meeting the SMART acronym) agreed at the beginning of a coaching programme has a huge impact on the success of the coaching. While the main focus of the executive coaching will be work-related, other items often creep onto the agenda, e.g. interpersonal development, personal change and transformation (Zeus and Skiffington, 2003:96).

Dietrich (1996:62) specifies the issues he frequently addresses:

- Identify and modify the impact of an executive's managerial style on individual effectiveness, team effectiveness, or both
- Provide practical direction for 'turning around' senior people who have performance problems
- Help executives more rapidly and effectively adapt to change
- Highlight the use of key strengths
- Plan for and monitor progress regarding individual development needs
- Educate executives on key dimensions of superior performance
- Enhance organizational performance

Levinson (1996:116) tends to focus on a remedial agenda while Kiel et al. (1996:68) found that approximately one-quarter of their clients are 'in trouble' and are 'possible derailment candidates', another one-quarter are being coached for future performance, and the remaining half are already strong organisational players interested in building on their leadership strengths. Witherspoon and White, (1996:126) suggest that while the focus for a coaching session may be 'on imparting specific skills, addressing performance issues on the job, or supporting broader changes in the executive's behaviour' it is important to clarify which focus is primary in order to 'avoid confusion about expectations, time and effort'. They describe the various functions as follows:

> Coaching for skills (learning sharply focused on a person's specific task), coaching for performance (learning focused more broadly on a person's present job), coaching for development (learning focused on a person's future job) and coaching for the executive's agenda.

They suggest that the executive agenda could be interpreted as 'loosely connected goals and plans'.

Knudson (2002:190-191) cites Yahanda (1998) as adapting the work of Reddy (1994) to produce five levels of coaching dynamics. Level 1 refers *to cognitive and task-or skill-related learning,* with the focus primarily on work to be done. Level 2 relates to describing and naming *behaviour*; coaching is targeted towards directly observable behaviours such as self-presentation, approach to conflict, problem solving, decision making, and methods of exerting influence on others. Level 3, coaching is conducted at the *emotional/reflective level,* and the issues are more often covert as compared to the presenting issue. Level 3 concerns, primarily inferred from Level 2 behaviours, are made up of core personal issues of inclusion, control, power, competence, and affiliation. Level 4, entitled interpretive/reframing, addresses values, beliefs, and assumptions about reality. Coaching work at level 4 illuminates how the executive's assumptions about people and the world determine behaviour and results. Level 5, which deals with the unconscious, is not appropriate for business coaching situations and is more appropriately explored in personal psychotherapy.

6.5.5 The coaching conversation

A coaching conversation can take many forms, depending on the needs of the client and the particular orientation of the coach (Downey, 2003:25).

Figure 2 displays the range of possible conversational styles open to a coach.

Figure 2: Spectrum of coaching skills
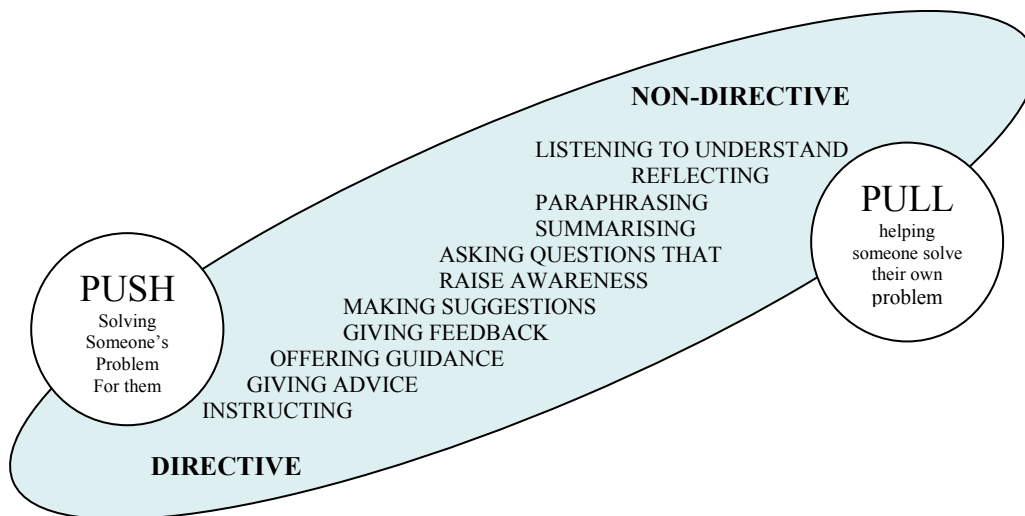
Effective Coaching, Myles Downey, (2003:23)

As Downey describes it, the spectrum goes from a directive solve your problems for you (push) approach to a non-directive help you solve your own problems (pull) approach. The directive style belongs to the traditional management paradigm while executive coaching would tend towards the non-directive end although even the most non-directive of coaches occasionally need to impart information in a directive way.

Various coaching conversation models offer guidance on how to progress coaching sessions. The GROW model is one of the most popular and widely used models for structuring coaching conversations (Downey, 2003:25). Citing research results from a study into the use of coaching models, Dembkowski and Eldridge (2003) report that 34% of respondents stated that they used the GROW model, 33% claimed to use a variety of models and the remainder were not aware of using any model or process in their coaching activities. Depending on which author you read, the mnemonic GROW can stand for 'Goals, Reality, Options and

Wrap-up' (Skiffington and Zeus, 2003:239) or 'Goals, Reality, Opportunity and What next (Dembkowski and Eldridge, 2003). The basic GROW model is often used as a foundation for developing more complex structures and processes. Dembkowski and Eldridge (2003) used GROW as a basis for their 7 step ACHIEVE model: Assess current situation, Creative brainstorming of alternatives to current situation, Hone goals, Initiate options, Evaluate options, Valid action programme design, Encourage momentum. Perhaps inevitably, there appears to be a degree of overlap among many of the models. Hanson's coaching model overleaf (Hanson, 2003:21) seems to be a comprehensive representation of a particular approach to coaching conversations.

Figure 3: Hanson's coaching model
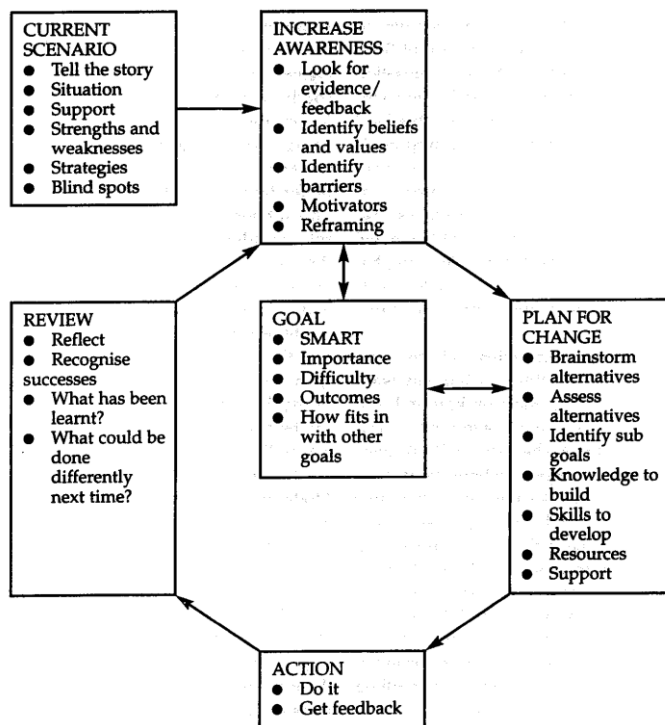
The Hanson Coaching Model: Towards a new framework? (Hanson, 2003:21)

Other practitioners offer their own preferred approaches. Within the articles reviewed for this paper, Tobias (1996) suggests a systems approach, Diedrich (1996) prefers an iterative feedback model, Richard (1999) suggests multimodal therapy as a useful model for the executive coach, Laske (1999) uses a constructive-developmental theory model, Sherin and

Caiger (2004) proffer a rational-emotive behaviour therapy model as a tool to help clients effect behavioural change in the context of a coaching relationship, Kilburg's (1996) model takes a systems and psychodynamic approach and Cocivera and Cronshaw's (2004) action frame theory approach builds on Kilburg's systems approach.

In a way similar to the myriad of available models, different practitioners offer slightly different prescriptions for coaching sessions. Kilburg (1997) advises that consultants should acts in a tactful and sensitive way to:

1. always actively, get problems on the table where they can be approached consciously and explored
2. make the unsaid said, and
3. make the unconscious conscious.

Peterson (2005:17) describes using a technique he calls *clear goals, conscious choice*:

> In each of our four meetings, we spent some time working on clear goals: getting a clear sense of what matters to her, what motivates her, what values she wants to live by and lead by. And then we worked on how she would use those goals and values to make conscious choices about what she did and where she spent her time.

Kilburg (1997, 2000), Lowman (2005) and Stevens (2005) make the point that much of the knowledge base around executive coaching takes a practitioner perspective and that the voice of the client is not heard often enough. Peterson (2005) is one of the few practitioners to bring the voice of the client directly to the reader.

6.6   Coaching Outcomes

Kilburg (1997) suggest that the primary focus of coaching sessions is to grow the self-awareness of the client and that increased self-awareness is the key to improved performance. Other writers claim that the ultimate aim of executive coaching is to facilitate learning that manifests itself in behaviour change that subsequently improves potential and performance (Downey, 2003, Bluckert, 2005). Learning can be single-loop, double-loop or transformative (Argyris and Schron, 1978).

Joo (2005:481) suggests that learning in executive coaching focuses on cognitive and affective learning. He defines cognitive learning as 'enhancements in declarative knowledge,

procedural knowledge, strategic or tacit knowledge…' Affective learning is attitudinal, e.g. changes 'in values …. changes in the coachee's motivational disposition, self-efficacy, or goal-setting'. He also suggests that outcomes can be classified as proximate and distal (Joo, 2005: 476). Proximate outcomes refer to more immediate outcomes while distal outcomes tend to refer to organisational performance and career success. Laske (2004) supports the idea that coaching outcomes are often delayed and posits the view that it is important to evaluate the effects of coaching over time.

As Table 1 shows, many research studies report on the benefits that accrue from executive coaching. For example, Stevens's (2005:276) study found that CEOs identified several benefits from coaching: judgements and actions more measured and considered; better choices and decisions giving rise to more of the right actions; better self-restraint in handling power, status, and adulation; more clarity and focus on role responsibility as the anchor for conduct and action; and more personal satisfaction from the role of leader.

Knudson (2002:193) is of the opinion that:
> In addition to achieving the specific agreed-on goals, a rich and successful coaching experience inevitably yields secondary consequences, or what could be called meta-learnings, for the individual being coached. These are the 'learning how to learn' outcomes, which can have both short- and long-term effect on strategy formation and implementation'.

She suggests that these objectives are usually implicit and include the following:

> Accepting and learning from feedback, identifying and solving self-generated problems, improving the executive's ability to observe and process personal data within his or her role and in real time, developing the capacity for identifying and reflecting on implicit assumptions that may be compromising the executive ability to discern existing business opportunities or to accurately assess the firm's progress and success in executing its strategy, valuing and seeking out opposing views and challenges to the executive's position.

Although not using the terms double and triple-loop learning, Knudson suggests that the 'last two abilities in particular enable executives to challenge conventional wisdom, thereby moving from making incremental changes to seeing the opportunities that could enable their firms to redefine the rules of the game', in other words they engage in double-loop learning.

Pedler (1994:149) argues that single-loop learning is the predominant method of learning within organisations (which is not disputed by Argyris, 1977). He approximates single-loop learning to the philosophy of continuous performance improvement and suggests that double-loop learning is an occasional rather than a continuous happening. He asks the question: When is learning radical enough to qualify as double-loop? Problems of succession, the probability of continuing rapid growth, the possibility of environmental change, and the possibility of inner changes could require double-loop learning. He makes the point that an obvious block 'is the extent to which directors and managers are concerned to keep a tight grip' (Pedler, 1994:153).

Senge (1990) argues that learning comes naturally if conditions are right. However, Lines and Ricketts (1994:165) advocate a more problematical view of learning. They suggest that: 'Learning entails giving up old perceptions, comfortable assumptions and states of knowledge or ignorance and draws into question the past approaches, habits and mind-sets of individuals and groups'. (Although they don't refer explicitly to double-loop learning, it is reasonable to infer that their description of the learning process reflects double-loop learning). Laske (2002:570) raises the issue of ontic developmental preconditions and says these are often not taken into account in the literature on learning.

6.6.1 Evaluating and monitoring outcomes

Best practice suggests that executive coaches should evaluate and monitor coaching outcomes. Within the duration of the coaching sessions, on-going evaluation of the success of coaching is discussed. However, because coaching outcomes are often delayed (Laske, 2004) it is important to evaluate the effects of coaching over time. Grant's (2005) survey of ICF members found that only a minority of coaches actually followed up in a structured way and most relied on informal feedback from clients. Kilburg (1997:296) makes the point that evaluation is not a one way process with the coach looking to the client. He suggests that clients 'judge their coaches very realistically and at times harshly'.

6.7 Organisational climate

Executive Coaching is concerned with learning new ways of thinking, new ways of feeling,

and new ways of behaving (Kilburg, 1996, 2002; Sherman and Freas, 2004; Bluckert, 2005; Peterson, 2005). It is reasonable to infer that how an organisation facilitates and encourages learning will impact on executive coaching outcomes. However, measuring these outcomes can be problematical.

Pearn et al. (1994:187) say that the learning organization is likely to display certain features that include 'establishing a climate in which learning in general and from each other is supported and actively encouraged'. Kolb (1996:285) proffers the view that 'learning should be an explicit objective that is pursued as consciously and deliberately as profit or productivity' and that time should be budgeted to enable managers and organisations to reflect on and learn from their experiences. However, he concludes that this rarely happens because of time pressure.

6.7.1 Interpersonal attributes of a supportive climate

Antonacopoulou (1999:217) suggests that the interactions of personal and organizational factors create conditions that affect individuals' receptivity to learning. This view is supported by Sambrook & Stewart (2000) who, in addition to organisational culture, identify senior management commitment, managers' skills and employees' positive or negative attitudes towards learning as factors that influence learning.

In a study into the contextual factors shaping informal workplace learning, Ellinger (2004:87) found that 'an overwhelming influence on informal learning seems to be contingent upon learning-committed leadership/management'. *Inter alia* this commitment manifests itself in managers/leaders who serve as coaches and mentors, who give positive feedback and recognition and who encourage risk-taking.

How leaders behave interpersonally and emotionally has substantial impact on the organisation's work climate, affecting employee morale and individual and organisational performance (Kiel et al., 1996; Kilcaid and Gordick, 2003; Quick and Makic-Frey, 2004). Goleman (1995, 1998, 2002) has written extensively in the area of emotional intelligence and leadership. The ways in which an executive manages these components has implications for collegial relationships. Goleman's position is that while IQ and technical skills are important, 'emotional intelligence is the sine qua non of leadership' (Goleman, 1995) and

that the 'primal job of leadership is emotional' (Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee, 2002:ix). Kets de Vries (2005:62) claims that:

> The emphasis on managing interpersonal relationships has grown as organizational leaders have come to realize that talent and human capital are what differentiates mediocre from high-performing organisations.

6.7.2 Support from HR

Knudson (2002:194) suggests that executive coaching can be extremely effective if used appropriately and she lays a heavy burden on the HR department to ensure its success. She claims that 'HR is in the best position to provide stewardship necessary to ensure effectiveness, integrity, and accountability in the use of executive coaching.' She recommends that HR frames the coaching objectives, identifies particular individuals or set of individuals, selects coaches wisely, draws up strong contracts that produce the clearest possible agreements at the beginning of the coaching process. She urges HR to oversee the whole coaching process, consult with all parties involved regarding the requirements for a successful outcome, ensure alignment with business needs, keep track of goals and expenses incurred, and manage the coaches.

Because measuring Return on Investment from Executive Coaching is difficult, qualitative data is often used to assess its value (Kiel et al, 1996:69, Sherman and Freas 2004:84). Grant (2005:31) cites Turner (2003) as saying that interpersonal concerns such as leadership, authenticity, and self-awareness are typical coaching goals, and the effectiveness of executive coaching in achieving these goals is best measured qualitatively'.

However, executive coaching is a business proposition, thus the organisation must benefit in some recognisable way, perhaps by improved employee satisfaction, 'better labour relations, or progress in other business indicators' (Kiel et al, 1996:69). Bluckert (2004:55) writes about companies becoming more discerning about what they are buying: 'Proof of the effectiveness of coaching will be sought, especially from companies who are investing heavily. They will be increasingly intolerant of anecdotal evidence and want to see a stronger and more robust business case being made for coaching'.

Laske (2004a:1) suggests that the ROI of coaching is twofold: observable (behavioural) and inferable (developmental) and Diedrich (1996:62) reasons that the executive coaching

process should be viewed as a 'value-added' activity that provides practical and tangible benefits for the client organisation. Kilburg, (1997:296) claims that clients judge their coaches 'very realistically and at times harshly' and in the end, it is the client who 'must determine whether the time, energy, and financial invest is worthwhile'.

Sherman and Freas (2004:85) explain why the effects of executive coaching are difficult to measure: 'The essentially human nature of coaching is what makes it work - and also what makes it nearly impossible to quantify'. They go on to say that although bottom line figures may be difficult to quantify, all companies benefit from the qualities that flow from coaching – 'more candour, less denial, richer communication, conscious development of talent, and disciplined leaders who show compassion for people' (Sherman and Freas, 2004:89).

Kincaid and Gordick (2003:48) make the point that the life-cycle of executive development has reached maturity which they say is evidenced by the number and range of suppliers offering executive development products and the niche nature of much of the offerings. Increasingly, 'corporate clients are expending an increasing amount of effort to understand, quantify, and measure differentiators among leadership development approaches' and to correlate approaches with positive financial results. Despite the aspirations to measure ROI on coaching and leadership development in general, serious issues surround the process. Within organisations there are a myriad of variables that contribute to success or failure (Kilburg, 2000:11). Kincaid and Gordick (2003:53) express it well:

> Non-quantifiable independent variables are difficult to causally link to financial dependent variables; financial dependent variables are equally problematic as they often rely on broad metrics (such as stock price, market capitalization, return on assets, etc.) that are inherently challenging to link to any single independent variable. Beyond weak operationalization of both independent and dependent variables, the precise mechanisms or process by which leaders have an impact on the bottom line will vary from person to person and from culture to culture.

However, despite concerns about the difficulty of measuring ROI on leadership development programmes and on executive coaching, practitioners and researchers are urged to engage with this process (Kilburg, 2002; Kilcaid and Gordick, 2003; Feldman and Lankau, 2003; Joo, 2005).

7.0   Conceptual model and research questions

This research study seeks to examine the practice of Executive Coaching from the perspective of the executive. Despite its international popularity, executive coaching is still a relatively recent executive development intervention. As the literature review shows, many authors refer to the limited empirical base underpinning the practice of executive coaching in general, and in particular they call for research that allows the experience of the executive to be heard. Furthermore, almost all published research on executive coaching emanates from North America. While this research study proposes to add to the existing body of knowledge on executive coaching, it will also provide an Irish perspective currently not available.

The research study seeks to explore 3 areas:
1. *How do executives feel about being coached?*
2. *What is the nature of the outcomes they associate with executive coaching?*
3. *What antecedents of executive coaching do they think helped bring about these outcomes?*

Affective responses to executive coaching: The literature suggests that, generally, executives enjoy the coaching process and perceive it to be beneficial. However, enjoying the coaching experience does not necessarily correlate with successful outcomes (Hodgetts, 2002).   This research study seeks to elicit descriptions of how executives feel about being coached, why they feel that way, and whether positive feelings correlate with successful outcomes.

Significant outcomes: The outcomes most consistently associated with effective executive coaching are: increased self-awareness, new learning (single loop, double loop or transformational), modified behaviour, and improved organisational performance.   The research study seeks to explore how executives describe the outcomes of executive coaching and what impact, if any, they perceive these outcomes to have had on their personal lives, on their managerial style, on their career prospects and on their organisational performance.

Significant antecedent variables: As the literature review indicates, five key variables potentially influence the impact of executive coaching: the qualities of the coach, the

characteristics of the executive, the dyadic relationship between coach and executive, the coaching process, and the organisational climate. This research will explore the ways in which executives perceive these variables to have influenced coaching outcomes.

Figure 4 depicts a conceptual model of the variables that impact on executive coaching and the outcomes that are likely to flow from effective coaching.

Figure 4: Conceptual model of the variables that impact on effective executive coaching.

Critical Inputs

Qualities of the Coach:
- Coaching skills
- Business acumen
- Psychological Insight

Qualities of the Executive
- Motivation
- Expectations
- Responsiveness to feedback

Dyadic Relationship
- Mutual respect
- Trust

Coaching Process:
- Contracting
- Challenging feedback

Organisational Support
- Learning climate
- HR and Superior support

IMPACT ON

EXECUTIVE

COACHING

Ideal Outcomes

Positive Affect

Self-Awareness

Learning

Behavioural Change

Organisational Performance

Career Success

The following sections formalise the research propositions and indicate the thrust of the research questions.

7.1   Qualities of the Coach

Talented executive coaches have good coaching skills, business acumen and psychological insight. When coaches are perceived to possess these qualities, executives ready to be coached could be expected to be receptive to the coaching process (Smither et al, 2003, Kets de Vries, 2005, Sherman and Freas, 2004).

Proposition 1:

- Talented coaches (those perceived to have good coaching skills, business acumen and psychological insights) will have a positive impact on an executive's perceptions of the coaching process.

Specific Research Questions:

1. Having experience executive coaching, how would you define it?
2. How would you describe the qualities of the coach?
3. How would you describe the coaching approach adopted by the coach?
4. What, if anything, was most helpful about this approach?
5. How satisfied are you with the coaching experience? Why?
6. How would you rate the coach on coaching skills, business acumen and psychological insights?

7.2 Characteristics of the executive

Executives who are eager to be coached, who are receptive to feedback and willing to change are more likely to experience successful outcomes from coaching (Zeus and Skiffington, 2003, Kiel et al, 1996, Kilburg, 1996).

Proposition 2

- Executive characteristics (level of motivation, expectations, feedback receptivity and propensity to change) will influence perceptions of the coaching experience and affect perceived outcomes.

Specific Research questions:

1. What motivated you to take part in the coaching process?
2. What expectations do you have of coaching outcomes?
3. How committed are you to the process (e.g. carrying out 'home-work', implementing new learning, practising new behaviours)?
4. How would you describe the feedback you got from the coach?
5. Would you describe how you handled this feedback?

7.3   Coach-executive relationship

The executive's perception of the dyadic relationship (compatibility, trust and confidentiality) affects coaching receptivity (Downey, 2003, Hedman, 2003, Peterson, 1996).

Proposition 3

- A good relationship between the coach and the executive will have a positive impact on how executives perceive the coaching process and enhance the likelihood of positive outcomes.

Specific Research Question

1. How would you describe the relationship between you and the coach?
2. How were issues of confidentiality handled?
3. To what extend was trust a significant factor in the relationship

7.4   Coaching process

The coaching process is individual to the coach and the sponsoring organisation. Its various stages, contracting, data collection, feedback, objective setting, coaching, monitoring and evaluating all potentially influence coaching outcomes (Kiel et al, 1996, Saporito, 1996, Kets de Vries, 2005, Sherman and Freas, 2004).

Proposition 4

A well-managed coaching process (tight contracts, specific goals, feedback on progress) will create accountability and encourage behaviour change.

Specific Research questions:

1. How is the coaching agenda established - by the executive, the coach, the HR department, a superior, or a combination of some or all of these?
2. How satisfied was the executive with the agenda?
3. How do executives experience each stage of the process?
4. Are particular stages more helpful/valuable?
5. What is the executive's overall experience of the coaching process?
6. How is reporting and accountability handled?

7.5   Organisational climate

The organisation has a vested interest in executive coaching. Both senior leaders and HR should provide a supportive learning climate for executive coaching (Lines and Ricketts, 1994, Kolb, 1996, Knudson, 2002). Systems and procedure should also support the process (Sherman and Freas, 2004).

Proposition 5

- A high level of support from HR and senior management will encourage executives to apply new learning and experiment with new behaviours.

Specific Research question:

1. In what ways did senior management overtly support the coaching process?
2. Were you aware of support for the coaching process from HR?
3. What was the nature of this support?
4. Could the HR department have done more to facilitate the process?

7.6   Coaching Outcomes

Outcomes can be categorised as proximate or distal (Joo, 2005). Proximate outcomes refer to increased self-awareness, new learning, and new behaviours. Distal outcomes refer to more distant outcomes, e.g. career success and improved organisational performance. The level of coaching dynamics (focusing on work to be done, behaviour, emotions/reflection, interpretative/reframing) will influence the nature of learning outcomes (single-loop, double-loop, or transformative learning).

Proposition 6

- Increased self-awareness and learning that leads to behavioural change and performance improvement will have a positive impact on individual success, and organisational performance.

Specific Research Questions

1. What was the nature of the coaching agenda?
2. What primary outcomes, if any, have been achieved by coaching?
3. Has there been secondary, unanticipated, outcomes?

4. What kinds of learning have taken place as a result of coaching?

5. What specifically do you do differently now as a result of coaching?

6. Have outcomes from coaching impacted on your career prospects?

7. In what ways, if any, has your organisational performance improved as a result of coaching?

8.0 Moving Forward

The foregoing sets of questions across 6 propositions are intended to take the research through its 3 final phases. The following is a very tentative view of how that research will proceed.

8.1 Document 3

- Interview HR Director re coaching program objectives, processes, support mechanisms and evaluation procedures.

- Interview External Coach to understand how the coaching process is conducted, the coaching approach, the background and qualifications of the coach.

- Conduct in-depth exploratory interviews with five executives who are or have been coached. Executives will be encouraged to expand on the specific research questions outlined in the 6 propositions.

It is likely that Kirkpatrick's (1996) typology of outcomes will be used to structure the information on outcomes. His four levels cover:

- **Affective reactions** to the coaching experience (how participants feel about the coaching process

- **Learning outcomes** (taps the amount of knowledge acquired or skills improved as a result of coaching)

- **Behaviour changes** (measures the extent to which participants change their on-the-job behaviours after being coached)

- **Organizational results** (the extent to which executives can quantify organisational performance improvements).

The information from the in-depth interviews will rely on self-report, which is a limitation of in-depth qualitative data. However, themes and patterns may emerge that will add to the existing body of knowledge. Information from the in-depth interviews will be used to inform both the content and the approach to Documents 4 and 5.

8.2   Document 4

- Survey 200 workers, half of whom are managed by executives who have gone through the coaching programme, and half of whom are managed by executives who have not yet been coached. Though disguised, this survey will be designed to identify:

  - Whether being part of the coaching programme is reflected in a coaching style of management, as perceived by workers

  - In what ways a coaching style/lack of a coaching style of management influences workers' attitudes and behaviour.

  - Has self-awareness brought about by coaching helped managers to more accurately gauge their impact on employees.

The instrument to measure employees' perceptions has not yet been chosen. However, Kampa-Kokesch's (2001) use of a leadership style questionnaire is a possible starting point.

8.3   Document 5

Building on the foundations established by Documents 3 and 4, Document 5 is likely to take an action research approach to exploring at a deeper level how executives respond to the coaching process. Qualitative interview using a Critical Incident Technique approach may be used to elicit positive and negative experiences of coaching across the variables that influence the process.

8.4   Conclusions

Executive coaching is a complex process that involves a triangular relationship between a coach, an executive and significant others in the organisation. Coaching practitioners make many claims for the efficacy of executive, and in fairness, the research to date (although limited and perhaps flawed) would appear to support their claims. However, few research studies actually address the experiences of the executive as one side of the triangle. By addressing this deficit, this research study should go some way towards increasing the body of knowledge in the area of executive coaching.

9.0 Reflective Section

Preskill and Torres (1999:101) define reflection as a 'process whereby we carefully consider the knowledge, beliefs, assumptions, actions and processes that influence our behaviour in order to understand our experiences'.   They cite Mezirow (1991) as suggesting that there are 3 categories of reflections: content reflection, process reflection and premise reflection. This latter reflection 'focuses on the underlying assumptions or beliefs we hold…' They go on to explain that reflection while we are engaged in an action 'occurs when we watch ourselves as we act out certain thoughts and actions' (p.102).   This is what Bluckert (2005:177) calls developing our 'observing self' and 'our capacity to be in object mode – an ability to notice one's own experiencing and to be able to helicopter above it to observe and reflect on it'. Reflection for future action attempts to predict how we will use what we have learned from our reflections (Schon, 1991).

While many authors encourage reflexivity (Weick, 1995; Schon, 1991), Skeggs (2002:368) tends to be dismissive of too much introspection and argues that reflexivity is most worthwhile when peers and colleagues can discuss their thoughts with a view to 'always trying to be responsible, accountable and ethical with an awareness of our positioning and partialities'.   While reflection is often viewed as an individual activity the outcomes of reflection are enhanced when done collectively (Preskill and Torres (1999:102).

I found these latter points reassuring as much of the benefit from reflection came as a result of discussions I had with Supervisors, Study Group colleagues, other DBA course participants and with friends who were interested in my research proposal.

I found the two-day April module on different approaches to research very though-provoking. John Frederick's discussion on the nature of knowledge – this notion that there is no such thing as absolute knowledge and that we are always bringing something of ourselves to knowledge - was insightful. When I visited Sally in Wales we talked about this in the context of what preconceptions an interviewer might bring to an interview. This helped to make an abstract discussion concrete.

The evolution of the research proposal has certainly been a process rather than an event. While I have given this topic plenty of reflection, I possibly have not reflected on the quality of this reflection! This is what Weick (1995:4) calls 'a double movement of reflexivity in terms of possessing a point of view on the point of view'. I have now arrived at the third iteration of the research proposal. Much of the learning in this process came from Supervisor feedback. I notice a tendency in myself to spot weaknesses in the research approach, but to bury this analysis and hope for the best. However, comments from Supervisors crystallised my doubts and make me consider revising. At the moment, I am happy with this third iteration.

I had a meeting in mid-May with the HR Director of my sponsoring company. I had previously e-mailed him the (second) research proposal and the meeting was organised to allow us (a) discuss the research and (b) to get input/suggestions that would make the research most worthwhile from his perspective. Reflecting on this meeting, I realised that these objectives were inadequately met. I tended to over-talk and to rationalise the research approach; I never truly sought any quality input from him. Prior to implementing the research for document 3, I intend to rectify this situation.

I have found the critical literature review challenging and satisfying. I notice a definite 'hunter-gatherer' bias – I am happiest tracking down articles and printing them off – reading them takes second place and writing is a poor third! However, I have sourced scholarly articles that were a pleasure to read. What has surprised and pleased me is how a second reading of some of the seminal articles yields so much more now than they did on the first reading. I have become more sensitive to structure and content and appreciate the quality of the comment. The feedback from Supervisors has informed a restructuring of the literature review, which was a very worthwhile learning experience.

Overall, tackling the critical literature review has been a positive experience. I look forward to constructive feedback and to engaging with the research process itself.

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Appendix 1:   Empirical research studies

Appendix 1 provides additional information on a selection of empirical research studies.

Olivero et al, (1997) took an action research approach to investigate the effects of a behavioural approach to executive coaching in a public sector agency. The research involved 31 participants and consisted of two phases. In phase 1, all participants engaged in classroom training that emphasised management competences. Phase 2 involved 8 of the original 31 participants being trained-up as coaches to provide executive coaching training to the remainder of the participants. Overall, the research found that the participants considered coaching to be beneficial both for them and for the Agency. Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson (2001:215) refer to the limitations outlined by Olivero et al, but further comment that parts of the analysis generated fuzzy data in that it was unclear whether the source of some of the findings were the coachees alone, or the coaches.

Judge and Cowell's (1997) survey sought to develop a better understanding of the practice of executive coaching. Sixty coaches participated and answered questions on their qualifications, backgrounds, the nature of the coaching industry (fees and contractual arrangements), and the process and assessments used in coaching. Judge and Cowell also looked at the profile of typical executive coaches, why executives engaged in coaching (valued by the company, but having difficulty in one or two areas; needed to enhance leadership skills; professionals other than executives, including lawyers, doctors, architects, etc.), the issues that dominated coaching sessions (modify interaction style, deal more effectively with change, build trust) and what one should look for and expect in an executive coach. Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson (2001:215) acknowledge the value of the data generated by Judge and Cowell, but question the 'lack of information regarding the methodology, which limits the applicability and generalizability of the findings'. They suggest that the findings should be viewed as 'tentative'.

Gegner's (1997) master's thesis on the nature of executive coaching outcomes is a cross-sectional field study that used both quantitative and qualitative methods. Gegner designed a 52-item survey that asked executives to rate the effectiveness of the coaching process across eight components. The study also considered whether changes in behaviour brought about by

executive coaching were long-term. Gegner hypothesised that executive coaching would induce executives to change to a coaching style of management because they would be more aware and more willing to accept more responsibility for the actions in their organizations. The second part of the survey gathered demographic information on the respondent, on the coach, and on variables associated with the coaching process, e.g. length of contract, frequency of coaching, etc. Gegner also considered whether gender difference between the executive and coach affected the coaching process.

Forty-seven coaches distributed survey materials to 146 executives, 48 of whom completed the survey anonymously. Gegner analysed the surveys using a variety of statistical techniques and generated a considerable amount of data.

Following on from the survey, Gegner then interviewed 25 of the 48 executives to gather further information. The interviews sought to add specific knowledge in five areas: (a) how executives became involved in coaching, (b) how a performance baseline was established prior to coaching and the resultant gains from coaching, (c) what were the greatest obstacles to coaching, (d) what was the most valuable learning experience, (e) whether coaching affected other life areas, and (f) any additional information executives wanted to share (Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson, 2001:216). According to Kampa-Kokesch and White (2002) eight of the executives (32%) interviewed by Gegner estimated an improvement in performance ranging from 10% to 100%. Many of the executives reported learning new skills, growing in self-confidence, and being better able to handle change. Kokesch and White (2002:145) speculate on why Gegner did not obtain a consistent data set from all the executives.

Aside from Gegner's own reservations, Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson (2001:216) take issue with Gegner on three counts: her definition of sustained behavioural change (self-rated and not considered over time), the fact that she did not specify the number of coaches who had been approached to participate and distribute survey materials (potentially limiting the generalizability of the findings), and 'the fact that multivariate analyses were not conducted to determine whether a combination of variables was more effective for enhancing executive performance' (Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson 2001:218).

Hall et al's (1999) study interviewed 75 executives in six different Fortune 100 companies and 15 executive coaches referred by Human Resource personnel as leaders in the executive coaching field. The focus of Hall et al's research was the application of executive coaching, the issues that executives bring to the table, what works and what doesn't work, and the nature of the outcomes experienced by executives. Overall, the respondents rated coaching as very satisfying and identified the main benefits as challenging feedback and useful examples to encourage behavioural change. The most effective coaching was focused on results. Hall et al's research results were presented in three areas: practice, effectiveness, and future directions.   Three categories of concerns about the future emerged from the research: managing the growth and demand for executive coaching, defining program scope and controlling costs, and ethical issues relating to confidentiality and matching coaches and executives.   Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson (2001:218) again suggest that because only limited information was provided on the nature of the sample, on the methodology and on the analysis, Hall et al's (1999) findings should be regarded as tentative.

Laske's (1999) study was concerned with the developmental effects of executive coaching on the executive's professional agenda.   Laske was particularly interested in separating behavioural learning and ontic development. His research question was whether 'changes that occur because of executive coaching are ontic-developmental (transformational) in nature or solely behaviourally adaptive' (Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson, 2001:220). For this qualitative study, Laske conducted two interviews with six executives 'identified by their coaches as experiencing developmental change because of coaching' (Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson, 2001:219). He also interviewed the coaches who provided information about their designated executive's life history, the corporate culture and how this influenced the coaching agenda.

The first interview, called the professional agenda interviews, discussed the executive's present organisational position and functions, focusing on the way the executives envision their work and approach their tasks. Two global questions and numerous follow-up questions shaped the first interview: Laske asked the executives what had significantly changed in the way they performed their organizational functions as a result of coaching and the second question asked the executives what aspects of their professional self-image has most notably been transformed as a result of coaching. Follow-up questions sought to elicit the specific

changes. Information gained in the first interview give Laske insights into the executive's developmental stage.

The second interview was held two weeks later and its focus was to elicit how executives view their world in terms of self-other object relations. According to Laske, this is an appropriate measure for assessing stage-level of adults. His purpose was to understand how executives make sense of their work experiences in relationship to their ontic-developmental stage-level on the basis of Kegan's theory of adult development. Laske used 10 index cards, each of which had one of the following topics written on it: angry, anxious/nervous; success/accomplishment, strong stand/conviction, sad, torn, moved/touched, control, change, and important to me. Laske briefly explained the meaning of each of the 10 topics, gave the executives 5 minutes to think about the topics, and then asked them to write down memories of work experiences based on the topics. Subsequently, Laske and the executive discussed in depth 3 to 5 of the topics most salient to the executive.

According to Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson (2001:220), Laske's analyse of the data sought to identify and link two sets of ontic scores. Data from the first interview was analysed using 'a non-stage score, based on Basseches' (1984) dialectical-schemata framework'; data from the second interview was analysed using a 'stage score, based on Kegan's developmental framework'

In his presentation of the findings, Laske profiled the participants' present professional performance, functioning, change story and ontic developmental score individually and collectively. These profiles were based on the information shared by the coaches and the output from the interviews. Laske referred to his methodology as the Developmental Structure/Process Tool and discussed how this instrument could be used for aiding adult and executive development. Because his research question was not fully answered, Laske proposed two alternative hypotheses:

(a) in order to experience transformative (ontic-developmental) effects of coaching, one must be developmentally ready to experience them and
(b) coaching may have transformative (ontic-developmental) effect, but the developmental level of the coach must also be such that it allows the coach to co-generate these effects in the coaching relationship. (Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson, 2001:220 citing Laske, 1999).

Laske also generated nine empirical findings relating ontic development and an executive's ability to benefit from coaching. One of his findings found that reports of developmental transformation reflect the ontic-developmental stage of the executive more than the impact of coaching. Grant (2005:17) comments that implicitly, Laske's study 'suggests the need for consulting psychologists and organizational psychologists to become expert in adult-developmental assessment'. The sample size (7 executives) and lack of independent corroboration of the interview findings limits its usefulness (Kampa-Kokesch and White (2002:148).

Garman, Whiston and Zlatoper's (2000) study was a content analysis of publications concerning executive coaching. The study reviewed 72 articles on executive coaching published in mainstream and trade management publications between 1991 and 1998. Coding was based on 5 variables: (a) whether they were concerned with externally provided coaching, (b) whether they were generally favourable, unfavourable, or mixed in their evaluation of executive coaching, (c) whether psychologists were specifically mentioned as executive coaching service providers, (d) whether psychologists were specifically mentioned as executive coaching service providers, (d) whether psychologists were regarded as a distinct service provider group, and (e) whether psychologists, if regarded as a distinct group, were distinguished favourably, unfavourably or neutrally. Comment from Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson, (2001:222) suggests that although Garman's research provides quantitative information regarding these variables, it fails to provide qualitative insights into why articles differ. They further suggest that results should be regarded with caution 'because of relatively moderate interrater reliabilities for some codes, as well as a lack of attention to the role of chance agreement in calculating these reliabilities' (Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson, 2001:222).

Garman et al's results suggest that although executive coaching is viewed favourably by 88% of the articles, psychologists in the role of executive coach do not enjoy a perceived advantage. Less than one-third of the articles mentioned psychologists and of those that did, less than half (45%) described psychological training as an asset while 18% of articles directly addressing psychologists described them as potentially harmful. Garman et al (2000) put forward two possible explanations for the unfavourable perceptions of psychologists: some clinical psychologists are working as executive coaches without retraining and some

clients perceive that psychologists use extensive assessments as a means of increasing billable hours.

Luthans and Peterson's (2003) quantitative-descriptive study found that 360-degree feedback, combined with coaching aimed at enhancing self-awareness, may lead to improved self and employee attitudes and eventually even improved organizational performance. The study had 80 participants; 20 managers and 60 workers.

Smither et al's (2003) quantitative-correlational study found that executives who worked with coaches (compared to those who did not), set more specific goals, were more likely to share their feedback and solicit ideas from supervisors (but not peers or subordinates), and had improved performance ratings (based on multi-source feedback).

Kampa-Kokesch's (2001) PhD study considered whether executive coaching as an individually tailored consultation intervention increased leadership ability. In this study she surveyed 50 executives. As cited in Feldman and Lankau (2005:835) 'she compared leadership ratings of 13 executives in the early stages of executive coaching (less than 2 months into the relationship) with that of 37 executives in the later stages of executive coaching….only one significant difference was found in one of the transactional leadership scales. Kampa-Kokesch and White (2002:148) also comment on this study. They consider it the 'most empirically rigorous quantitative study investigating the efficacy of coaching' compared to the other studies reviewed by them, i.e. Gegner, 1997; Hall et al, 1999; Laske, 1999; McGovern, 2001. However, they acknowledge the limitation of an 'exceptionally low response rate among coaches (2%) and the fact that only one instrument was used in the study'. However, the study reported 3 statistically significant and practically meaningful differences on three transformational leadership scales: 'Idealized Influence-Behavior (IIB), measuring charismatic leadership that is behaviourally based and observed by followers; Idealized Influence-Attributed (IIA), measuring charismatic leadership that is attributed to the leader by his/her followers; and Inspirational Motivation (IM), measuring the leader's ability to inspire followers by arousing team spirit and getting them focused on envisioning future organizational goals' (Kampa-Kokesch and White, 2002:149). Executives involved in the study reported considerable benefits from coaching. Six themes are identified: self-awareness and development, performance and outcomes, different perspective, objective person, feedback and support, and relationships. In addition to the benefits from coaching

identified by the respondents, the reasons why executive came to coaching included relationship issues, personal problems interfering with work, changing work environment, development and leadership ability and good reports on coaching from within the organisation.

McGovern et al. (2001), Anderson (2001), and *CompassPoint* (2003) were studies sponsored or undertaken by commercial interests.

McGovern's (2001) study sponsored by the Manchester Consulting Group, used Kirkpatrick's (1996) typology of outcomes to assess coaching effectiveness. Telephone interviews were conducted with one hundred executives who had completed a coaching program with the consulting firm. Where possible, immediate supervisors or human resource representatives in the executives' organisations were surveyed about the program's effectiveness as well. Interviewers used a standardized interview protocol. As cited by Kampa-Kokesch and White (2002:151), executives 'provided a rating of their overall coaching satisfaction, described their coaching goals, and indicated whether their goals had been met'. Executives also estimated 'financial gains to the business and any tangible and intangible benefits' of coaching. They described behavioural changes (what they were doing differently) that flowed from coaching.

Kampa-Kokesch and White (2002:150) consider McGovern's study in some detail. Overall, the results from McGovern's study were extremely positive. They report that executives and stakeholders were both 'overwhelmingly satisfied with the coaching process' and executives identified the coaching relationship and the coaching process as important to the outcomes. Executives reported an improvement in learning competencies categorised as 'enhanced leadership skills (14%), enhanced management skills (18%), increased business agility and credibility (15%), better interpersonal skills (35%), and fostering personal growth (12%). Kampa-Kokesch and White (2002:152) commenting on the limitations of McGovern's study make the point that there was 'no control group, there were no objective outcome criteria employed, the study measured outcomes at a single point in time, and its results may be perceived as self-serving due to its sponsorship by a consulting firm performing the coaching'. Feldman and Lankau (2005:836) comment on the flawed nature of part of McGovern's research, e.g. 'to assess learning the study asked participants and stakeholders to identify their top two development priorities. Unfortunately, this measure of learning

represents 'desired learning but not actual changes in knowledge or skills themselves'. They comment on the difficulties inherent in undertaking quality research on executive coaching.

As cited by Feldman and Lankau (2005:836) both Anderson's (2001) and CompassPoint's (2003) studies of executive coaching outcomes used a self-report methodology to investigate coaching effectiveness. Anderson's study sought to determine the business benefits and return on investment for an executive coaching program involving 43 leadership development participants. Seventy-seven per cent of the respondents indicated that coaching had had a positive effect on at least one of nine business measures. Similarly, CompassPoint's (2003) study found that the executive participants also self-reported positive reactions to coaching, increasing learning and more effective behaviours at work.

Wasylyshyn's (2003) study surveyed 87 executive coaching clients regarding their opinion of important credentials for executive coaches. Wasylyshyn found that the criteria most frequently cited were: graduate training in psychology; experience in, or understanding of, business; established reputation as a coach; listening skills; and professionalism.

Thatch (2002) undertook an action research study to answer the question whether executive coaching improves leadership effectiveness and productivity. The study tracked the progress of 281 executives participating in a six-month coaching and 360-feedback process. The procedure was implemented in 3 phrases over a period of almost 3 years: Participants got 360-feedback before coaching started and checked-back at least three times over six months with direct reports, peers, and managers to discuss the feedback and assess progress on action items'. A mini-360 and email post surveys were administered at six months. The email survey sought feedback on the number of times the executive met with the coach, self-assessed progress, and pros/cons of the process.

The data was analysed by various methods: descriptive statistics for the individual mini 360 post survey data and the first 3 questions on the email survey, plus an element of correlational statistics, and a qualitative methodology of thematic coding and frequency was used to analyse the last two items regarding what worked well and areas for improvement regarding the overall process.

The results suggest that the combination of multi-rater feedback and individual coaching do increase leadership effectiveness up to 60%, according to direct report and peer post-survey feedback. However Thatch suggests that the positive results from the research are hampered by its action research design. No effort was made to isolate variables, since a 'complete process' was being implemented (Thatch, 2002:212). Because no effort was made to separate the impact of 360 feedback from the executive coaching, Thatch wonders would 360 feedback alone have produced positive results and what would happen if the follow-up steps were eliminated from the process.

Paige's (2002) study sought to explore the impact of executive coaching on five executives and their work. The five executives, all at senior level, were nominated by colleagues because of various characteristics, e.g. one was a young progressive member in industry, another was nominated by colleagues due to his foresight and willingness to share information and ideas. Another was nominated due to his motivation and ability to encourage other colleagues. All of the executives had undertaken coaching six to twelve months previously. Paige adopted Guskey's (1998:2-3) summative evaluation stage (an evaluation which is conducted at the completion of a programme or activity). The five critical levels of Guskey's professional development evaluation (1) participants' reactions, (2) participants' learning (3) organisational support and change, (4) participants' use of new knowledge and skills, and (5) learning outcomes were applied to the data emerging from the participant interviews. Paige claims that the key strengths of Guskey's model lies in its ability to follow a staged and systematic evaluation that is thoughtful, intentional and purposeful.

Each participant was interviewed twice. In the first interview Paige explored the participants' stories about the context of their coaching experiences, the relationships that developed with their coaches, and to appraise the impact of the coaching on the participants and their work. The second interview was a follow-up to the extent that specific themes, ideas and concepts arising from the first interview were explored further. Three major themes emerged from the analysis: the context of coaching, the experience of coaching and reflections. Each theme was an umbrella for a number of sub-themes. Paige presents her results under the headings of the themes and Guskey's Model of evaluation.

Overall, the executives sought coaching to hone leadership and management skills. Trust in the coach was a critical issue and executives appreciated quality feedback and being

challenged on 'comfort zones'. They validated the value of executive coaching both at an organizational and at a personal level. Paige lists a range of identified negatives that the executives associated with coaching, however she doesn't say whether these negatives emanated from 1 participant or from 5. Using the levels of Guskey's model of evaluation, participants reacted positively to executive coaching and all felt that both personal and organisational learning occurred during the coaching process. While all participants were using their new knowledge and skills and all acknowledged the impact of executive coaching, all participants 'suggested that they had not necessarily felt organisational support in endeavouring to *immediately* implement the new learning they had acquired through coaching' (Paige, 2005:67).

Grant and Jackon (2004) undertook an executive, workplace and life coaching survey of International Coach Federation members. A total of 2,529 coaches responded to an online survey conducted in 2003 – a 41.1% response rate. The survey focused on six broad areas relating to (a) coaching professionalism, (b) respondents' coaching career (c) coaching processes used (telephone versus face-to-face coaching, length of session, etc.), (d) coaching practice (number of clients, fees, etc.), (e) client profiles (life coaching or executive coaching) and (f) demographics. Seventy-six multiple choice and qualitative short answer questions formed the basis of the survey, which took between 15 and 20 minutes to complete. Data on credentialing, prior professional background, and current coach practice was collected.

Grant and Jackson found that the coaches had overwhelmingly graduated from, or had been enrolled in, a coach training program and virtually all had come to professional coaching from a prior professional background. The authors suggest that coaching is emerging as a new cross-disciplinary profession. Backgrounds included 'business consultancy, management, teaching, workplace training, learning and development, clinical, organisational and sports psychology, among others'. Eighty-three percent of respondents had a business background, as against 9 per cent with psychology/ counselling as prior careers. However, most coaches are double-jobbing; only 13.1% of coaches do not engage in any other occupation. Almost 40% of respondents claimed to engage in corporate coaching. Commenting on the detailed findings from this survey are beyond the scope of this brief review, one interesting result found that only 31.8% of coaches use client satisfaction surveys 'often'. Based on the finding of the survey, Grant and Jackon make recommendations

regarding future research and urge professional coaching bodies to actively lobby state colleges and universities to offer doctorate programs in coaching.

Blow's (2005) study asked the question: Can coaching strategies help experts share expertise? It began from the premise that much of what experts do and how they do it stems from their unconscious competence and that this internalised knowledge will remain with the individuals alone. Nineteen subjects were involved in the study: 6 experienced coaches, 6 senior executives who had received coaching in the past, and 7 experts from various disciplines who had never been formally coached as part of their work. Blow describes her methodology as qualitative and phenomenological, underpinned by reflective action research. Information from experts and coaches was gathered by semi-structured interview face-to-face or over the telephone; coachees answered an e-mail questionnaire. Blow explored the data using a (complex) phenomenology approach described by Moustakas (1994). In terms of coaching practice (although much of the article's discussion is around how experts use the word 'intuition'), Blow contends that the data indicate a role for coaches to help experts describe their intuitive understanding. 'That role has two aspects: to help experts understand the nature of their own intuitive insight and to think through the implications of how to communicate that insight to others' (p.7). Excerpts from the interviews tended to focus on how experts dealt with the transfer of their expertise. I found Blow's presentation of the data confounded by an on-going discussion that made it difficult to separate fact from inference.

Stevens, (2005) interviewed 7 top management executives from 4 major business areas to ascertain their views and perspectives on executive coaching. Three of these executives continue to lead their respective organisations and 4 have retired into post-career roles. Stevens conducted taped telephone interviews. Each taped telephone interview was conducted in an informal, conversational manner, guided by 11 pre-constructed questions. Each executive had received the interview questions well in advance of the telephone interviews and 'each was encouraged to use the questions to help stimulate and guide his or her reflections and thoughts but not to be limited by them'. Stevens's findings were categorised into 11 themes and presented as quotes from participants. The themes were: Definition of executive coaching; what might prompt an executive to engage in a coaching relationship? What are the essential ingredients that underlie an effective engagement? For you, what has been most useful from executive coaching? What are the pitfalls that executives should keep in mind when considering whether or not to participate in an

executive coaching relationship? What is the nature and scope of confidentiality in an executive coaching engagement? What should the nature and extent of feedback to the organization be when executives are engaged in executive coaching? What parameters or conditions need to be considered when executives from the same team are engaged in executive coaching? How important is it that an executive coach be trained in business/psychology/human resources or in some discipline, and why? How critical is it that an executive coach be someone from outside the organization versus someone from within the organisation, and why? Stevens summarises the responses from the 11 themes, and concludes that all the participants considered executive coaching to be a 'unique process' that helps them to better meet their roles and responsibilities.

Document 3:

Executive Coaching: Critical Inputs and Ideal Outcomes

1.0   Introduction

1.1   An interest in Executive Coaching

My interest in Executive Coaching as a research study stems from an academic interest in coaching as a skill set for managers. As part of a course on Executive Coaching, I experienced being coached and I also got the opportunity to practise coaching. This whetted my appetite to better understand the process of coaching and the impact it might have on senior executives. Through the goodwill of a mutual acquaintance, I was fortunate to be put in touch with the HR Director of an Irish company who had decided to use executive coaching as a strategic development technique. He has been most supportive and has facilitated my access to a number of executives who have been coached. They in turn have been most accommodating with their views and their time.

1.2   Respecting confidentiality

Because coaching is such a personal experience and confidentiality is intrinsic to the process, I have chosen to disguise the name of the company and allocate fictitious names to all those interviewed.

1.3   The research focus for document 3

The focus of my research interest has shifted somewhat since the research proposal. Initially I was interested to uncover the barriers and facilitators of executive coaching from the executive's perspective. However, on foot of insights from the critical literature review, my research is now concerned with the impact that executive coaching has on executives, what they perceive as the outcomes of coaching and the antecedents of successful outcomes.

The research seeks to uncover executives' perceptions in three key areas::

1) How do executives interpret the experience of executive coaching?
2) What outcomes do executives associate with coaching?
3) What antecedents are perceived to be most significant in influencing coaching outcomes?

1.4   The nature of executive coaching

Executive coaching is a relatively new business practice that had its genesis in the 1980s, became popular in the 1990s and is presently enjoying an explosion in growth across 3 continents (Chartered Institute of Personnel Development (CIPD), 2004; Grant and Jackon, 2005; International Coach Federation (ICF), 2006). However, anecdotal evidence suggests that executive coaching is still at an embryonic stage in Ireland.

Executive coaching is an intervention that focuses on improving the performance of senior executive in organisations (Kilburg, 2004:203). It is also seen as a strategic developmental tool for success planning and talent retention (Kilburg, 2000) and is often used to complement executive development programmes (Judge and Cowell, 1997:71). This one-on-one relationship between a coach external to the organisation and the executive is describes as a customised process that is 'focused and relevant to the concerns of the executive and the organisation' (Tobias, 1996:87). While the concept is not un-problematical (Berglas, 2002; Sherman and Freas, 2004), executive coaching is generally seen as beneficial (Kilburg, 1996, 2004; Judge and Cowell, 1997; Orenstein, 2002; Kets de Vries, 2005), although there is concern about the unregulated nature of providers (Brotman et al., 1998; Berglas, 2002; Sherman and Freas, 2004).

There is wide agreement that executive coaching is chiefly concerned with developing self-awareness, and enhancing learning ability with a view to performance improvement (Kilburg, 1996; Joo, 2005). It is now acknowledged that how leaders behave interpersonally and emotionally has substantial impact on the organisation's work climate, affecting employee morale and individual and organisational performance (Kiel et al., 1996; Kilcaid and Gordick, 2003; Quick and Makic-Frey, 2004). Goleman contends that while IQ and technical skills are important, 'emotional intelligence is the sine qua non of leadership' (Goleman, 1995) and that the 'primal job of leadership is emotional' (Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee, 2002:ix).

Executive coaching is seen as a business proposition that must benefit the organisation in some way (Kiel et al, 1996:69). Laske (2004:1) suggests that the ROI of coaching is twofold: observable (behavioural) and inferable (developmental) and Diedrich (1996:62) reasons that the executive coaching process should be viewed as a 'value-added' activity that provides practical and tangible benefits for the client organisation. Because measuring

Return on Investment from Executive Coaching is difficult, qualitative data is often used to assess its value (Kiel et al, 1996:69, Sherman and Freas 2004:84).

Potentially, many factors appear to affect the success or failure of executive coaching (Stern, 2004:161). Writers on executive coaching refer to both the expertise and the personal characteristics of the coach as crucial ingredients in the mix of executive coaching (Giglio et al., 1998, Kets de Vries, 2005; Stevens, 2005). The quality of the coaching relationship also receives extensive coverage in the literature and revolves around mutual respect, trust, and chemistry (Peterson, 1996:79; Laske,1999:3; Kilburg, 1997:293; Downey, 2003:136; Sherman and Freas, 2004:87). The person-centred approach, empathic, non-judgmental and working from the client's frame of reference is thought to provide a solid foundation for trust (Peterson, 1996, Hedman, 2003,).

The coachability of the client is a recurring theme through the literature. *Inter alia*, this theme considers executive motivation (Sherman and Freas (2004:87), personality traits that might impede the process (Kiel et al, 1996:68; Kilburg, 1997) and strategies of passive and active resistance that executives can bring to sabotage the process (Zeus and Skiffington, 2000:202). One of the themes that emerged from Steven's research (2005:276) is that executives need to engage willingly in the coaching process and that 'demanding or forcing them to engage in executive coaching diminishes the potential value of it'. Stages in the coaching process involves contracting with the organisation and the client, data gathering and feedback, developing a coaching agenda, engaging in coaching, and monitoring and evaluating progress. Facets of the coaching process also influence coaching outcomes (Bluckert, 2006) as does support from Human Resource Departments and from direct superiors (Sherman and Freas, 2004).

Rationale for research

While the volume of published articles on executive coaching is considerable, there is a paucity of rigorous empirical research underpinning the practice of executive coaching (Kilburg, 1996, 2004; Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson, 2001; Feldman and Lankau, 2005; Joo, 2005). Much of the published material on executive coaching takes a practitioner perspective and very little quality research has been conducted on how executives experience coaching (Kilburg, 2004; Lowman, 2005; Stevens, 2005).

Kilburg (1996:134) contends that 'what actually happens in coaching engagements remains quite mysterious' He makes a call for more case studies that illuminate what practitioners actually do with their clients. After a review of the executive coaching literature, Feldman and Lankau (2005:845) conclude that there is something of a 'black-box' feel about much of the current coaching literature 'we know it can work but often do not know why it works or how it could work even better'.   Furthermore, the extant research appears to emanate mainly from the United States of America and from Australia. Thus this research while adding to the body of knowledge on executive coaching in general, will mark a first attempt at gauging the perceptions of Irish executives to an executive coaching process.   For the C&C Group, already engaged in the coaching process and partners in this research,   the research findings will deepen the HR Director's understanding of the executive coaching intervention; for other companies contemplating executive coaching as an executive development intervention, the research results may prove insightful.

1.6   Conceptual model and research questions:

The research study seeks to explore 3 areas:

4. *How do executives feel about being coached?*
5. *What is the nature of the outcomes they associate with executive coaching?*
6. *What antecedents of executive coaching do they think helped bring about these outcomes?*

Five key variables potentially influence the impact of executive coaching: the qualities of the coach, the characteristics of the executive, the dyadic relationship between coach and executive, the coaching process, and the organisational climate. This research will explore the ways in which executives perceive these variables to have influenced coaching outcomes. The research study also seeks to explore how executives describe the outcomes of executive coaching and what impact, if any, they perceive these outcomes to have had on their personal lives, on their managerial style, on their career prospects and on their organisational performance. The conceptual model, Figure 1: represents this diagrammatically.

Figure 1: Conceptual model of the variables that impact on effective executive coaching.

Critical Inputs

Qualities of the Coach:
- Coaching skills
- Business acumen
- Psychological Insight

Qualities of the Executive
- Motivation
- Expectations
- Responsiveness to feedback

Dyadic Relationship
- Mutual respect
- Trust

Coaching Process:
- Contracting
- Challenging feedback

Organisational Support
- Learning climate
- HR and Superior support

IMPACT ON

EXECUTIVE

COACHING

Ideal Outcomes

Positive Affect

Self-Awareness
▼
Learning
▼
Behavioural Change
▼
Organisational Performance
▼
Career Success

The following research propositions underpin this study:

Proposition 1:

- Talented coaches (those perceived to have good coaching skills, business acumen and psychological insights) will have a positive impact on an executive's perceptions of the coaching process.

Proposition 2

- Executive characteristics (level of motivation, expectations, feedback receptivity and propensity to change) will influence perceptions of the coaching experience and affect perceived outcomes.

Proposition 3

- A good relationship between the coach and the executive will have a positive impact on how executives perceive the coaching process.

Proposition 4

- Increased self-awareness and learning that leads to behavioural change and performance improvement will have a positive impact on individual success, and organisational performance.

Proposition 5

- A well-managed coaching process (tight contracts, specific goals, feedback on progress) will create accountability and encourage behaviour change.

Proposition 6

- A high level of support from HR and senior management will encourage executives to apply new learning and experiment with new behaviours.

Structure of the document

Section 2 provides a brief overview of the changes that have taken place in the company and describes the rationale for introducing executive coaching into the organisation. The information contained in this section comes from the interview with the HR Director.

Section 3 outlines the methodological choices on offer to a researcher and discusses their pros and cons. It discusses the implications of choosing an interpretative approach and looks at the trade-offs involved in this choice.

Section 4 describes the methods used to gather data and the practical issues of access and choosing respondents. Political and ethical questions that impinged on the research are considered.

Section 5 is concerned with an analysis of the findings. This section will consider the ways in which the findings link back to the literature.

Section 6 will provide a summary overview of the research study and will consider what assertions it be possible to make

Section 7 is a reflective critique of what it has meant to me to engage in this research.

2.0   Context

2.1   Brief Company Profile

C&C Group Plc can trace its origins back 150 years. It is an Irish based company and one of the largest manufacturers, marketers and distributors of its product category in Ireland. C&C Group has its headquarters in Dublin; it employs approximately 2,000 people.

In the last six years, the company has experienced tremendous change. Following a venture capital funded management buyout in 1999, the directors decided to prepare to list the company on the Irish and London Stock Exchanges. This decision was the catalyst for change within the organisation. Within 2 years the company had appointed a Strategic Director (2000), and a HR Director (2001) with a strategic remit. In 2002 a new Managing Director was appointed. Collectively, a large part of their brief was to prepare for a public listing and to ensure that the company would thrive under the spot-light of going and being Public. In May 2004 the company was listed on the Irish and London Stock Exchanges. Since then, the company has shed some of its business interests and restructured the Group into 3 divisions.

Developing Business Leaders

The Group Human Resources Director (Vincent) has responsibility for Group-wide human resource policies and strategy, and for performance and management training. The main objective of his job is to enhance our overall business performance by bringing C&C Group's People Plan into line with best practice. One of the key focuses of the People Plan is '*leadership, succession and talent retention*' and a critical part of this plan was the introduction of executive coaching for all senior managers as part of their personal development plan.

Prior to the new HR vision, the company approach has been described as paternalistic and traditional. While the company did invest in training, it had a *very poor history of developing people for leaders*, mainly the focus was on developing functional positions, with no focus on business leaders, and no real HR strategy. Vincent's remit is to focus on the top teams with a view to developing a cadre of potential business leaders. He is part of a *People Matter Group* which consists of the top 11 senior executives who meet on '*a people agenda to agree strategy and approve operational plans*'. So far, these plans have been successful. A comparative staff morale survey by an outside company showed a 20% improvement in the

last 3 years – this helped silence some of the critics who *'don't believe in all these people policies'*.

Some of the people difficulties that the company is experiencing could be laid at the door of success. Since going public, the company had multiplied its value 7 times in four years. *We have gone from the 2nd divisions into the 1st division … and this is quite a leap for some people to make*. The People Matter Group decided that modern techniques such as executive coaching were needed to develop business leaders and that these techniques would focus on developing interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence.

3.0   Methodology

3.1   Introduction

This section considers the various methodologies open to management researchers.   The requirements of the DBA specify that the research topic be investigated using multiple research perspectives and thus it is useful to consider the pros and cons of alternative approaches.   However, because executive coaching is a development intervention that involves a dyadic relationship between the executive and his/her coach, it is likely to be a very personal, subjective experience for both parties, best suited to an interpretivist approach.

Saunders (2003:83) uses the analogy of peeling an onion to capture the complexity and multi-layered aspects of management research (See Figure 2 overleaf).   As figure 2 illustrates, management research is concerned with three philosophical views or 3 different paradigms: positivism, realism and phenomenology (alternatively described as interpretivism). Denzin and Lincoln (2000:156) define a paradigm as 'a basic set of beliefs that guide action'.   They explain that:

> Paradigms deal with first principles, or ultimates.   They are human constructions.   They define the world view of the researcher-as-interpretive *bricoleur.*

Thus, depending on which philosophy is favoured, different research approaches of deduction (associated with positivism) and induction (associated with phenomenology) will dominate. Realism tends to occupy the middle ground.   The possible research strategies and the time horizons represented in Figure 2 illustrate the approach most likely to be favoured by researchers in each of the traditions.   Data collection methods are common to all research philosophies, although interviews and questionnaires are most commonly associated with an interpretivist approach.

Figure 2:

Differing Approaches to Research

The Research Process 'Onion' – Saunders et al 2ⁿᵈ Ed Fig 4.1 p85.
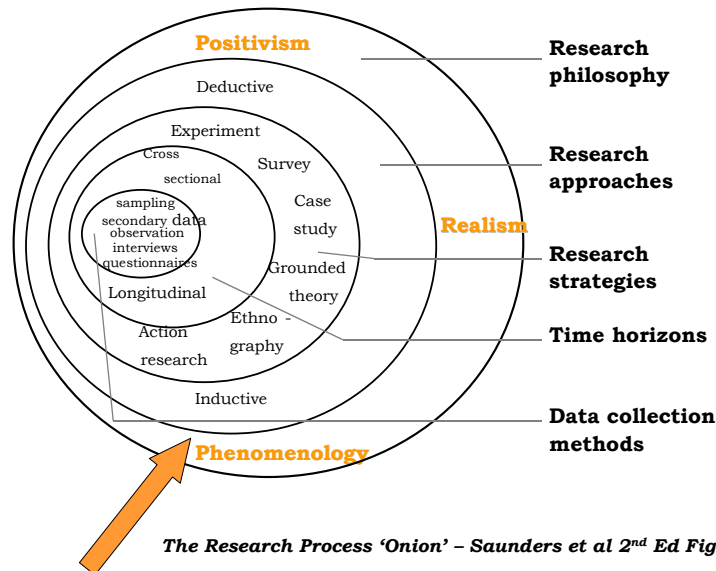
3.2   Philosophical debate

Denzin and Lincoln lay the ground for an understanding of the debate about opposing paradigms. The contend that 'a paradigm encompasses four concepts: ethics (axiology), epistemology, ontology and methodology'.   They offer the following explanation:

> Eithics asks, how will I be a moral person in the world?
> Epistemology asks, How do I know the world? What is the
> relationship between the enquirer and the known?   Every
> epistemology…implies an ethical-moral stance toward the world
> and the self of the researcher. Ontology raises basic questions
> about the nature of reality and the nature of the human being in the
> world.   Methodology focuses on the best means for gaining
> knowledge about the world.
> (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000:157)

Lincoln and Guba elaborate on the role of ethics and values in the research process. They describe the ways in which ***axiology*** (values and beliefs) feed into the inquiry process via:

> choice of the problem, choice of paradigm to guide the
> problem, choice of theoretical framework, choice of major
> data-gathering and date-analytic methods, choice of context,
> treatment of values already resident within the context and
> choice of formats(s) for presenting findings.
> (Lincoln and Guba, 2000: 169)

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Different views on the nature of knowledge and how knowledge is developed is known as *epistemology*. The Concise Oxford English Dictionary (2004:480) defines epistemology as a philosophy concerned with 'the theory of knowledge, especially with regard to its methods, validity, and scope'. Bryman & Bell (2003:13) offer a simple explanation of epistemology, they suggest that 'An epistemological issue concerns the question of what is (or should) be regarded as acceptable knowledge in a discipline'. How this question is answered affects the approach taken to research (Saunders et al., 2003:83). Much is written about the extent to which the philosophies of positivism and interpretivism are at odds about the nature of epistemology or what constitutes knowledge (Brannick & Roche, 1997; Bryman & Bell, 2003; Easterby-Smith et al, 1991). Morgan and Smircich claim that 'the ground for knowledge in each of these perspectives is different because the fundamental conceptions of social reality to which the proponents of each position subscribe are poles apart'. They suggest that the different world views are reflected in the metaphors used to describe the polar positions:

> The epistemology of extreme positivism, derived from a mechanical conception of the universe as a closed structure, gives way to an epistemology emphasizing the need to understand process and change. It is a change in epistemology that reflects a move away from a conception of the world as a machine, or closed system, to a conception of the world as an organism, an open system.
>
> (Morgan and Smircich,1980:493)

Gill and Johnson (1991:139) argue that if there are any criteria available for evaluating knowledge, these criteria do not relate to 'some quest for absolute knowledge'. They quote Morgan (1983:393) as saying that the criteria relate to 'the way knowledge serves to guide and shape ourselves as human beings – to the consequences of knowledge, in the sense of what knowledge does to and for humans'. The following offers a brief exposition of different philosophical positions.

Positivism argues that knowledge is external and objective and is only significant when based on observations of external reality. It posits the view that knowledge is based on certainty; as Morgan & Smircich (1980:493) express it positivism encourages a concern for 'an 'objective' form of knowledge that specifies the precise nature of laws, regularities, and relationships

among phenomena measured in terms of social 'facts''. This scientific world view argues that the laws that pertain to natural sciences should equally apply to the social world and that 'the role of research is to test theories and to provide material for the development of laws'(Morgan & Smircich, 1980:493). Easterby-Smith *et al.* (1991:22) explain that the key idea of positivism 'is that the social world exists externally, and that its properties should be measured through objective methods, rather than being inferred subjectively through sensation, reflection or intuition'. Saunders *et al* (2003) cite Remenyi (1998:32) as portraying the philosophical approach of positivism in terms of the researcher being independent of and neither affecting nor being affected by the ongoing research. They also suggest that in the positivist tradition the researcher is an objective analyst who uses a highly structured methodology and quantifiable observations that lend themselves to statistical analysis.

Interpretivism takes the view that knowledge is socially constructed and that both researcher and subjects influence the outcomes of research (Easterby-Smith *et al.,*1991; Saunders, 2003; Fisher, 2004; Stake, 1995). Bryman & Bell (2003:16) explain phenomenology as 'a philosophy that is concerned with how individuals make sense of the world around them' and how a 'philosopher should bracket out preconceptions in his/her grasp of that world'. Phenomenology and interpretative research would appear to be synonymous terms to the extent that interpretative research is concerned with the study of the social world. Morgan (1990:18) expresses it thus:

> The interpretive paradigm directly challenges the preoccupation with certainty that characterizes the functionalist perspective, showing that order in the social world, however real in surface appearance, rests on a precarious, socially-constructed web of symbolic relationships that are continuously negotiated, renegotiated, affirmed or changed.

Interpretivist research has been classified as 'gnostic' by Fisher (2004:18) because it rejects orthodox or standard interpretations of topics and emphasises 'plurality, relativism and complexity', which are all characteristics of the social world.

Bryman & Bell, (2003:16) argue that the study of the social world is different from the study of the natural world and that it 'requires a different logic of research procedure, one that reflects the distinctiveness of humans as against the natural order'. They credit the work of

Schutz, (written in the 1940s, but only translated from German in the 1960s) as marking the fact that, in the natural world, order means nothing to molecules, but that in the social world, people act on the basis of the meaning they attribute to their own actions and to the actions of others. Easterby-Smith *et al.*(1991:24) refer to this as a new paradigm (a competing set of beliefs and underlying assumptions) that arose during the mid-1900s 'in reaction to application of positivism to the social sciences'. This new paradigm posited the view 'that the world and 'reality' are not objective and exterior, but that they are socially constructed and given meaning by people'. Easterby-Smith *et al.* argue that this 'phenomenology' is 'not logically derived from positivism in any way'.

Morgan and Smircich cite Husserl (1962) as challenging the whole notion of 'objective' knowledge that 'can be specified and transmitted in a tangible form'. Husserl seems to suggest that knowledge is a reflection of the personal frame of reference that a scientist puts on the external world, 'which is mistakenly perceived as lying in the external and separate realm' (Morgan and Smircich,1980:493).

In order to grasp the meanings of a person's behaviour, the phenomenologist must take an empathic approach (a Rogerian approach?) and attempt to see things from that person's point of view. Thus the researcher's task is to 'try to understand and explain why people have different experiences, rather than search for external causes and fundamental laws to explain their behaviour' (Easterby-Smith *et al.* 1991:24). Denzin and Lincoln (2000:158) describe it as studying the world from the point of view of the interacting individual.

Realism, which could be interpreted as taking a middle ground, favours a social construction theory but holds that an external reality exists independent of human thoughts and beliefs, thus 'Social objects or phenomena ….will affect the way in which these people perceive their world, whether they are aware of these forces or not' (Saunders et al. 2003:85).

These philosophical differences are reflected in questions of social ontology. **Social ontology** is concerned with whether social entities 'can and should be considered objective entities that have a reality external to social actors, or whether they can and should be considered social constructions built up from the perceptions and actions of social actors' (Bryman & Bell, 2003:19). These apparently polar positions are referred to as objectivism and constructionism by Bryman and Bell (2003) and are depicted as a continuum of

epistemological and ontological assumptions by Morgan & Smircich (1980:491) who offer the view that the different assumptions regarding ontology and human nature and the 'different world views they reflect imply different grounds for knowledge about the social world' (Morgan & Smircich, 1980:493). The notion of subjectivism/constructionism emphasises the individualism of people's social worlds and supports the view that 'social phenomena and categories are social constructions' (Bryman & Bell, 2003:19). 'Users of this paradigm are oriented to the production of reconstructed understanding of the social world' (Denzin and Lincoln, 2000:158).

3.3   Paradigm incommensurability

As has been established, these different paradigms reflect researchers underlying beliefs and assumptions about the nature of research. Bryman & Bell (2003:22) make the point that by their nature paradigms are incommensurable, that is **'**they are inconsistent with each other because of their divergent assumptions and methods'. Hazzard (1990) refers to Kuhn's view that: 'Rival paradigms cut up the world with different standards, different assumptions, different *language'*. Kuhn argues that 'the normal-scientific tradition that emerges from a scientific revolution is not only incompatible but often actually incommensurable with that which has gone before' (Hazzard, 1990:221). Not everyone agrees with these views. Martin (1990:30) arguing for 'methodological chameleons' suggests that researchers:

> 'could learn to be tolerant of different methods, coming to prize and encourage divergent conclusions that emerge from divergent method choices. …All too often, methodologies are discussed as if they were scientific religions – each one labelling itself the one true faith'.

Bryman & Bell suggest that the social sciences are in the happy position of being designated as 'pre-paradigmatic', in that no one paradigm dominates and researchers in the social sciences, such as management researchers, are free to choose the paradigm that best reflects their beliefs and facilitates their current research. They support the point made by Denzin and Lincoln (2000) that the choice of paradigm 'has implications for the design of the research and the data collection approach that will be taken' (Bryman & Bell, 2003:24).

3.4 The research approach

Choosing a research approach entails making a decision about the design of the research. Several possibilities exist. Figure 3, an adapted version of Easterby-Smith *et al's* (1991:33) '*Summary of the choices facing the researcher*, attempts to capture the key design decisions facing a researcher:

Figure 3: Summary of the choices facing the researcher

Positivist approach	vs	Interpretivist approach
Deductive approach	vs	Inductive approach
Quantitative Research	vs	Qualitative research
Researcher is independent	vs	Researcher is involved
Large Samples	vs	Small numbers
Testing theories	vs	Generating theories
Experimental design	vs	Fieldwork methods

Neither research approach is intrinsically 'better' than the other and the choice of approach is driven by the nature of the research question and by the beliefs and underlying assumptions held by the researcher (Saunders et al, 2003:85). While Figure 3 would suggest clear-cut dichotomies exist, several authors argue against such a simplistic approach and argue for a multiple approach perspective. In practice research approaches tend to mingle, and proponents of each approach happily dip into the common pool of research strategies. Saunders et al (2003:88) argues that not only is it 'perfectly possible to combine approaches within the same piece of research', but in their experience 'it is often advantageous to do so'. This methodological pluralism is a form of 'methodological

triangulation' thought to get over the bias inherent in a single-method approach (Gill and Johnson, 1991:127). Lincoln and Guba (2000:178) go further and argue that even a collection of methods is unlikely to provide the 'royal road to ultimate knowledge'.

A ***deductive approach*** requires a developed theory and hypothesis capable of being tested. ***An inductive approach*** is more fluid – data is collected and theory falls out of the data analysis. Saunders et al, (2003:85) suggest that 'Insofar as it is useful to attach these approaches to the different research philosophies, the deductive approach owes more to positivism and the inductive approach to interpretivism', although they believe 'that such

labelling is potentially misleading and of no practical value'. While quantitative research is associated with the deductive/positivist approach, and qualitative research is associated with the interpretivist/inductive approach, Bryman and Bell (2003:12-13) support Saunders et al's position when they suggest that 'deductive and inductive strategies are possibly better thought of as tendencies rather than as hard and fast distinctions' and Morgan and Smircich (1980:491) argue 'that the dichotomy between quantitative and qualitative methods is a rough and oversimplified one'.

Stake (1995:36) makes the point that both qualitative and quantitative research have common areas of interest, although the emphasis may be different. He argues that despite different approaches, qualitative studies consider 'enumeration and recognition of differences-in-amount' to be important, and quantitative studies consider 'natural-language description and researcher interpretation' to be significant. Brannick (1997:2) supports this view and argues that:

> A clearer and more accurate portrayal of the differences is that quantitative research typically focuses on the links among a number of clearly defined and measured attributes involving many cases, while qualitative research focuses on the links among many contextualised attributes involving relatively few cases. The two kinds of research, although somewhat different in orientation, are similar in that both involve a systematic interplay between ideas and evidence.

Stake, (1995:8) cites Fred Erickson, whom he refers to as a 'well regarded writer on qualitative studies' as defining 'qualitative work as field study where the key interpretations to be pursued were not the researcher's interpretations but those of the people being studied'. According to Stake, Erickson claims that the most distinctive characteristic of qualitative inquiry is its emphasis on interpretation. Drawing a distinction between qualitative and quantitative research, Stake highlights three major differences in emphasis:

> (1) the distinction between explanation and understanding as the purpose of inquiry; (2) the distinction between a personal and impersonal role for the researcher, and (3) a distinction between knowledge discovered and knowledge constructed.
>
> (Stake, 1995:37)

Different research approaches require researchers to adopt different roles. While all research needs interpretation, quantitative designs tend to 'limit the role of personal interpretation for

that period between the time the research design is set and the time the data are collected and analysed statistically', which is sometimes referred to as a 'value-free' period (Stake, 1995:41). On the other hand, the role of the qualitative researcher is relatively fluid and unrestricted. Good qualitative research will not be rigidly fixed on a particular research question, but will be willing to modify and adjust the research question in response to the interpretation of incoming information. Furthermore, quantitative research designs seek to operationalise and control the dependent variables in contrast to qualitative research where the 'dependent variables are experientially rather than operationally defined', research situations are fluid, and researchers are open to being flexible and responsive to unexpected relationships (Stake, 1995:41/42). As cited by Stake (1995:42), Erickson's summary of the nature of qualitative research includes comments on the role of the qualitative researcher. He argues that:

> Given the intense interaction of the researcher with persons in the field and elsewhere, given a constructivist orientation to knowledge, given the attention to participant intentionality and sense of self, however descriptive the report, the researcher ultimately comes to offer a personal view.   (Stake, 1995:42)

Stake (1995:38-39) credits Finnish philosopher Georg Henrik Von Wright with distinguishing explanation and understanding as epistemologically different – they seek different kinds of knowledge. 'Explanation and control are the remit of the quantitative researcher, while understanding, which has a psychological aspect to it, is better orientated towards a qualitative approach'. Wright refers to the empathic nature of qualitative research and the importance of providing rich descriptions that 'convey to the reader what experience itself would convey' thus drawing the qualitative research into a personal, subjective and interpretative role that facilitates the construction of knowledge.

3.5   My perspective

The DBA requires students to take multiple research perspectives across Documents 3 and 4. The chance to experience the characteristics of the two dominant paradigms, illustrated in Figure 4 will no doubt be both insightful and enriching. Furthermore as Martin (1990:30) contends, multiple perspective will offer the possibility of a richer research outcome. The foregoing discussion makes the point that management research is not tied into either the positivist or interpretivist paradigm. As the critical literature review on executive coaching

(Document 2) illustrates, researchers may take either a positivist or interpretivist approach, based on the nature of their research and the questions they want answered; some researchers appeared to take multiple perspectives, for example, Gegner, (1997) and Kampa-Kokesch (2001).

While document 3 requires an interpretivist approach, the nature of my research question fits with this approach.   I would argue that my study of executive coaching is trying to 'understand and explain why people have different experiences, rather than search for external causes and fundamental laws to explain their behaviour' (Easterby-Smith et al, 1991:24).   This qualitative approach emphasises interpretation and will provide rich descriptions of how executives experienced the coaching process.   Taking this socially constructed view of the world makes it inevitable that my role as researcher will impinge on the research process.   Even the formulation of questions for a semi-structured interview guides the nature and direction of the discussion and of necessity brings researcher preconceptions to the interview process.   Following from these contentions, it seems reasonable to suggest that constructionism is the appropriate social ontology perspective for document 3.   Taking a constructionist approach to understanding executive coaching acknowledges the idiosyncratic nature of people's responses to 'social reality' and develops an appreciation that each executive shapes his/her own reality.

4.0   Methods

As Figure 2 illustrates, particular methods tend to be associated with the philosophies of either positivism or interpretivism.   Both experiments and surveys tend towards the positivist/ quantitative end of the spectrum, case study occupies a middle ground and grounded theory, ethnography and action research collectively incline towards the phenomenological/qualitative end of the spectrum.   Choosing a research design entails making decisions and 'each decision made is affected by, and in turn, influences every other decision' (Brannick, 1997:9). While no method is intrinsically better than any other, it is important to choose the method that facilitates the research requirement. Gill and Johnson cite Trow (1957:33) as maintaining that the problem under investigation properly dictates the methods of investigation. They go on to suggest that 'the commonly used metaphor of the social scientist's 'kit of tools' to which he turns to find the methods and techniques most

useful to the problems at hand' illustrates a multiple-choice approach. Choice is determined by the 'trade-off around reliability, internal and external validity, and their appropriateness to the research topic' (Gill and Johnson,1991:127). This topic will be considered in more detail in section 4.3: Criteria for evaluating research.

For the purpose of Document 3, my preference is to take a case study approach to explore how C&C executives experience coaching. A case study approach enables me to explore the views and perspectives of many actors in the executive coaching drama. The Case Study method also facilitates the multiple methods approach favoured by the DBA as it has the flexibility to accommodate both qualitative and quantitative methods.

The characteristics of case studies are elaborated on in the following discussion.

4.1   The nature of case studies

Yin (2003:13) defines case-based research as 'an empirical enquiry which investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context especially when the boundaries between phenomenon and context are not clearly understood'. Yin suggests that you would use the case study method 'because you deliberately wanted to cover contextual conditions'. This logic of design helps distinguish case studies from other possible methods, such as experiments and surveys. He also suggests that data collection and data analysis strategies are particular to case studies and that case study inquiry:

- copes with the technically distinctive situation in which there will be many more variables of interest than data points, and as one result
- relies on multiple sources of evidence, with data needing to converge in a triangulating fashion, and as another result
- benefits from the prior development of theoretical propositions to guide data collection and analysis.

(Yin, 2003:13-14)

Writing in the context of case study research, Bryman & Bell argue that whether case study research is inductive or deductive tends to be affected by whether a quantitative or a qualitative research strategy is employed.

> When the predominant research strategy is qualitative, a case study
> tends to take an inductive approach to the relationship between

theory and research; if a predominantly quantitative strategy is taken, it tends to be deductive. (Bryman & Bell, 2003:54)

Case studies can fall within the remit of either positivism or interpretivism, depending on whether the researcher seeks explanation or seek understanding. Stake (1995:38) claims that 'cause and effect relationship case studies tend to provide explanations, while other cases seek to understand human experience'. How well a qualitative case study succeeds in establishing this understanding depends on the researcher's ability to bring the voice of the actor to life, in other words to provide thick descriptions. Stake expresses it thus:

The function of research is not necessarily to map and conquer the world, but to sophisticate the beholding of it. 'Thick description, 'experiential understanding' and 'multiple realities' are expected in qualitative case studies. Pursuit of complex meanings cannot be just designed in or caught retrospectively. (Stake, 1995:43)

In bring the voice of the actor to life, Stake acknowledges that the interpretations of the researcher are likely to get more emphasis than the interpretations of the actors, 'but the qualitative case researcher tries to preserve the *multiple realities*, the different and even contradictory views of what is happening' (Stake, 1995:13).

4.2   A qualitative case study approach

The purpose of my taking a case study approach is to arrive at an in-depth understanding of executive coaching from the executive's perspective. The case study focuses on how executives within one organisation, C&C Group Plc., experience executive coaching, what outcomes they associate with coaching and what antecedents are judged to have contributed to the outcomes.

At one level this could be described as a 'revelatory case' in that it considers the coaching circumstances within one organisation from the perspective of key actors within that organisation. In addition to the views of several executives who have engaged in coaching, the views of both the HR Director and the External Coach provide additional perspectives to enrich the case. However, at another level, because the key actors are the executives being coached, each executive could be dealt with as a mini-case. With this approach there may be 'important co-ordination between the individual case studies', leading to the designation of a 'collective case study' (Stake,1995:4).

Further deconstructing the approach, because the unit of analysis is at the individual level and the research seeks to explore how individual executives experience coaching, the organisational setting is merely a context within which to better understand the impact of executive coaching (Yin, 2003:45). This fits what Stake (1995) describes as an instrumental case.

Stake (1995:3) distinguishes between intrinsic and instrumental case studies. An intrinsic case focuses on the learning that comes from one particular case, rather than what can be learned about a general problem or issue. On the other hand, if there is 'a need for general understanding, and (we) feel that we may get insight into the question by studying a particular case', Stake classifies this as an instrumental case study in that the case is instrumental in allowing you to arrive at a general understand. He further develops the notion of instrumental cases by suggesting that when the units of analysis are multiple, that is several executives as in my particular case study, each case will be instrumental in learning about the experiences of coaching.

Yin (2003:47) requires rather more stringent justifications for choosing a multiple-case approach. He takes a somewhat positivist position in regard to multiple-case studies. He argues that when taking a multiple-case study approach, each case must be carefully selected 'so that it either (a) predicts similar results (a literal replication) or (b) predicts contrasting results but for predictable reasons (a theoretical replication)'. This point will be developed further under issues pertaining to the generalisability of case studies.

Figure 4 overleaf (developed from Easterby-Smith et al's 1991 summary of paradigm characteristics) attempts to capture the characteristics associated with the two dominant paradigms. As Figure 4 illustrates, both paradigms have their particular characteristics, each with its strengths and weaknesses. Thus a choice of paradigm inevitably involves some trade offs in efficiency and understanding. The positivist paradigm generally yields explanations, rather than understanding, but its methods are relatively efficient. On the other hand, the interpretivist approach will deliver greater understanding, but more time and effort may go into gathering and interpreting the data and in some quarters the results from interpretivist research has low credibility. Since this research study is concerned with understanding how executives interpret the coaching process, the interpretivist approach is the most appropriate.

Figure 4: Summary of the characteristics of opposing paradigms

Paradigm	Basic Beliefs	Researcher Role	Preferred Methods	Weaknesses	Strengths
Positivist Paradigm	• World is external & objective • Observer is independent • Science is value-free • Knowledge is discovered	• Impersonal role • Look for explanations • Focus on facts • Look for causality and fundamental laws • Reduce phenomena to simplest elements • Formulate hypotheses and test them	• Operationalising concepts so that they can be measured • Taking large samples	• Methods tend to be inflexible and artificial • Not very effective in understanding processes • Not very effective in understanding the significance people attach to actions • Not very helpful in generating theories • Research focus is on the present or immediate past, which makes it difficult for policy makers to infer what changes should happen in the future	• Provide wide coverage of range of situations • Can be fast and economical • May be relevant to policy decisions
Interpretivist Paradigm	• The world is socially constructed and subjective • Observer is part of what is observed • Science is driven by human interests • Knowledge is constructed	• Personal role • Focus on meaning • Try to understand what is happening • Look at the totality of each situation • Develop ideas through induction from data	• Using multiple methods to establish different views of phenomena • Small samples investigated in depth or over time	• Data collection can take up a great deal of time and resources • The analysis and interpretation of data may be very difficult • Harder to control the research pace, progress and end-points • Studies based on a phenomenological approach may have low credibility	• Have ability to look at change processes over time • Can understand people's meanings • Can adjust to new issues and ideas as they emerge • Can contribute to the evolution of new theories • Provide a way of gathering data which is seen as natural

4.3   Criteria for evaluating research

Bryman and Bell (2003) suggest that reliability, replication, and validity are the most prominent criteria for the evaluation of business and management research. However, they also cite Lincoln and Guba (1985) as proposing that alternative terms and ways of assessing qualitative research are required. According to Lincoln and Guba, trustworthiness is an overarching criterion by which to judge a qualitative study.   It addresses the following issues:

> *Credibility* – how believable are the findings?
> *Transferability* – do the findings apply to other contexts?
> *Dependability* – are the findings likely to apply at other times?
> *Confirmability* – has the investigator allowed his or her values to intrude to a high degree?
>
> Bryman and Bell (2003:35)

Denzin and Lincoln (2000:157) cite Lincoln and Guba as proposing that researchers within a constructionist paradigm 'are oriented to the production of reconstructed understanding of the social world' and that 'the traditional positivist criteria of internal and external validity are replaced by such terms as *trustworthiness and authenticity'*. Gill and Johnson, (1991:150) acknowledge that ensuring the validity of findings is always a concern and argue that their research is 'more likely to produce valid findings in a relatively under-researched area if data is taken in depth from a few cases'.

Within the positivist paradigm, generalisability is a critical criterion. Dealing with the concept of generalisability in the context of case studies, Stake (1995:4) makes the point that while it might be 'useful to try to select cases which are typical or representative of other cases' in practice this is difficult to do. Any small sample of cases is 'unlikely to be representative of others'. He contends that case study research does not have to meet the norms of sampling research; the primary focus is the present case and the obligation 'is to understand this one case'. The aim is to maximise learning and increase understanding that leads 'to assertions, perhaps even to modifying of generalizations'.

Stake argues that a good instrumental case study does not depend on being able to defend the typicality of the case. He also states that even when selecting collective

case studies, 'selection by sampling of attributes should not be the highest priority' and that while 'balance and variety are important; opportunity to learn is of primary importance' (Stake, 1995:6). Thus case study research is not really about generalization, rather it is about particularization. 'There is emphasis on uniqueness', which implies that the researcher is familiar with other, different, cases, but the first emphasis is on understanding the case itself (Stake, 1995:8). He also argues that, during the data gathering, the function of the qualitative researcher is to 'maintain vigorous interpretation' (Stake, 1995:9).

The criterion of relevance and the concept of ecological validity appear to be closely related. Relevance refers to the importance of a topic and the contribution it makes to the literature of its field (Hammersley, 1992 as cited in Bryman and Bell, 2003:35). 'Validity is concerned with the integrity of the conclusions that are generated from a piece of research' (Bryman and Bell, 2003:33). Ecological validity is concerned with the question of whether social scientific findings are applicable to people's everyday, natural social settings. Business research is sometimes criticised on the basis that while findings maybe be valid at one level, they have 'little to do with what happens in people's every lives' (Bryman & Bell, 2003:34). The extent to which this research study meets appropriate qualitative research criteria will be addressed in Section 8.

4.4 Political and ethical considerations

'Ethics in business research refers to a code of conduct or expected societal norm of behaviour while conducting research' (Sekaran, 2003:17). Most discussions about research ethics concern the use of qualitative methods. This comes about because the researcher's presence is more intrusive in the process of qualitative research and because the use of qualitative research methods may put the researcher in a considerably more powerful position in relation to individuals (Easterby-Smith, Thorpe, & Lowe (1991:64). Researchers must take ethical issues into consideration from the start of an investigation through to the final report (Kvale, 1996).

Informed consent, confidentiality and consequences are ethical issues that may arise at different stages of an interview project (Easterby-Smith et al, 1991, Kvale, 1996, Saunder et al, 2003). Informed consent involves the interview participants being informed of the nature and purpose of the interview. Kvale (1996) suggests that with

semi-structured interviews informed consent can be problematical in that by their nature these interviews rely on the possibility of following up unanticipated leads from the subjects and of posing questions not prepared in advance. Thus fully informed consent is difficult to achieve. Addressing this issue, I am confident that, for this particular research study, participants were fully aware of the nature of the research and though the interviews were semi-structured, questions did not stray outside the realm of soliciting executive coaching experiences. Ethical issues also involve the question of whether the subjects should have a say in how their statements are interpreted (Kvale, 1996). I found this aspect of ethics challenging and although I did not go back to the interviewees to validate my interpretations, I was conscious of the need to interpret the statements as objectively as possible.

Confidentiality is critical and must be assured. This involves making sure that anonymity is maintained and that private data identifying the subjects will not be reported. It may be necessary to change names and identifying features when reporting interviews, and also when reporting on organisations (Sekaran, 2003:136). As stated earlier, this is a step I have chosen to take. Consequences are closely linked to confidentiality and the issue here is to ensure that participants do not suffer adverse consequences as a result of the research. Ideally there should be reciprocity in what subjects give and what they receive from participation in a study. Again, this is a small problem for me in that each of the interviewees expressed an interest in seeing the final document. Because of the personal nature of some of the statements, I am loathe to share an unedited version of the document. Another issue raised by Saunder et al (2003:137) concerns how far to push interviewees if they appear reluctant to answer. I met this situation when I looked for the executives to rate various aspects of the coaching experience.. It seemed to bring a jarring note into the interview. I never pursued the question if the respondent's body language was negative or if they fudged the question.

Saunder et al (2003:135) urge objectivity. The key, they suggest, is to collect data accurately and fully and avoid subjective selectivity in what you record This may be easier said than done in that all of us come to research with preconceptions or mental models that affect what we see and affect what we do. As Senge (1990:175) puts it, the tendency to observe selectively is 'no less true for supposedly "objective"

observers such as scientists than for people in general'.   However, being conscious of the need for objectivity, but also conscious of the values I brought to the research, will have gone some way to ensuring objectivity.

Easterby-Smith et al, (1991) make some insightful comments on the political nature of research within organisations. For example, they mention that the client may have preferred outcomes from the study (Easterby-Smith et al, 1991:57). I was conscious that there was always the possibility the HR Director (my contact in the organisation) would choose executives for interview who had visibly benefited from coaching as this would validate his decision to introduce coaching. I actually mentioned this concern to the External Coach and checked the names with her. I was reassured that 'I had a good mix', and the subsequent interviews validated this.

Easterby Smith et al. also make the point that 'most managers are in a position where they can easily decline to provide information for researchers; they are also adept at handling face-to-face interviews and at managing interaction with strangers' (Easterby-Smith et al, 1991:46). Because I had no personal relationship with any of the senior executives, I expected to have to negotiate with them for interview time. I was pleasantly surprised that, with reasonable advanced notice and a choice of days and times, each executive immediately confirmed a date for the interview; only one quibbled about the amount of time, and all appeared open and willing to share their experiences. This prompted the thought that the HR Director was either a very powerful person, or a very popular person, or perhaps both.

My decision to disguise the name of the company and the names of the interviewees was influenced by both political and ethical considerations. Because executive coaching involves a dyadic relationship I was conscious that in some interviews the coach could the 'victim' of the research, an absent stakeholder 'whose interests may be adversely affected by its results' (Easterby-Smith et al, 1991:47). A second consideration of equal importance was the openness of executives in discussing their experiences. While none asked that I treat their information anonymously, I didn't feel comfortable doing otherwise.

4.5 Data Collection

Data for the case study was gathered via 9 in-depth, semi-structured interviews. Stake (1995:6) argues that 'selection by sampling of attributes should not be the highest priority' and that 'good instrumental case study does not depend on being able to defend the typicality of the case'. While acknowledging that 'balance and variety are important', he contends that 'opportunity to learn is of primary importance'. Because many executives have now experienced coaching, I was able to suggest a profile of subjects that I felt would meet Stake's criteria of balance and variety and also maximise my understanding of the impact of executive coaching across diverse demographics of gender and age. Most particularly, I was conscious of the need to bring the voice of the actors to the reader, and to preserve their 'multiple realities' and their 'different and even contradictory views of what is happening' (Stake,1995:13).

The HR Director and the External Coach were interviewed, as were 7 senior company executives. My key consideration in identifying subjects for interview was to maximise my understanding of the impact of executive coaching. Without being overly prescriptive, I requested the names of 6 executives with different demographics who had experienced executive coaching. The HR Director volunteered the names of 6 senior executives: two women in their 30s, two men in their 40s, and two men in their 50s. He also suggested a divisional HR director who would be willing to test the format of the interview. I found that the pilot interview flowed very well, that all the themes were covered and the respondent did not seem to have any problems answering the questions. This pilot interview now forms part of the data set.

The HR Director's secretary subsequently e-mailed the 6 executives with a brief explanation of the research project and requested that they accommodate me with a two hour interview, which, generally, they did. (One executive could only spare an hour).

The initial interview with the HR Director provided insights into why executive coaching was embedded within the company's leadership development programme. This interview also served to illuminate the procedures and processes put in place by the HR Director to facilitate coaching. The interview with the external coach, a key mover in structuring the leadership development programme, provided an additional

perspective both on the company and on the programme, and acted as a form of triangulation to deepen my understanding of the philosophy underpinning the process of executive coaching in the company.

The in-depth interviews with the 7 executives explored their perceptions of the inputs to executive coaching (the qualities of the coach, the qualities of the executive, the dyadic relationship between coach and executive, the coaching process and the role of the organisation) and elicited the outcomes they identified from the process. During the interview executives were invited to rate their affective response to the coaching process, to rate their own level of motivation, and to rate the qualities of the coach. It was obvious, both from interviewees' body language and from their verbal responses, that many executives were uncomfortable about doing this. When I sensed this discomfort, I didn't press for an answer. Ironically, this problem did not surface at all in the pilot interview, which serves to illustrate how individual each person's reaction is.

Data analysis and presentation

Seven interviews were fully recorded and transcribed. Unfortunately, two of the executive interviews scheduled on the same day were not fully recorded because the digital recorder was out of space. Half of one interview was recorded and the remainder of the interview was reconstructed from rough notes and from memory; the other interview was totally recorded by hand.

The interview with the HR Director is summarised and can be read in Appendix A, information from this interview is used to address propositions 5 and 6. Appendix B is a summary of the interview with the external coach. Appendix C contains a summary of the 7 executive interviews which have been restructured into themes that link into the conceptual model. All the appendices are strong on providing 'thick descriptions' of how the actors in the coaching drama felt about the coaching process.

The analysis section also includes a brief exposition of the structure for executive coaching within the organisation and a summary account of each executive's experience.

The 6 research propositions are used as a framework for analysing and discussing the data. Each section contains a brief review of the literature to give a context to the findings. These findings are discussed in terms of the literature and, where appropriate, a social constructionist perspective is added to the discussion. To facilitate the flow of analysis and prevent repetition, closely related propositions are grouped together, thus propositions 5 and 6 that concern the organisation are grouped.

Limitations of the study

Because of resource time constraints, it wasn't possible to conduct more than the 9 in-depth interviews. Obviously, it would have given a richer picture to interview all the executives who had been coached and to interview all the coaches who delivered the sessions. A second issue, which definitely muddied the waters for me, was that inputs from the emotional intelligence leadership development modules were difficult to separate out from the coaching inputs. With some effort I got clarity around this. The subjective nature of condensing the data must also be acknowledged – perhaps another interpreter would choose different facets to highlight and so encourage different interpretations.

5.0 Analysis and discussion

Introduction

Most of the executive coaching within C&C is embedded in a Leadership Development Programme (LDP). Participants in this leadership development programme are mainly drawn from 'B Band' executives; 30 of the top 40 people in the Group are in this band. Twelve participants took part in the Leadership Development Programme - *a couple of people* from each company.

To date, coaching within this LDP has taken two forms: traditional coaching, which took place in 2003/4 and focused coaching with an emphasis on developing emotional intelligence, which took place in 2006.

Traditional coaching involved profiling individual executives, 360 degree appraisal, a feedback session and 2 follow-up coaching sessions. Depending on the executive's profile, four coaches were available to conduct the sessions.

The focused coaching was part of a 6 month course designed around improving emotional intelligence. This programme was a follow-on to the pilot coaching programme, but the provider was different. In addition to seminars, the executives could avail of on-line modules. The executives completed the *BarOn Emotional Quotient Inventory* (EQI) which is designed to help people better understand their emotional and social functioning. This inventory assesses Intrapersonal EQ (Self-regard, emotional self-awareness, assertiveness, independence, self-actualization), Interpersonal EQ (empathy, social responsibility, interpersonal relationships), Stress management (stress tolerance, impulse control), Adaptability (Reality testing, flexibility, problem solving) and General Mood (Optimism and happiness). Group scores were shared with the group, and individual scores plus 360 feedback were given privately. Each executive was entitled to 4 one hour coaching sessions. Two coaches were available to conduct the sessions. At the end of the programme, which lasted 6 months, the EQI scores were retaken, but the 360 degree appraisal was not repeated. Part of the course programme required all executives to identify key people whose co-operation made a serious contribution to the success of their role

(customers, suppliers, or people in the organisation). They were to contact these people, explain about the course, and attempt to deepen their relationship with them.

To provide a context for understanding the analysis and discussion, the following section introduces the key actors via a summary of the in-depth interviews (nine in all). A more detailed summary is provided in Appendices A (interview with HR Director), B (interview with Executive Coach) and C (Themed interviews with 7 executives at different levels in the company; one A Band, 5 B Band, and one S1, which is the level below B Band).

These appendices provide 'thick descriptions' of how the HR Director approached the coaching process, how the External Coach viewed coaching within the company and how the executives experienced executive coaching.

Common themes: Some themes were identical for most interviews, e.g. trust was not an issue for any of the executives, one executive was concerned very briefly about confidentiality. All the executives mentioned the changes that had taken place within the company and spoke highly of the HR Director's role in developing staff. Everyone expressed an interest in being on the Leadership Development Programme. The notion of transformational leadership was not a familiar concept, although some executives remembered it being part of the last seminar on emotional intelligence. Except for one HR executive, nobody has tried their hand at coaching. Most executives acknowledged some regression and the term 'revert to type' was mentioned by several executives. The example most commonly used to illustrate this was that contacts with key relationships had been allowed to slip back. When the course was finished, each executive had a one-to-one debriefing meeting with the CEO, who seemed '*to be genuinely interested*'; the CEO's input was seen '*as a nice touch*' and appeared to add value to the course.

Summary Interviews

Interview with HR Director

The Group Human Resources Director (Vincent) has responsibility for Group-wide human resource policies and strategy. His main objective *is to enhance our overall business performance* and ensure *leadership, succession and talent retention.* He introduced Executive coaching for all senior managers as part of their personal development plan. Prior to the new HR vision, the company had a *very poor history of developing people for leaders*. The company's recent successes have propelled them into the top league *and this is quite a leap for people to make.* The new approach is focusing on leadership competencies such as interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence.

Barbara Brady & Associates' coaching company came highly recommended; Vincent took some coaching sessions *to test the water* and three other members of the *People Matter Group* agreed to take part in a pilot executive coaching programme which was then rolled out to senior executives.

Together, Barbara Brady and Vincent identified the main competencies and behaviours they wanted to target and influence. These were: *self-awareness, influence, business acumen, emotional acumen, coaching and mentoring, and team leadership*. The C&C coaching contract was *for a year for a specific number of sessions, it was clear what was expected and what they were supplying*. Executives would be entitled to 3 coaching sessions each, further sessions would have to be sanctioned by HR - the sessions couldn't just continue.

Executive coaching is now an 'integral part' of C&C's leadership development strategy. The company has two different kinds of coaching – *traditional coaching which gives the executive an opportunity to talk*, and *focused coaching which is specialised* and concentrates on specific areas such as emotional intelligence and on stress management. Vincent finds it difficult to quantify the outcomes from coaching, but he does notice a difference. Executive coaching is now mandatory for all senior executives. Vincent likens it to a hand-shake – like going to the doctor; he sees

coaching in the same light as a medical check. He's coming to the viewpoint that senior leaders should have a personal coach.

Interview with External coach

In 2002, Barbara Brady & Associates were employed by C&C Group Plc to provide a coaching service to senior executives. Barbara, (a woman in her early to mid 40s) prefers the term '*corporate psychologist*' to consultant. Her background is in clinical psychology and she has worked in consultancy for 15 years. In addition to herself, Brady & Associates employ 3 executive coaches, all psychologists. The coach considered that the number of sessions contracted for was *absolutely not enough* and really just qualified as *a taster*. She measures success in terms of the individual executive – helping them to deal with the stressors and demands of a very fast changing environment; encouraging them '*to take personal responsibility for their own development, and not expect the organisation to hand it to them on a plate*.

Barbara recalls that in the beginning executive coaching was *viewed with deep suspicion and scepticism.* She had encountered *complete lack of awareness and very high levels of resistance* by some senior executives. It was a time of rapid change in the company and several factors contributed to causing concern to executives. However, some executives welcomed the process.

Before a person walks through the door, Barbara's company has done about 12 hours profiling work and Barbara has a '*huge amount of information*'. '*Just by looking at the profile you can tell whether someone is lacking in self-awareness*'. All this information is a 'great launching pad' and she claims that in 18 years nobody has said '*that isn't me*'. Confidentiality is absolute. The agreement with the company is to bring the person as far as possible in the time available. No feedback goes to the company and neither is it privy to the psychological profile or to the 360 degree feedback.

The first meeting is concerned with feedback; it is used to create rapport and get agreement on the profile. This first session produces a '*huge up-surge in awareness*'.

Individual coaches are chosen to get a best fit with the profile that emerges from the bank of psychometric tests. Trust and respect are critical ingredients.

She makes the point that it is very important to know what a person is potentially capable of and not to try to take them there too fast: '*our job is to get them to recognise their own potential*'. When this happens you have a huge psychological shift. Many senior people '*don't see themselves as leaders, they see themselves as executives or/and as managers*'. Barbara is '*not into the management development model*', she's into the '*leadership development model*'. Taking individual requirements into account, the focus is on self-awareness, self-management, self-regulation and self-development; '*we want them to take charge of themselves*'. It will probably be 4-5 years before the company will be operating in the people arena at a level acceptable for their standing. The company needs to make a radical culture shift, but everyone is working towards this. A lot of people in the company are actually asking about the coaching now – the HR Director '*has done a phenomenal job*'.

Interviews with Executives

Harry: (Pilot interview) mid-40s to 50s, with the company 4 years, Divisional HR Director. Harry now thinks that business awareness is a key skill for his job. The HR function has moved beyond the traditional administration focus and is now strategic. Harry is being coached by Peter. The coaching objectives were agreed at a tripartite meeting with Peter, Harry and Vincent (the HR Director). Harry has contracted for 6 sessions with Peter, so far he has had 2. He wanted to improve his strategic thinking – he was in *awe of the word strategy*; he also wanted some help to cope with occasionally being wrong. He looked forward to the coaching sessions. Between sessions he worked on his approach to thinking, he also did some recommended reading on strategy. He likes Peter's personality and he likes his style. He thought that he was very strong on business knowledge and very challenging – *he'd ask the right questions rather than giving you the right answers*. Coaching has stretched his thinking, he's also more confident about where he is contributing strategically. He has tried his hand at coaching and is pleased with the progress.

Kieran, mid-50s; with the company 17 years; B band.   He describes his style as '*a little bit robust*', he feels he is reasonably good at picking people who are also robust and who '*are not going to be intimidated by my style*'.   Kieran wasn't impressed with the traditional coaching, he found the coach's style '*brusque*' and felt that she intended to take the sessions where she wanted them to go; he *didn't click* with the coach and 'it *wasn't an enriching experience*'.   At that stage he wasn't very interested in being coached. He had a much better second round experience. This time he thought the coach was very capable and willing to go in whatever direction suited him.   He mainly used the sessions for stress management.   His emotional intelligence scores are very respectable, but he feels that he got '*some insights*' from coaching. He doesn't attribute his recent promotion to coaching, but thinks it helps him do the job better.

Gary: mid 40s, 3 years in C&C company, B Band.   Gary's first experience of coaching was unfortunate. He did all the psychometric tests and organised 360 feedback; he had a feedback session with the coach but felt he was being pigeon-holed and told what to do. He wasn't aware that further coaching sessions were available to him.   However, the emotional intelligence coaching worked well for Gary. He had a very poor score on empathy and some of the profile and feedback was tough to take.   However, he worked very hard at making changes and when the EQI profile test was retaken, his empathy score showed the most improvement.   He identifies the primary outcomes as definite behaviour changes, while the secondary outcome is a better work-life balance. He is now a lot more relaxed, a lot calmer. He discusses some work issues at home, which he never would have done. He probably trusts people a lot more. In terms of his recent promotion, he thinks that would have happened irrespective of coaching. But coaching has '*absolutely helped me to do the job*'

Seamus: early 50s. 15 years in the company; Deputy MD; B Band. At the moment the company is undecided about what to do with the business unit, there is very poor morale in his section and 25% of people have left. In the restructuring, he was turned down for the top job (*shafted*), so instead of being MD he is now deputy MD. He describes himself as a high achiever; when he was MD he *worked so hard it almost killed him*. Seamus describes himself '*as a big fan of coaching*'. He thought Barbara

was a *superb coach.* Because of personal tragedy he had his own agenda and '*the work with the coach was very valuable to me in all sorts of ways'.* For the emotional intelligence coaching he found that his work with Kathy wasn't as strong as with Barbara. He didn't find her as challenging, although he got on very well with her.

His primary output has been increased self-awareness. He appreciates that it is *how* as much as *what* that matters, especially in managing up. In terms of leadership competencies he now knows that having all the answers is not the right route. He also works on showing empathy and thinking about the impact he has on others. Because he is more balanced himself, he finds he enjoys a better work-life balance. With his self-awareness he now has awareness of others and of emotional intelligence. If he were to associate coaching with his career, he would have to say it didn't work. His career is going backwards.

Oliver: mid-50s; 30 years in company; A Band. Oliver was coached by Paddy. During the feedback session he didn't feel threatened by the 360 – at his level '*he doesn't think you do'.* Overall he did well, but some comments he thought were unfair. During the coaching sessions they used a leadership manual and worked through it. He was very interested in the coaching, and got a lot out of it. He rated the coach very highly on coach skills and psychological insights. He was a good listener; he also thought he had a lot of business acumen and appreciated the position of senior executives – '*when that man spoke, you'd stop and listen'.* He has learned to think about what he wants to achieve; he also gives more thought to how he'll handle people. He now has another coach and he thinks he's very good. A key learning point with the second coach was about managing his time – learning not to procrastinate – learning how to delegate. He definitely has a better work-life balance and a healthier lifestyle. Coaching won't have any effect on Oliver's career – he isn't interested in promotion. However, it is very relevant because he is very interested in improving his performance in the current job.

Laura, mid-late 30s, B Band, 12 years in the company, 5 years in her current role. She describes as *extraordinary* the changes that have taken place in the company in the last number of years. Laura found the feedback on her profile *fascinating.* She thinks Barbara was a *brilliant person* to do the profiling with. The same things keep

coming up over and over for her: *I need to take more time with people.* But time is something she doesn't have. Laura felt the coaching was *a lot more about me learning a lot more about me.* The second round of coaching was perfectly timed for her, she was just back from her 3rd maternity leave and her confidence was a little low. There wasn't much difference in how she profiled the second time around. During the sessions she and the coach talked about time management and about influencing skills, while it was all very positive, she didn't think that it *changed anything fundamentally.* The primary outcome from the emotional intelligence course is that it gave her the confidence to recognize that she has the qualities for leadership. She feels that support for coaching is growing.

Fiona, early 30s, 3 years in the company, recently promoted to the S1 Band. Fiona says she is: *very hard on myself, constantly pushing myself.* She can become very project focussed. When the emotional intelligence course was completed, Fiona requested further coaching; her second coach is also a woman. As part of the emotional intelligence course, Fiona was coached by Kathy. Her review from her peers showed that when she was in her *natural zone*, she was *absolutely grand.* Fiona went into coaching with an open mind and viewed it *more as my time as opposed to company time.* The coaching took place once a week for four weeks. She found this schedule a problem – *sometimes you had to manufacture something to talk about.* She enjoyed the coaching. The agendas were mostly about development: influencing skills, handling confrontation and relationship building. In the sessions, there was always time for issue discussion. She liked the fact that both her coaches were women and she rated them highly on coaching skills and psychological insights; she thought they were about a 6-7 on business acumen.

The coaching has given her a better understanding of herself and she is *more sure of the person I want to be and how I want to come across.* She has got over having a negative reaction to people disagreeing with her, she thinks her thinking *is a lot more grey now*, less wedded to outcomes and she is more supportive of colleagues. She also has a better work/life balance. Coaching has helped her in carry out her new role. Table 1 (overleaf) illustrates the executive/coach dyad.

Table 1: Executive Coach Dyad

Type of Coaching	Coach	Executive
Traditional	Barbara	Gary
		Kieran
		Laura
		Seamus
		Vincent
Traditional	Paddy	Oliver
Traditional	Peter	Harry
Traditional	Claire	Fiona
Emotional Intelligence	Kathy	Fiona
		Kieran
		Laura
		Seamus
Emotional Intelligence	John	Gary

5. 3   Research Propositions

The research propositions outlined on page 6 provide a framework for the data analysis. As mentioned previously, the introduction contains an overview of the relevant literature, findings are the voices of the executives, and the discussion section is interpretative and relates the findings to the literature and to the propositions.

5.3.1 Qualities of the coach

Proposition 1:

- Talented coaches (those perceived to have good coaching skills, business acumen and psychological insights) will have a positive impact on an executive's perceptions of the coaching process.

Introduction

The literature is replete with debate about the qualities of the ideal coach. Coaching skills are seen as the ability to remain non-judgemental, to avoid being over-directive, to engage in active listening, to ask insightful, challenging questions and to give constructive feedback. In addition, the coach must be capable of raising the executive's self awareness and sense of responsibility (Peterson, 1996:79; Hedman 2001:73; Hanson, 2003:20; Galway, 2003; Downey, 2003; Wasylyshyn, 2003; Whitmore, 2002; Stevens, 2005; Wright, 2005). The concept of profiling clients and organising 360 degree feedback appears to be integral to the start of an executive

coaching process; this is exemplified by case studies presented in the special edition of the *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research,* Spring 1996. These psychological tests and the feedback are seen as a way of raising self awareness, highlighting strengths and limitations, and raising issues that might form part of the coaching agenda (Diedrich, 1996; Kiel et al., 1996; Peterson, 1996; Tobias, 1996). Laske (1999), Peltier (2001) and Luthan and Peterson (2003) express varied concerns about 360 degree feedback in terms of confidentiality, feedback motivated by spite, and the actual process of introducing thirds parties feedback intruding on the coach-client relationship.

While some writers argue that a grounding in psychology is *de rigueur* for the executive coach (Kilburg, 2004:249; Levinson 1996:115, Berglas, 2002:87), others will settle for psychological mindedness (Bluckert, 2005). Others argue that too much psychology may be inappropriate in a business setting (Levinson, 1996; Peltier, 2001). However, Laske (2002:5) makes the point that an understanding of psychology is needed to appreciate the developmental stage of the client. Business knowledge is seen by some as a prerequisite for successful coaching, particularly an appreciation of organisational roles and an understanding of organisations (Levinson, 1996; Saporito 1996; Kiel, et al, 1996). There is a general consensus that effective executive coaches are expected to have both a psychological background and business acumen (Levinson, 1996, Wasylshyn, 2003, Kets de Vries, 2005).

Findings

Except for minor reservations, one by Gary and one by Seamus, executives were exuberantly enthusiastic about the qualities **of at least one** of their coaches. Kieran thought Kathy was:

> *Very, very capable, very, very bright, able to go anywhere*
> *at all that I wanted to go and very, very strong. She was*
> *very, very knowledgeable on a range of topics.*

Both Seamus and Oliver rated their coaches as really good listeners, with great psychological insight. Seamus felt that Barbara was *superb* and *highly tuned to the corporate culture and to issues that senior executives face;* Oliver though that Paddy had a lot of business acumen and that he also appreciated the position of senior executives. As he described it: *when that man spoke you'd stop and listen.* Both

women executives rated their coaches highly on coaching skills and psychological insight. All executives gave at least one of their coaches a very positive rating on coaching skills and on psychological insight. They were aware that the coaches were psychologists, but this was not an intrusion. Fiona remarked of her coach:

> *That was one of the strongest parts of her coaching, you didn't feel that you were being analysed, but with hindsight you definitely were.*

The coaches' ability to be challenging and ask insightful questions was also appreciated: Harry describes Peter as *asking the right questions*, *rather than telling the right answers.* He describes one part of a coaching sessions:

> *I was really enthusiastic to tell him what I had done and where I was at and he heard it all and reinforced it and was very positive. Then he challenged me and I realised I hadn't gone as far as I thought I had. So he doesn't miss a trick.*

Overall, the executives were satisfied with the degree of business acumen exhibited by the coaches. From their comments it would appear that business acumen is concerned with organisational dynamics, rather than commercial acumen, *per se*. No coach scored higher than 7 on business acumen, despite some very favourable comment. Harry described his coach as being:

> *very strong on business knowledge, he understands organizations, he understands what the roles are; it's not soft coaching – touchy-feely stuff. It's definitely focused on the business and his business acumen comes across.*

While he rated Peter's business acumen *very high*, when he considered him relative to his boss, he gave Peter a 7. Oliver also used his boss as a standard against which to rate the coach on business acumen; he also scored 7.

Seamus would have liked Kathy to be more challenging, although he appreciated how strong she was on personal interactions. While Gary rated John very highly on psychological insight (9/10), he would have liked more feedback (although on recollection he thinks that maybe keeping the feedback to the end was a particular strategy). He detected no business acumen, but he was quite philosophical about this

lack; he didn't see it as part of the coach's job. However, despite some reservations, he was also quite positive:

> *It was quite an open style and quite constructive because he was able to throw back examples at me or questions to me or challenge me, so that was the sort of style it was. He probably was quite good at persuading you to do something but actually persuading in a way that it was your own idea in the first place.*

The only hint of an executive experiencing a problem around psychology came from Gary's comments concerning his first half-hour with the coach:

> *he was looking at me all the time and I was thinking, why are you looking at me? – I became conscious of my body language – did I do something wrong?*

Feedback: Kieran, Gary, Seamus, and Laura experienced two sets of feedback, Oliver and Fiona experienced one feedback session and Harry's coaching didn't involve psychometric testing or 360 appraisal.

Within the range of interviews, several viewpoints emerge on the value of the feedback sessions. Having struggled to remember the traditional coaching, both Kieran and Gary had a poor assessment of the initial feedback session. Gary thought the coach's approach was *clinical;* he didn't like it and he felt he was being *pigeon-holed.* Kieran similarly had a negative response. He thought that the coach's manner was *brusque*, and that she *intended to take the sessions where she wanted them to go.* However, he conceded that both sets of 360 degree feedback gave him *a fair idea of how people see me,* and this lined up with how he saw himself.

Gary's experience was different; he found the emotional intelligence feedback session very tough: *There was a lot of stuff in it that I didn't like coming out of the 360, but you have to take it on the chin.* Fiona also found the feedback challenging, but because it was written down, you tended to believe it. With hindsight, she wonders whether she now fully accepts the face validity of the feedback.

On the other hand, Laura, found the process *fascinating*. She remembers the feedback as *not all positive, but nothing in it that was just awful and nothing that would damage my confidence*. What it did for her was highlight her strengths. She found this the most useful aspect of the coaching. It gave her the confidence to know she could be a leader:

> *It gave me the confidence to say listen, you have all the basic skills you need to move forward and do whatever you need to do. Now you just need to get off your ass and do it. Now you need to go out and grab this yourself.*

Discussion

Within C&C, 360 degree appraisal was a new practice instigated at the behest of the coach. Barbara considers that the feedback session is critical in building rapport and getting agreement on the profile. She refers to confidentiality around 360 degree feedback *being a big issue,* chiefly because the process was so new to Ireland and because executives were not used to getting feedback.

Concerns about confidentiality were not articulated as an issue by the executives. At this stage they appeared to have no problem accepting that the whole of the process was confidential. It could be argued that this ready acceptance of verbal assurances speaks well for their confidence in the integrity of the company as represented by Vincent; alternatively this attitude might be benefiting from hindsight. Some executives did mention their surprise at being able to identify the 360 degree respondents and Oliver considered that some feedback might be motivated by *personal stuff*. He seemed to take this as a prod to pay more attention to that person.

The amount of effort the coaching company put into developing each executive's profile reflects the significance that various writers attach to the process (Diedrich, 1996, Kiel et al., 1996; Peterson, 1996; Tobias, 1996). In her interview, Barbara refers to *12 hours work* analysing the *2000 questions* that executives answered. Going into the feedback session, she has *a huge amount of information* on the executive's personality, leadership behaviour, thinking styles and emotional intelligence. This is all very useful information and gives her a great start: *just by*

looking at the profile you can tell whether somebody is lacking in self-awareness. She also uses the first session to build rapport and get agreement on the profile. This approach worked well for three of the five executives, but was a disaster for two. It is difficult to explain how these two executive had such a negative reaction to Barbara. (It is likely that they fall into her '*highly resistant*' executive category). Their reactions to Barbara, who is validated as a great coach by Vincent (*could handle anyone in our organisation*), Laura (*brilliant*) and Seamus (*superb*), appear to be idiosyncratic; perhaps the problem lay with the content of the feedback, although comments from Seamus would not support this view. Alternatively, you could argue that something in their manner drew an 'out of character' response from Barbara. Either explanation highlights the very subjective nature of the coaching process. **These multiple realities support Kilburg's contention that the coach can misinterpret how executives are experiencing coaching.**

With the exception of these two bad experiences, it would be fair to say that the executives were extraordinarily positive about the qualities of their coaches and that the coaches employed by C&C appear to have the qualities advocated by practitioners and academics. All of the coaches were rated very positively on coaching skills and psychological insight. Two of the executives distinguished between acumen around organisational dynamics and acumen around commercial knowledge; they didn't expect the coach to add to their commercial knowledge. Thus 'business acumen' may mean somewhat different things to different people. It is interesting that 3 of the executives used their own boss as a benchmark against which to judge the business acumen of the coach. They appeared to be setting a very high standard.

Laske's (2002:5) contention that an understanding of psychology is needed to appreciate the developmental stage of the client is echoed by Barbara's assertion that it is important to understand how far the executive can be taken in the time available.

The psychological aspect of the coaches' approaches was commented on very positively by all executives – this came across as the most appreciated quality and was strongly linked to the coaches' abilities to ask insightful questions. This supports Vincent's viewpoint that being a psychologist made *'them very powerful'*. Certainly there was no hint of Garman et al's (2000) findings that psychologists can be seen as

doing more harm than good. However, because all of the coaches were psychologists, it isn't really possible to compare the response to a coach who is a psychologist with the response to one who is not.

It could be argued that, based on evaluations from the interviews, C&C's vetting and contracting process has worked very well.   With the exception of Gary and Kieran's first poor experience with the traditional coaching, all executives express satisfaction with the qualities exhibited by their coaches.

From a social constructionist perspective, the diversity of views about the feedback session highlights the subjective nature of people's experiences. Laura's response to the feedback session highlights the potentially powerful role this session can play in building awareness of strengths, as well as limitations. Laura's response lines up with how the coach defines success – when executives take personal responsibility for their next career move and shape their own roles. On the other hand, the same experienced coach (Barbara) conducted the initial traditional coaching feedback sessions with Kieran, Gary, Seamus and Laura.   Both Kieran and Gary would disagree with the coach's notion that these sessions are about building rapport and getting agreement on the profile. It is interesting that following what they perceived as a poor feedback session, neither of these executives derived any benefit from the traditional coaching. The problem didn't appear to lie with the feedback *per se*, rather it lay with their interpretation of the coach's approach. While Gary didn't know that he could have two other sessions, it might be reasonable to infer that if rapport had developed, it would have been natural to discuss the next meeting. Perhaps the lesson to be learned from this is that even an experienced coach can sometimes get it wrong.

5.3.2   Coachability of the client

Proposition 2
- Executive characteristics (level of motivation, expectations, feedback receptivity and propensity to change) will influence perceptions of the coaching experience and affect perceived outcomes.

Introduction

Part of the notion of qualifying the executive is concerned with his or her coachability. Sherman and Freasis (2004:87) suggest that the organisation should ask 3 questions: is the executive motivated, is there an important developmental need, and is the executive valuable enough to justify the cost of executive coaching. Resistance to coaching may be passive or blatant, either way goals are never reached and the executive doesn't change (Zeus and Skiffington, 2000:202). Steven's (2005) research found that for worthwhile results, executives need to engage willingly in the coaching process and Frisch (2005b:14-15) puts forward the view that, in addition to personal or family problems debilitating the coaching process, an executive who is totally satisfied with the current job is less likely to appreciate coaching. Giglio et al (1998) hazard that sometimes, executive may feel anger at being selected for coaching or fearful of the process. A further complication is that the personality traits of high-achieving executives may conspire to make acceptance of coaching difficult. Axelrod (2005:120) describes ambitious executives as being long on drive and ambition, short on people skills, having difficulty tolerating divergent opinions especially when solutions seem obvious, and rarely showing their human or humorous sides.

Findings

While only Kieran admitted to not being interested in being coached, it seems that many executives were informed of the coaching via e-mail or a telephone call. However, all appreciated the opportunity being offered as part of the leadership development programme and many expressed the view that it was very satisfying that the company was taking an interest in them.

Almost all of the executives portrayed themselves as being not unlike Axelrod's (2005:120) 'hard-charging manager'. The results from the EQI profiles showed that the executive group scored particularly low on empathy. Gary commented on the fact that despite being drawn from different companies across the Group, their results were surprisingly similar and their strengths appeared to lie in being task focused. Individual comments support this. Seamus describes himself as *highly charged, having a high achievement drive.* When he had the MDs job *I worked so hard it almost killed me.* He also has a difficulty in standing back and letting his team have

an input. So too does Gary, who acknowledges being *dismissive of people's opinions way too early*. Kieran describes his approach as *a bit robust* and Gary uses the word *confrontational* when speaking about his negotiation style with suppliers. Fiona talks about being project driven and *always pushing myself;* Laura is constantly '*rushing from pillar to post*'. Almost all of them had brought their work home in their heads, if not in their briefcases: Kieran refers to this as *sleeping, and working in your sleep.*

Probably because of his poor experience with the traditional coaching, Gary's motivation was low at the start: *Being honest, I probably wondered what this guy is going to add at all,* but he ended up being very involved in the process. Laura entered into it *wholeheartedly*, but perhaps with a touch of cynicism. Most were very positive about the effort they put in to bring about change in the areas that interested them. Kieran says: *I made a huge effort on just general relaxation and stress management and getting better at it, and I did work very, very hard at that.* From the second session, Gary was *able to give loads of examples of things I had done differently*. Oliver always did the homework: *You owed it to the coach to do the homework.*

However, particular executives did exhibit forms of resistance. Both Kieran (*I felt I was being pigeon-holed)* and Gary (*she was going to take the sessions where she wanted them to go)* had poor experiences with the initial traditional coaching which influenced their perceptions of that coaching experience. Neither of these executives associated positive outcomes with the traditional coaching.

At a more subtle level, some of Laura's comments could be interpreted as a form of passive resistance, i.e. a person may appear enthusiastic, but nothing changes and goals are not reached. Despite her *wholeheartedly* engaging with the coaching, she admits to being a *little bit cynical*. She was interested to see if there was much of a difference between her profile with Barbara and two years later for the emotional intelligence profiling*: I don't think that there was frankly, not a lot anyway.* She found herself uncomfortable with some of the influencing techniques proposed by the coach and she seems to suggest that any changes that took place were minor: *just a gentle rounding of my edges*. Talking about time management, she didn't think that *it changed anything fundamentally*.

Discussion

To briefly address Sherman & Freas's (2004:87) three questions, the HR Director very definitely identified a developmental need and the executives, as potential leaders, were valuable to the organisation. The question of whether the organisation 'qualified' the executives in terms of motivation is a mote point. In answering how they came to be involved in coaching, most referred to an e-mail, or a telephone call telling them about the coaching. However, this e-mail or telephone call was followed up by a day devoted to gaining acceptance for the idea.

Demographic factors did not appear to influence motivation. The older males were very motivated and put a big effort into making the coaching work. In terms of resistance, perhaps the most interesting responses come from Laura. As the dialogue above shows, she associates coaching with only minimal behavioural changes and says there was almost no difference in her profile over the two year gap, which perhaps indicates that her behaviours and attitudes remained the same. She was also cynical about the improvements in the emotional intelligence scores taken at the end of the programme, suggesting that the scale used the second time might have been different. However, during the interview, she was animated and keen to acknowledge how much she enjoyed the process, albeit from a very personal perspective. My response to this interview was curious. I found her personality very infectious and it wasn't until I read the transcripts that I appreciated how many caveats and reservations she had built into the interview.

Looking at the overall coaching, it would be fair to say that even with their 'A' type personality characteristics, most of the executives were well motivated and willing to take part in the process; they all scored themselves highly on this. The notable exception was Kieran. Kieran's response was a confluence of two negatives – he wasn't really interested in being coached (Stevens, 2005) and he *didn't click* with the coach. Both Gary's and Kieran's response to their coaching indicated a fairly strong level of resistance and their failure to achieve anything from the coaching appears to support the proposition; certainly neither had positive outcomes that could be associated with the traditional coaching. Frisch's (2005b:14-15) contention that family problems or over-satisfaction with the current job will lessen the appreciation of coaching is not supported. While only Seamus mentioned having personal

problems, these did not inhibit his ability to gain from the coaching, he fact he was one of the most enthusiastic endorsers of the process. Oliver had no ambitions to go any further in the organisation, yet he was very interested in being coached to improve his current performance. Several executives acknowledged that not all behavioural changes brought about by coaching had been maintained. In particular, the key relationship building had been allowed to slip back, mainly due to '*pressure of business*'. The extent to which individual needs and attitudes affect the perception of coaching outcomes, illustrates the extent to which we all create our own worlds.

5.3.3 Quality of the coaching relationship:

Proposition 3

- A good relationship between the coach and the executive will have a positive impact on how executives perceive the coaching process.

Introduction

Several writers emphasise that the quality of the coach-executive relationship is the lynchpin of the entire process (Sherman and Freas, 2004:87; Laske, 1999:3; Kilburg, 1997). Downey (2003:136) contends that any failure in a coaching intervention is the 'result of a ropey relationship'. He identifies trust as a key factor in cementing the relationship and if trust is lacking the executive will not feel safe enough to speak openly, or to reflect on mistakes and weaknesses. Winum (1995:120) suggests that in a coaching relationship, trust has to be earned.

Findings

The relationship: As the interview summaries show, all the executives were genuinely enthusiastic and very positive about their relationship with their coaches. Even Gary who got off to a rocky start, ended up being positive: *The first half hour I was watching the clock and thinking – God, how many more of these do I have to go through*, he ended up liking his coach: *He was quirky, but I did like him.* Fiona describes herself as '*very fond*' of Kathy'. Both Laura and Seamus spoke highly of Barbara, and Harry likes Peter's personality and likens him to a *father figure*.

Trust was never a serious issue, although Seamus admits to having some initial reservations about confidentiality which were quickly dispelled by the coach. Some

executives referred to 'others' who thought that the company might have a 'hidden agenda' – that maybe profiles and 360 information might be used for promotion decisions. However, Gary's comment is resonant of the common sentiment:

> *I did trust him, because I wouldn't have said some of the things to him if I didn't'. When you're talking about emotions and personal things you need to feel that the person is trustworthy.*

Discussion

All the evidence suggests that executives who developed a good relationship with their coach had a positive coaching experience; those who had a 'ropey' relationship had a negative experience and no outcomes.

The interview with the coach supports the contention that mutual trust and respect are essential ingredients for successful coaching, this is borne out by Gary's comments and by the general sentiment expressed by the executives. Even Kieran who had a poor experience with the coaching, wasn't at all concerned about confidentiality. In her interview, the coach was particularly strong about ensuring confidentiality.

Despite the coach's contention that the process was viewed with deep suspicion, this was not a viewpoint supported by the interviews, although the references to 'other people' having reservations might suggest some covert concerns about the company's intentions. On the face of it, and as articulated by the executives, the company had reassured the executives that the process was confidential and none to whom I spoke admitted to having a problem accepting this assurance. However, as mentioned before, this view might be benefiting from hindsight. The executives did made it clear that if trust had been an issue, they wouldn't have continued with the process.

The willingness of the executives to trust the coach and the company suggests that the coaches' display integrity and that company has credible ethics. It also supports Vincent's contention that *if you invest in people they respond*.

5.3.4 Proximate and Distal Outcomes

Proposition 4

- Increased self-awareness and learning that leads to behavioural change and performance improvement will have a positive impact on individual success, and organisational performance.

Introduction

Kilburg (1997) suggests that the primary focus of coaching sessions is to grow the self-awareness of the client and that increased self-awareness is the key to improved performance. Others writers claim that the ultimate aim of executive coaching is facilitate learning that manifests itself in behaviour change that subsequently improves potential and performance (Downey, 2003; Bluckert, 2005). This learning can be single-loop, double-loop or transformative (Argyris and Schron, 1978). Joo (2005:481) distinguishes between immediate outcomes and more distant outcomes, such as career success. Knudson (2002:193) expects 'meta learning' to flow from rich and successful coaching experiences. Meta learning includes accepting and learning from feedback, and valuing and seeking out opposing views and challenges to the executive's position.

Findings

To a greater or lesser extent, all the executives experienced positive outcomes from the coaching and found the process of being coached a very enjoyable experience: *I just loved it* (Laura) and Seamus declares himself *a big fan of coaching*.

While only Seamus specifically mentioned 'self awareness' as an outcome, comments suggested that that there had been a considerable increase in self-awareness across the group. Gary claims to be a more reflective person and both Fiona and Laura had their personas validated. Fiona say: *I am more sure of the person I want to be and how I want to come across*. Laura now appreciates that:

> *it is alright to be this confident, it's alright to be this independent, that's just the person you are.*

Laura found that the first round of traditional coaching had acted as a launch pad for her. The initial coaching had given her insights into her strengths: *I view it as me understanding myself*; the second round of coaching would help her apply those strengths.

The notion of involving others in decisions has been a learning outcome for both Seamus and Gary. Talking about leadership, Seamus says:

> *having all the answers is not the right route – the challenge is letting others come up with the answer and having the judgement to be able to deal with the point at which the answer is wrong.*

Greater consideration for others, better interpersonal relationships and better self-management are recurring themes. Seamus has learned to have patience and he is working on showing empathy and on thinking about the impact he has on others. Fiona is more supportive of colleagues; she is now less likely to focus on projects to the exclusion of everything else. Gary makes a big effort to show interest and empathy for his staff and Kieran now always makes an effort to enquire about people's problems: *It is now very, very important for me to make time on that no matter how busy I am.* The empathy score for the group had risen at the end of the emotional intelligence course/coaching. Gary was particularly pleased with his personal empathy score, he had a great improvement.

Many executives refer to being more relaxed, and having a calmer approach to work. With the exceptions of Laura and Harry, all mention having a better work-life balance. Gary claims that when last on holidays, he turned off his mobile phone and didn't check his e-mails. He trusts people more now.

Coaching has helped the executives think strategically. Talking in terms of organisational development, Harry says that coaching has stretched his thinking. He used to be *in awe of the word strategy*. Coaching has helped him realise that he sometimes does think strategically and has helped him identify ways in which he needs to become more strategic. Fiona's *thinking is a lot more grey now, I am less wedded to outcomes.* Both Oliver and Seamus are thinking ahead and have learned to

prepare the ground to get their ideas accepted: *It is as much about the how as the what* (Seamus).

Executives found it difficult to identify tangible performance differences brought about by coaching. Seamus made the point that too many variables intervened between the coaching input and a tangible output. Several executives made references to the danger of reverting to type, although Gary thought you would never go all the way back. Both Fiona and Gary felt that telling other people about being coached helped keep you on tract because they reminded you of how you should be behaving: *She told me I was ready for a top-up!* (Gary).

In terms of career success, none of the executives credited coaching as having made any difference to recent promotions. However, all the executives claim that they are doing a better job because of executive coaching. While coaching did not prevent Seamus from being demoted, it has helped him cope and helped him in many other ways.

Discussion

Many of the ideal outcomes appear to have been achieved through executive coaching. Positive affect was not an issue – everyone enjoyed the coaching, although it could be argued that Laura's response could be interpreted as narcissistic.

Meta learning in the form of accepting and learning from feedback (Knudson, 2002) appears to be validated by the majority of executives. Most people referred to definite changes in behaviour –displaying more interest and more concern for staff, not focussing on projects to the exclusion of all else, being calmer in work and having a better work/life balance. Encouraging team members to have more input is moving away from a command and control style management which is likely to facilitate team learning (Pearn et al (1994:187). From an organisational performance perspective, people are also working smarter – Oliver has learned to delegate effectively and both Laura and Oliver are more proficient at managing time. Gary reckons that by adopting a different negotiating style he saved the company £100,000 (but he doesn't really attribute this to coaching).

Thinking styles have changed and executives are thinking more strategically about how to influence people. However, it could be argued that the coach's contention that executives saw themselves as managers rather than leaders is borne out by Kieran's acknowledgement that leadership is a journey that he is starting out on, and by Harry's discomfort with the work 'strategy'. Both of these men are in the B Band – the company elite, yet they are only coming to terms with concepts like leadership and strategy.

HR coaching objectives: Vincent and Barbara set objectives for the coaching. They sought improvements in Self-awareness, Business Acumen, Emotional Acumen, Team Leadership and involvement in Coaching and Mentoring. There is quite an amount of evidence for improved self-awareness, which Kilburg (1996) identifies as the launch pad for a myriad of positive changes. Business acumen appears to have been enhanced via the emotional intelligence modules on influencing skills and on negotiations; Gary considers that his coup in negotiations had nothing to do with the coaching but could be credited to the on-line module on negotiations. Emotional acumen would seem to be the biggest winner. Laura only concedes a *gentle rounding of my edges*, but most executives were affirmative about the interpersonal relationship changes brought about by coaching. While team leadership was not referred to directly, indirectly team leaders from the group had a heightened consciousness of the need to encourage team input. Two of the executives were undertaking mentoring, but coaching was a non-starter. Achieving a measure of success in four of the five objectives could be considered satisfactory.

The variety of outcomes reflect the coaching agendas and the expectations and orientations of the executives. The individual nature of the agenda reflect what is happening for the executive at that time. Laura needed to build her confidence and that is what happened; Kieran needed to enhance his stress management skills, and he did, Harry needed to come to terms with strategic thinking. Each executive brought their needs to the coaching agenda and the interaction between the coach and the executive created the next layer of reality for each executive. The flexibility of the coaches in pursuing individual developmental agendas was appreciated by all the executives. The coaches' collective ability to develop the executives across a range of outcomes is a further validation of their coaching skills.

5.3.5 Support for the Coaching Process

For ease of discussion, propositions 5 and 6 will be taken together.

Proposition 5

- A well-managed coaching process (tight contracts, specific goals, feedback on progress) will create accountability and encourage behaviour change.

Proposition 6

- A high level of support from HR and senior management will encourage executives to apply new learning and experiment with new behaviours.

Introduction

Writers such as Kiel et al (1996), Berglas (2002), and Sherman and Freas (2004) recommend that companies should check the qualifications of the coach and draw up coaching contracts that cover fees, the number and length of coaching session and key objectives for the sessions. The notion of the company 'qualifying' the executive, and the coach 'qualifying' that the company has ethical reasons for employing a coach is also a theme in the literature (Kiel et al, 1996:71, Tobias, 1996:89; Sherman and Freas, 2004). Knudson (2002:194) suggests that executive coaching can be extremely effective if properly supported by the HR department. Kiel et al (1996:69) and Diedrich (1996:62) looks for coaching to add value for the organisation. Laske (2004:1) suggests that the ROI of coaching is twofold: observable (behavioural) and inferable (developmental). The concept of single-loop, double-loop and transformational learning is associated with Argyris and Schon (1997). Zeus and Skiffington (2000:18) advocate the use of double-loop learning so that executives 'are capable of doing things differently'. Measuring Return on Investment from Executive Coaching is difficult, thus qualitative data is often used to assess its value (Kiel et al, 1996:69, Sherman and Freas 2004:84).

Findings

The coaching company came well recommended, the contract was tightly drawn for a specific number of sessions and a specific number of executives, and key development areas were agreed. This is in line with recommended practices.

All the executives acknowledge the input from the HR department in sponsoring the coaching and leadership development programme. Similarly, all executives have a problem identifying tangible performance improvement outcomes from the coaching. Kieran refers to too many variables intervening between cause and effect. Many examples have already been given of behavioural changes on foot of coaching, and in line with Lask's theory, it is reasonable to infer that improvements in self-awareness have led to developmental changes.

Discussion

The company appears to have taken a very softly-softly, but structured, approach to the introduction of coaching. Top management endorsed the process, and were willing to take part in a pilot coaching project to help 'sell' the concept outside of the board room. Great case was taken to reassure executives that the process would be confidential, and the coach was very strong in articulating that *confidentiality if absolute* and that no specific feedback goes to the company either on the profile or on the 360 degree feedback. Although the coach speaks of *breaking down resistance*, resistance to the idea of coaching was only articulated by one interviewee, though many referred to *other people* who had reservations about the process.

The question of the coach qualifying the organisation in terms of integrity would not have been an issue – the focus of the coaching was developmental, rather than remedial. It is reasonable to infer that the discussions between the HR Director and the Coach gave her an 'overall sense of the organizational requirements, culture, philosophy and context within the industry' (Saporito, 1996:97-99). However, in the second round of coaching a number of executives made reference to the fact that the company delivering the emotional intelligence course was Australian and this affected the timing of the coaching sessions (*you had to manufacture issues)*.

While the executives were 'qualified' in the sense that they were senior executives who were being groomed for leadership succession, it could be debated whether, from a coaching perspective, executives were 'qualified' in any serious sense, i.e. was there a serious attempt to measure their likely responsiveness to coaching. The HR director refers to the initial coaching being voluntary, but the coach suggests that executives may not have felt free to decline the offer. One executive is up-front about his lack of

interest in executive coaching at that point in his career; it was a wasted exercise for him.

It could be argued that the concept of qualifying the executive, although never very strong, has now been abandoned. The HR Director's views on the benefits of coaching are very strong and he now considers executive coaching akin to a medical check and insists that all senior executives avail of coaching. This lines up with Sherman and Freas's (2004) contention that for maximum benefit, the whole of the top team should be coached.

A further layer of idiosyncrasy is added with the HR Director's conscious decision not to have a triangular meeting (HR, Coach, Executive) to mutually agree a coaching agenda, and not to seek feedback on coaching outcomes. In this sense, although there was no ambiguity about who the 'client' was (Kets de Vries, 2005:74), this approach contravenes the strong recommendation that there should be openness in the process and that both the coach and the executive should share information with the sponsor (Wasylyshyn, 2003). However, the HR Director was *not interested in that kind of thing*, thinking that that approach was appropriate only for remedial coaching. His decision here reflects his belief that when you invest in people, they respond. It could be argued that, to some extend, the feedback issue was addressed when executives individually met the CEO to discuss outcomes from the LDP. In his favoured it could be argued that Vincent's actions suited his espoused theories (Argyris & Schron, 1978).

In her interview, the coach described the coaching on offer *as just a taster*, and was sceptical about what progress could be made in such a limited number of sessions − coaching needs to go over several years to have a serious impact. In the interviews, one of the women executives (Laura) validated the notion of the first round of coaching as a taster that had successfully prepared the ground for her to further benefit from the emotional intelligence coaching. Similarly, Fiona found that the emotional intelligence coaching formed a platform that enabled her to benefit from coaching sessions with Claire.

It could be argued that even if the results from coaching are nebulous and fall into the realm of soft skills, that, for C&C Group Plc, the return from investing in coaching has been satisfactory. Descriptions of the learning outcomes certainly indicate that most executives have experienced double-loop learning as a result of executive coaching. Even Laura, who doesn't admit to doing too much differently, has a powerful understanding of herself and is thinking differently about how she will position herself for a leadership role. Generally, there has been an upsurge in self-awareness which is reflected in positive behavioural change, in double-loop learning, and in executives thinking strategically.

6.0   Conclusions

Kilburg (1997, 2000), Lowman (2005) and Stevens (2005) make the point that much of the knowledge base around executive coaching takes a practitioner perspective and that the voice of the client is not heard often enough. This instrumental case study has contributed to an understanding of how executives in one Irish company experienced coaching. The case meets the criteria of trustworthiness and ecological validity and is rich in issues and descriptions that reflect the personal realities of the executives, the HR Director and one of the External Coaches. In line with Stake's (1995:9) advice, the key interpretations were those of the people being studied, rather than the researcher.

C&C Group's decision to introduce executive coaching as a leadership development instrument would appear to be validated by the range of successful outcomes. The conceptual model proposed that the success of executive coaching was dependent upon certain critical inputs: the qualities of the coach, the coachability of the executive, the relationship that developed between the executive and the coach and support from HR and from the organisation.   Successful outcomes included executives enjoying the coaching process, becoming more self-aware, behaving differently on foot of being coached, thinking differently, performing better and enjoying career success. Executives whose careers had reached a plateau or were going backwards, still benefited from coaching.

In line with many of the research studies on the effects of executive coaching, this piece of qualitative research found that inter alia, coaching was a positive experience for most of the executives and that everyone benefited from the process (Gegner, 1997; Hall et al, 1999; Laske, 1999; Kampa-Kokesch, 2001; McGovern, 2001; Paige, 2002, Stevens, 2005). Two executives had serious reservations about the qualities of one of their coaches (a very experienced coach that other executives rated highly). The notion that a poor coach/executive relationship will influence the outcomes is borne out by the experiences of these two executives. All of the other executives lauded the qualities of the coaches, particularly in terms of coaching skills and

psychological insight; they particularly liked being challenged. Executives were more reserved in their judgements of business acumen.   Interestingly, despite a good relationship with both of her coaches, one executive (Laura) would only acknowledge minimal changes in her behaviour; she didn't seem to see much need to change. However, the feedback session did validate her strengths and she found this very empowering.   Her dialogue around the coaching agenda is an example of one executive acknowledging multiple realities. As Laura recollected, no objectives were set for her coaching sessions, but she thinks that maybe if Barbara were asked she would say *Oh yes, we had very specific targets to do, but I certainly did not feel that there were.* Her observations help make Stevens' (2005) point that practitioners can be mistaken in their interpretations of interventions.

Neither age nor gender appeared to affect the response to coaching. All of the executives described themselves as highly motivated to benefit from coaching and all engaged in 'homework' such as practising new behaviours or trying to think differently.   It is interesting that the second set of coaching did seem to build on the first, particularly for the two women. Of the seven executives interviewed, three are continuing with coaching, which indicates an appreciation of the value it brings to their competencies. However, none of the executives associated coaching with recent promotions, although they all acknowledged that coaching had improved their ability to do their jobs, i.e. had improved their organisational performance. However, only one executive could give a tangible example of improved performance (Gary), but again he did not associate this improvement with coaching, *per se*.

The efforts of the HR Director were commended by all, and the culture shift in the company was attributed to him. The references to 'reverting to type' suggests that either an extended period of coaching, or 'top-up' coaching sessions might prevent regression. One executive (Harry) suggested that there was a 'disconnect' in the coaching approach. He thought that team coaching should be introduced and he was working towards getting this idea accepted.

In addition to all the executives enjoying the coaching, the improvements most referred to were in the area of individual learning: increased self-awareness, increased self-confidence, more people sensitivity, better team work, more trust and support for

colleagues, more ability to delegate, better time management, and more ability to think strategically. These considerable improvements indicate a degree of fresh thinking that surely qualifies as double-loop learning. The quality of this learning must enhance the personal effectiveness of individual executives and make a contribution to leadership within the company. How leaders behave interpersonally and emotionally impacts on the organisation's work climate, affects employee morale and individual and organisational performance (Kiel et al., 1996; Kilcaid and Gordick, 2003; Quick and Makic-Frey, 2004). Goleman contends that 'emotional intelligence is the *sine qua non* of leadership' (Goleman, 1995) and that the 'primal job of leadership is emotional' (Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee, 2002:ix). Within C&C Group, the HR Director is leading the drive for leadership consciousness and leadership competencies. Four years after coaching was initiated, the concepts of people leadership are gaining a foothold; obviously this is a slow process against the backdrop of a traditional, functional perspective.

The lack of accountability is arguably the only aspect of executive coaching within C&C Group that fails to match up to best practice. Unlike many studies that attempt to evaluate coaching outcomes from a peer perspective (Luthan and Peterson, 2003; Smither et al., 2003; Thatch, 2002), the C&C Group coaching process did not include a post-coaching assessment that included a post-coaching peer evaluation. This was a deficit commented on by quite strongly by Gary, who thought it was *'stupid'* not to have undertaken a second 360. He also made the point that in filling out the *EQI* for the second time, people could have manipulated their answers to get a better score. It could be argued that the lack of accountability for coaching outcomes is a deficit approach. Initially it might have been justified as a reassuring gesture for nervous executives, but now that the coaching is better established, some element of post-coaching appraisal seems appropriate. The notion of involving others in the coaching process (e.g. those who have filled in the 360s), was mentioned as beneficial by some of the executives and could perhaps be more formalised in future coaching programmes.

A second area for concern is the lack of interest that executives appear to have in the notion of coaching their reports. Coaching facilitates a less directive style of management and linked with emotional intelligence fosters transformational

leadership.   Whether any of C&C Group's coached executives exhibit transformational leadership characteristics will be the focus of document 4.

As an outcome of this study, some assertions are possible:

- When conditions are right, all executive enjoy being coached.
- When conditions are right, executives accept and learn from feedback
- Depending on their agenda, executives can experience a variety of outcomes from coaching
- A positive dyadic relationship is linked to positive coaching outcomes
- Executives appreciate a coach who can bring psychological insights to the coaching process
- Executives benefit from and appreciate being challenged by the coach.
- Executive coaching appears to enhance a leadership development programme
- Executives appreciate positive support from HR
- Executives who experience coaching will not necessarily coach their direct reports.

Constraints of time and space may have prevented my doing justice to the myriad of perspectives expressed by the executives. The perspectives on offer illustrate the idiosyncratic nature of executives' responses to the coaching process. From a social constructionist perspective, how individuals draw what they need from what is basically the same process, is insightful. Individual responses to the nature of the feedback is a good example of how people's beliefs and values feed into creating their own reality which goes on to shape their actions. The same could be said for the different responses to Barbara's coaching style. What the executives bring to the process in terms of prior experience, attitude, and motivation so impacts on the final outcomes that they truly create their own worlds.

6.1   Looking forward to Documents 4 and 5

Document 3 has provided a deeper understanding of how one particular set of executives experienced coaching and the benefits they and the organisation obtained

from the process. Whether the positive outcomes that the executives associated with their coaching adds value for the organisation in terms of enhanced leadership styles is the focus of document 4. Goleman (2002) in particular makes a strong link between emotional intelligence and transformational style leadership.

The possibility of administering Avolio and Bass's (1999:442) Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) is currently under negotiation with the company. This questionnaire seeks to distinguish between transactional leadership styles and transformational leadership styles. My intention is to administer this questionnaire to the direct reports of all executives who have undergone executive coaching.

At this stage, my thoughts on document 5 are very tentative. Building on the foundations established by Documents 3 and 4, I will seek to explore at a deeper level how executives experience the coaching process and whether coaching has influenced their leadership styles.

7.0 Reflection

Document 3 has been quite a journey. Lincoln and Guba (2000:183) describe reflexivity as:

> the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher, the 'human as instrument'…It is a conscious experiencing of the self as both inquirer and respondent, as teacher and learner, as the one coming to know the self within the processes of research itself.

This is a viewpoint that received quite a degree of emphasis in readings on methodology. I found this section challenging but also very interesting. The notion that researchers bring their background, their attitudes and their prejudices to bear on the research is a sobering concept. I thought about this quite a bit and came to appreciate the truth of it. Bryman and Bell (2003:27) make the point that that 'research cannot be value free' and they encourage researchers to be self-reflective about what they bring to the process.

Looking at the values that I brought to Document 3, I would have to acknowledge that my background predisposes me to value the notion of coaching to enhance personal and organisational performance. Outside of the fact that part of my own development involved enrolling in an Executive Coaching Programme, academically, I am also very interested in the area of interpersonal skills and teach a module in this subject. I am also interested in the world of business, although I don't have much knowledge of the dynamics of organisational life. For many years I have believed that people create their own reality; that your response to what happens in your life is a determinant of the quality of your life and shapes the reality of your world. Thus the notion of social constructionist fitted very well with my existing philosophy, although I was unaware of the term prior to starting the DBA.

In the course of developing the research for Document 3, I met many interesting people who went out of their way to be helpful. This really added value for me. During the research process I had the opportunity to take the emotional intelligence questionnaire (*Bar-On EQI)* which the executives had taken as part of the LDP programme prior to the emotional intelligence focussed coaching. This suggestion

came from Barbara during my interview with her. I completed the survey on line. It was subsequently analysed and linked to a Leadership Behaviour Profile. I then had a feedback session with John who explained the profile to me (It was interesting to recollect John's manner during the feedback session – this also helped me identify with Gary, who was coached by John). I was very interested to find that my response to the feedback practically mirrored Laura's response – we both felt that the profile had boosted our confidence.   Understanding how this process worked was personally insightful and was a big help to me when talking to the executives.

The actual interviews were most enjoyable. As I mentioned in the document, all the executives were accessible – nobody cancelled and only one person, Kieran, reduced the time to an hour (*you have to be ruthless with your time*).   In view of his philosophy, it probably was a reflex reaction.   I felt very privileged by the degree of openness shown by the executives and their willingness to be helpful. However, it did raise the issue of confidentiality: how much of what was said should be included in the themed interviews in the appendixes.   This was a judgement call that I had to make.

Before starting the interviews, I was concerned about my sponsorship into the company. While I really appreciated having the HR Director on my side, willing to smooth the way, I was also a little concerned that I might be 'tainted' by organisational politics, especially the notion that 'The Group' headquarters was imposing me on the Divisional executives. As far as I could discern, this was never an issue. All the executives seemed to have the greatest respect for the HR Director and attributed full credit to him for the people initiatives within the company.

Easterby-Smith et al, (1991:57) talks about 'contamination from people in organisations wanting particular results'. I am very conscious of the fact that the HR Director confidently expects a very positive report on the introduction of executive coaching into the company. A further concern is the dissemination of results – all the executives expressed an interest in having access to a final document. As I mention in the document, the name of the company and the names of the people have been changed and for the most part, job descriptions have been omitted. However, within the company itself and among the HR director, the coach, and the seven executives

interviewed, it is harder to preserve anonymity.   This is something I need to discuss with my supervisors after they have read the document.

In the course of the last DBA module, I was very interested in some thoughts on a reflective approach to organisations that Dalvir Fredericks shared. Dalvir specialises in ethnographic research into how decisions are taken at Board Room level; thus she has a lot of experience of working within companies. She suggested that we should be conscious of the clues in the environment that would help you understand the politics of the organisation and she suggested that one's biography is quite important – it influences what you notice. She suggests that we should be alert from the minute we enter the building.   Although I didn't go to the lengths that Dalvir does (sketching the placement of furniture), I was definitely more tuned into nuances. For example, both of the women executives used a meeting room for the interview and provided water and glasses. All of the men used their office and one offered coffee. When I e-mailed the executives to thank them after the interviews, both women e-mailed me back an acknowledgement – none of the men did this. Do these small things matter? Although I marked the differences and found them interesting, I'm not sure how to interpret.

Perhaps because of my biography (I was a secretary in a much earlier phase of my life), one of the nice things I noticed about the company was the pleasant manner of the receptionists and their helpfulness. I was also impressed by the fact that every executive, bar one, came down to the foyer to meet me and brought me back to their office.

Dalvir also emphasised the importance of context – what kind of mood were people in. In her interview, the coach made the point that executives in the company were more relaxed and more secure financially since the flotation – and one interviewee said she felt very fortunate to be working in a company that was doing so well. All the executives, except Seamus, seemed to be moving forward. It wasn't until the second last interview that I had a sense of the 'maleness' of the organisation. This happened when Fiona mentioned several times how nice it was to have a woman coach who could understand what it was like for her – there were so few women

working in the top of the organisation – 3 women in the top 40. I found it fascinating that so many of the executives described themselves in terms of A personality types.

Dalvir also flagged the notion that you might sometimes have a strong identification with the person telling the story and that you need to be aware of your responses to some of the people.   I was quite aware of feeling closer to the women, but also feeling quite a degree of empathy with both Gary and Harry. I was also conscious of the need to be non-judgemental, no matter what the story. I did try to be objective, although I know that complete objectivity doesn't exist.

Regarding interviews, Dalvir pointed out that not only are we editing the interview, but that the interviewee is also editing for our benefit. Senior managers, she said, like to 'present as competent and polished'. Although I can appreciate this point, I found it hard to keep in mind that perhaps I wasn't always getting the full story, especially when executives told stories against themselves. However, I fully appreciate the point about editing the interviews. There is a lot of content in a two hour interview, and deciding on what to include and exclude from Document 3 was not easy.

I had some unfortunate experiences with technology that made painful learning. As I mentioned in the document, on one occasion my digital tape recorder only recorded half of the interview. Because I don't fully trust technology, I had taken some notes and was able to build the interview from the notes and from memory. The second interview, which was scheduled for a half-hour later, was recorded by hand. The difference between trying to take good notes while simultaneously conducting the interview and between being able to use a recorder and listen and concentrate on the speaker, is huge.   Transcribing the interviews was also insightful. Initially I had thought to get them professionally transcribed – unfortunately the transcribers couldn't understand the Irish accent. When I came to listen to the recordings through their ears, I realised how quickly we spoke and how much of our speech was slurred! This was quite insightful in terms of appreciating cultural differences.

Document 3 also taught me about the paucity of the written word to capture the nuances of conversation (inflection, tone, body language) and the personality of the speaker.

Despite the use of copious quotes to illustrate the interviews, the words on the page are very cold relative to the voice of the speaker. All the elements that give life to words – inflection, tone and body language, are missing from the spoken word. No matter how carefully you try to craft the written language, it is difficult to capture the personality of the person, for example, Laura is a very vivacious woman with a high energy level: I'm not sure this comes across. I had an overall sense of positivity from the actual interviews that didn't come across when I read the transcripts.

With hindsight, I think I should have learned to keep a tighter rein on the structure of the interviews. However, being willing to follow the conversation helped me build empathy with the executives; I really enjoyed talking to them and getting to understand their world. I look forward to Document 5 that offers another opportunity to explore executives' experiences of and critical incidences around executive coaching.

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Appendix A: Interview with HR Director

Interview with HR Director

The Group Human Resources Director (Vincent) has responsibility for Group-wide human resource policies and strategy, and for performance and management training. The *main objective of this job is to enhance our overall business performance by bringing C&C Group's People Plan into line with best* practice. One of the key focuses of the People Plan is:

> *leadership, succession and talent retention and a critical part of this plan is the introduction of executive coaching for all senior managers as part of their personal development plan.*

Prior to the new HR vision, the company approach has been described as paternalistic and traditional. While the company did invest in training, it had a *very poor history of developing people for leaders*, mainly the focus was on developing functional positions, with *no focus on business leaders, and no real HR strategy*. Vincent's remit is to focus on the top teams with a view to developing a cadre of potential business leaders. He is part of a *People Matter Group* which consists of the top 11 senior executives who meet on 'a people agenda to agree strategy and approve operational plans'. So far, these plans have been successful. A comparative staff morale survey by an outside company showed a 20% improvement in the last 3 years – this helped silence some of the critics *who don't believe in all these people policies.*

Some of the people difficulties that the company is experiencing could be laid at the door of success. Since going public, the company had multiplied its value 7 times in four years. *We have gone from the 2nd divisions into the 1st division ... and this is quite a leap for people to make. The People Matter Group* decided that modern techniques were needed to develop business leaders and that these techniques would focus on developing interpersonal skills and emotional intelligence.

Choosing the coach

Following a detailed presentation on executive coaching, the *People Matter Group* approved the introduction of executive coaching as a leadership development intervention. The pilot programme, which took place in late 2002 and 2003, was conducted by Barbara Brady & Associates. This company came recommended by a senior C&C executive who had experienced their approach in another company.

What Vincent was looking for from the coaching team was professionalism; they had to be experts in their field and have a proven track record and a good reputation.
There are *a lot of charlatans in this business and every dog and devil was coming around looking for coaching business*. To get his business, a coach would also need either coaching qualifications or psychological qualifications and the *capability of taking on our contract and fulfilling it to a particular standard*.

Vincent himself took some coaching sessions *to test the water* and three other members of the *People Matter Group* agreed to take part in a pilot executive coaching programme. Vincent found the coach to be *very astute, she was also a trained psychologist, which helps*; he *finds that makes them very powerful*. He knew she could handle anyone in his organisation. The fact that four members of the senior team were coached helped '*in selling the programme to other senior managers'*.

Together, Barbara Brady and Vincent identified the main competencies and behaviours we wanted to target and influence. These were: *self-awareness, influence, business acumen, emotional acumen, coaching and mentoring, and team leadership*. The C&C contract was *for a year for a specific number of sessions, it was clear what was expected and what they were supplying*. Executives would be entitled to 3 coaching sessions each, further sessions would have to be sanctioned by HR - the sessions couldn't just continue.

Executive coaching is now an 'integral part' of C&C's leadership development strategy. The company has now two different kinds of coaching – *traditional coaching which gives the executive an opportunity to talk*, and *focused coaching which is specialised* and concentrates on specific areas such as emotional intelligence and on stress management. He finds it difficult to quantify the outcomes from coaching, but he does notice a difference. People are more focused, their behaviours in emotional intelligence have improved – *particularly a couple of people I can think of*. These are all *very dedicated, loyal, professional people that were doing a very good job and are now doing it better – but how can you quantify that?*

Executive coaching is now mandatory for all senior executives. Vincent likens it to a hand-shake – like going to the doctor; he sees coaching in the same light as a medical check:

> *The company sends all senior executives to the doctor every two years – it's an excellent preventative'...every business leader needs time to sit back and reflect, to see where they're going, what they're doing and to have a chance to think in a structured way'.*

He's coming to the viewpoint that senior leaders should have a personal coach.

Appendix B: The Coach's Perspective

The Coach's perspective

In 2002, Barbara Brady & Associates were employed by C&C Group Plc to provide a coaching service to senior executives. Barbara, (a woman in her early to mid 40s) prefers the term '*corporate psychologist*' to consultant. Her background is in clinical psychology and she has worked in consultancy for 15 years. In addition to herself, Brady & Associates employ 3 executive coaches, all psychologists.

The coach considered that the number of sessions contracted for was *absolutely not enough* and really just qualified as *a taster*; for real change to take place, *for someone to change to an unrecognisable extent, you would need 9 to 10 sessions*. Executive coaching was a 3 year process, ideally five years. She recollects that the HR Director anticipated that it '*would take 4-5 years for the breakthrough*'.

The early days

Barbara recalls that in the beginning executive coaching was *viewed with deep suspicion and scepticism* and she went thought 18 months of breaking that down. Company executives were *uniformly of the higher age rate*, very bright with lots of potential that hadn't been capitalised. While the company was '*big into training*', even this didn't happen at senior level; *they were thought to be already fully formed*. She didn't think you could call it a blank sheet, that implied a neutral situation; she had encountered *complete lack of awareness and very high levels of resistance* by some senior executives.

The early coaching was '*more or less*' voluntary. Very few said they weren't doing it, perhaps because they '*didn't want to be perceived as not being up for it*'. It was a time of rapid change in the company and several factors contributed to causing concern to executives – it was pre-floatation time and this generated a lot of uncertainly, the job evaluation banding exercise was starting and many people found it hard to appreciate that it was the job, rather than the executive, that was being classified, finally, confidentiality around the 360 degree feedback was a big issue. However, some executives welcomed the process.

Making progress

Post-flotation there was a different feel to the company – '*people were more relaxed because they had choices now; they could stay or go and financially they were in a much better position*'. What also became 'immediately clear' was that there were two types of executives:

> *those people who wished to progress, who had a hunger*
> *to do more, do better, be better themselves and others*
> *who were just prepared to pay lip-service to the whole*
> *process. The breakdown was probably 50-50.*

This year, 4 or 5 very senior people have come and said that they realise that they're the ones who have to drive this. So the coach considers that the work done 2 ½ years ago did have an impact. To illustrate this, she mentions a '*major concession*' from a very senior executive who '*had no concept of people development, no concept of intellectual capital*' and who '*now wishes he had started this 15 years ago*'.

How the coach measures success

Success is measured in terms of the individual executive – helping them to deal with the stressors and demands of a very fast changing environment; encouraging them '*to take personal responsibility for their own development, and not expect the organisation to hand it to them on a plate*. She helps them plan how to shape their careers and develop roles for themselves to take them to the next level.

> 'You need to have an awareness of what is possible for these individuals, getting them to where they're confident enough, and profiling themselves enough, so that they can literally create a role for themselves'.

The coaching process

Before a person walks through the door, the company has done about 12 hours work and Barbara has a '*huge amount of information*'. Prior to coaching, the executive completes a range of psychometric tests and answers up to 2000 questions. Barbara uses a minimum of 6-8 tests that, *inter alia*, measure personality factors, leadership behaviour, thinking styles and emotional intelligence. The emotional intelligence test tells a lot about a person – '*how emotionally staple he is, how resilient he is, what their core self-esteem is – it's very useful*'. The psychometric tests will tell whether somebody is coachable. '*Just by looking at the profile you can tell whether someone is lacking in self-awareness*'. Barbara considers that the key area is self-awareness –

> If they don't know themselves and aren't already taking responsibility for some of their own actions', then coaching will be very hard work.

This information is a 'great launching pad' and she claims that in 18 years nobody has said '*that isn't me*'.

Confidentiality is absolute. The agreement with the company is to bring the person as far as possible in the time available. No feedback goes to the company and neither is it is privy to the psychological profile or to the 360 degree feedback.

The first meeting is concerned with feedback; it is used to create rapport and get agreement on the profile. About half-a-day is given to this. This first session produces a '*huge up-surge in awareness*'. Subsequent coaching sessions last from 2-3 hours – they tend to be very intensive; '*some people can't do more than 2 hours*'.

Executive are asked to give one hour a month to review progress: 'Type A personalities find this incredibly difficult: *'One second's spare time and they have a rush of anxiety'.*

Relationship with client

Confidentiality is a big issue. At the time when coaching was introduced there were:

> *'concerns about 360 information leaking, also at the same time the work bands were being drawn, also flotation, also amalgamation, there was huge change and lots of fear'.*

Individual coaches are chosen to get a best fit with the profile that emerges from the bank of psychometric tests. There can be differences in the quality of relationships – you gel better with some people. Trust and respect are critical ingredients.

Dealing with resistance

You need perseverance to deal with resistance. Often you are met with a lot of anger – executives can be angry and humiliated at having reached their limitations. Almost all senior executives have some kind of chip on their shoulders and often they may feel they need help, but don't know how to ask for it.

The coaching agenda

In terms of coaching for skills, performance, development or the executive's agenda, most of the focus is on performance. Brady & Associates don't coach for skills. Executives who stay with the process climb this ladder – they now know where they need to go. Barbara's agenda is *'just about getting as far as we can in the time that we have'.* The process is completely open-ended and completely controlled by the executive: *'they often don't realise they have to input so much; they think it's us'.* But executives have to meet the coach half-way.

She makes the point that it is very important to know what a person is potentially capable of and not to try to take them there too fast: *'our job is to get them to recognise their own potential'.* When this happens you have a huge psychological shift. Many senior people *'don't see themselves as leaders, they see themselves as executives or/and as managers'.* Barbara is 'not into the management development model', she's into the 'leadership development model'.

Outcomes from coaching

Taking individual requirements into account, the focus is on self-awareness, self-management, self-regulation and self-development; *'we want them to take charge of themselves'.*

Slippage

In terms of people regressing, it takes 9 – 12 months to get a new perspective on yourself and then 18 months to make sure you don't row back on your plan.

> *'Anyone we coach successfully for a year never goes back, they wouldn't want to'. In 2 to 3 years you have a person who has changed exponentially'.*

The coaching approach

The profile that falls out of the psychometric tests 'determines areas of focus'. Barbara likes to focus on areas of strength 'that way naturally you bring along the weak areas'. This is in contrast to how it was in the old days, when a lot of coaching was remedial. Specific behavioural objectives are agreed and set. These objectives arise from 4 key areas – corporate roles, profiles, emotional intelligence and 360 degree feedback. The behavioural objectives are always managed by the executive because Barbara believes 'you have to work from the inside out'. On the 28th of each month, the executive is asked to do the self-audit.

She likens coaching to psychotherapy; 'you're trying to change facets of behaviour, and that can't be done in 3-6 months. But usually after 9 months you can see a change. After this happens '*it's possible to move to a whole new level of development'*. However, movement to the next level may only be for a handful of executives:

> *'those who have kept working at it and come back and come back and come back; they realise how far they have to go'. In contrast, 'others are quite happy to take their 3 sessions and run'; they may come back and look for support if they new roles, 'but it's really after the event, as opposed to long-term planning'.*

Looking to the future

It will probably be 4-5 years before the company will be operating in the people arena at a level acceptable for their standing. The company needs to make a radical culture shift, but everyone is working towards this. A lot of people in the company are actually asking about the coaching now – the HR Director '*has done a phenomenal job'*.

Appendix C: Summary of Executive Interviews

Themed Summary of Executive Interviews

Profile: HARRY, 4 years with C&C Group, B band.   Harry thinks that commercial awareness and business awareness are the key skills needed for his job as a Divisional HR Director. The HR function has moved beyond the traditional administration focus, and is now strategic. '*The role of HR now is contributing at the Board level, to the business'.*

Harry did a Post-Graduate Course in Executive Coaching and Management. The executive coaching element of this course was conducted by Peter Bluckert and Associates and Harry experienced being coached by Bluckert as part of this programme. Harry knew he would shortly be listed for coaching and requested to have Bluckert as his coach.

Traditional coaching
Process: Harry, Courtney and Bluckert met to agree the coaching agenda and to define the terms of the contract. Harry was aware of a developmental need that might be met by coaching; '*he had seen the potential of coaching'.* He wanted to improve his strategic thinking — '*he was in awe of the word'*, and he also '*needed to be able to cope with occasionally being wrong'.* He gave himself a hard time when he got something wrong. These two items formed the core of the coaching agenda. It was agreed that Harry would have 6 coaching sessions with Bluckert. To date, Harry has had two coaching sessions, six weeks apart.

The sessions were structured at the beginning and end, '*but wandered in the middle - I mean this very positively'.* The GRO W was probably used to a certain extent, but in a very loose way. But the session '*definitely ended-up with objectives to reach for the next time'.*

Coachability: Harry definitely looked forward to the sessions —'*Great*'!' He knew he had a very '*solid agenda'* and he knew from Bluckert's style '*that he was going to delve in'*; he was very confident that Bluckert '*would facilitate my thinking'.* Between sessions he tried to '*think certain things'*- it was more his approach to thinking. He also did some recommended reading on strategy. He would rate himself as about 8 or 9 on coachability.

Relationship with the coach: He worked well and felt comfortable with Bluckert; '*I like his personality'.* In fact, in the best possible way, Bluckert reminded Harry of someone in his family who was '*like a father figure'.* He had '*very high regard and respect'* for this family member. He felt that Bluckert '*was the right man'* and that they '*had clicked*' — he '*liked his style'.*

Qualities of the coach: Bluckert is a good listener, be builds up the relationship. He is '*very strong on business knowledge, he understands organizations, he understands what the roles are'*; it's not '*soft coaching — touchy-feely stuff'.* It's definitely focused on the business and his '*business acumen comes across'.* You would '*feel that he's qualified and has all the skills as a coach'.* He's also very challenging: '*He'll ask me the right questions, rather than telling me the right answers'.*

Part of the focus was on coaching for performance and part was on coaching for developing his future role.

Harry came out of the first session '*seeing some work to do*'. At the next session:

> I was really enthusiastic to tell him what I had done and where I was at and he heard it all and reinforced it and it was very positive. Then he challenged me and I realised I hadn't gone as far as I thought I had. So he doesn't miss a trick.

In terms of assessing coaching skills and other qualities, he really had '*nothing to benchmark him against*'. He thought 9 to 10 on coaching skills. On business acumen, he thought '*very high*', but if considered him relative to his own boss, he would give Bluckert a 7; on '*psychological insight*, Bluckert is a 9*'*.

*Outcomes***:** He has now stretched his thinking — Bluckert helped him to realise that his role is not just looking downwards in the organisation, but also '*looking at the people I sit beside and how that team works and that to me was such an insight*'. At meetings now he sometimes disengages from the discussion to '*see how the team is playing*'. That is something he never did before. He's also more confident in recognising where he is contributing strategically. He has made a big contribution to the restructuring: '*I have impacted on that decision and on the implementation*'.

In terms of coping with things sometimes going wrong, he's working on accepting that you probably won't always be right and '*that it is not bad to be wrong*'. He hasn't made that much progress on this aspect. However, he is pleased that his coaching agenda is so '*real and so much in my work life*' — it's not like learning something that you don't put into practice.

He would like to see a team based approach to coaching in the company. He has tried his hand at coaching and feels the process is successful. Part of his rationale for doing the coaching course was to develop his coaching skills — he had always coached, but in an '*amateurish way*'.

Profile: Kieran, mid-50s; with the company 17 years; B band.   He describes his style as '*a little bit robust*', he feels he is reasonably good at picking people who are also robust and who '*are not going to be intimidated by my style*'.

Traditional Coaching

Process: As part of the process he undertook a profile assessment, including 360, a feedback session and (he thinks) one further session. (He had a problem remembering that this coaching even took place).

Coachability: Kieran doesn't remember having any preconceptions about coaching; it wasn't something he 'felt was beneficial for him at the time' and it was low on his priorities. He didn't discuss coaching with any of his colleagues.

Outcomes from coaching*:*   Overall, he 'would *not describe it as an enriching experience'.*

Relationship with the coach*:* He put his negative evaluation down to 'not clicking' with the coach 'we just did not hit it off'. He describes her manner as 'brusque' and he felt she intended to take the sessions where 'she wanted them to go'. He was reluctant to rate the coach on any attributes, feeling that he hadn't been coached for long enough to make a judgement.

Outcomes*:* Nothing positive came out of this coaching.

Emotional Intelligence coaching

Process*:* Kieran scored quite well on the emotional intelligence test – no particular area of weakness, and there was very little change in his score when the test was retaken. He sees himself as already strong in areas such as delegating, managing time (you have to be ruthless with time), and seeking feedback from people.   He used two of the coaching sessions to focus on relaxation and stress management, even though he scored quite highly on copying with stress. They also talked about 'empathy and how you approached things or how you approach people'.

He wanted to develop 'skills for switching off when the day is done and sleeping better at night and being able to come in more refreshed in the morning, rather than, you know, going home, sleeping and working in your sleep'. Part of the skills learned was not to postpone issues or confrontations.

Coachability*:* He made a 'huge effort on just general relaxation and stress management and getting better at it, and I did work very, very hard at that'.

Qualities of the Coach*:* Kieran was very impressed with the coach. He found her to be 'very capable, very, very bright, able to go anywhere at all that I wanted to go and very, very strong'. In terms of coaching skills, he found her 'no push-over in terms of being able to be assertive – in the best sense of that word'. She had an 'air of confidence' and was 'very, very knowledgeable on a wide range of topics'. He scored her 9/10 on coaching skills. He thought she had sufficient business acumen to do the job well.
In the area of stress management: 'she was so good and so capable and so experienced, I found this to be very beneficial. I think that has helped me personally'.

Outcomes*:* Kieran had a positive response to the emotional intelligence coaching. He is 'quite a believer' in EQI because 'I have managed people of you know incredible intelligence and academic background and experience, and they have not been performers, and I have managed people who are not terribly gifted who perform very, very well'.   This is something he would like to understand in people to help him get the best out of people.

Talking in terms of having taken on probably the biggest job of any of the MD jobs – '*I am quite relaxed. I am quite looking forward to it, now that I have the ability to just be more relaxed. Not to get distressed by things.'*

Another key learning point for him was to be more attentive to people. While this was not a new thought for him, he is now more sensitive to it:

> *'If someone has told me about a problem if I can*
> *remember the next time I see that person to ask how are*
> *you getting on – I think it builds a little bit of trust'.* It
> is now *'very, very important for me to make time on that*
> *no matter how busy I am'.*

He thinks here has been some regression and people *'revert to type'*, mainly due to the *'pressure of business'*. He is not sure whether contacting the key functional relationship people made much difference – but he thinks that *'everything helps'*. It's not something that he actively does anymore and he doubts if many of the group still do – *'he hasn't been taken out to lunch in a while!'*

Kieran thinks he is *'reasonably reflective'*. Both sets of 360 degree feedback gave him a *'fair idea'* of how people see him and that *'would generally fit with my own understanding of how I would have been anyway'*. So he probably got *'small insights'* from the coaching, but he feels he is *'probably good enough at seeking feedback from people'*.

In terms of his recent promotion, he thinks he would have got the job anyway, but probably can do the job better now. With tangible outcomes *'you're looking for cause and effect and there are just too many variables'.* However, he did notice some changes in behaviour after discussion of group scores – 'how we might do things differently' – he noticed some different behaviours from other members in the team towards each other in subsequent business situations. He hasn't tried coaching, but is mentoring two people.

Profile: Gary: mid 40s, 3 years in C&C this month; now Divisional Wholesale Director (job has been expanded and now the Marketing Department reports into him), B Band, 9 direct reports.

Traditional coaching

*Process***:** Gary did all the psychometric tests and organised 360 feedback. He wasn't long in the job so he wonders about the validity of the 360 degree feedback. He only had the feedback session – he didn't know that further coaching sessions were available to him.

Qualities of the coach: He had a feedback session with Barbara (he finds it hard to remember). He's quite used to getting feedback – other companies he worked in did a lot of psychometrics. As usual, there were lots of areas to improve. He didn't like the Brady approach, thought it was:

> *clinical – almost pigeon-holing you – you're an*
> *'AQUB - that's what you came out as, that's what you*
> *do, get on with it. You were being told what to do.*

Emotional Intelligence Coaching

Process: Gary didn't score very highly on emotional intelligence. He had the *'poorest score on empathy but the biggest improvement when the test was retaken'*. He had 4 coaching sessions, each about one month apart. He found the initial feedback session quite difficult in terms of dealing with the coach and dealing with the feedback.

'The first half hour he was watching the clock and thinking – God, how many more of these do I have to go through'. There were:

> *a lot of pregnant pauses – I didn't know where we were going or what we were doing – I couldn't spark off him – he was looking at me all the time and I was thinking, why are you looking at me – I became conscious of my body language – did I do something wrong – but I actually liked him in the end. He was quirky, but I did like him.*

The nature of the feedback was also a problem. There was *'a lot of stuff in it that I didn't like coming out of the 360, but you have to take it on the chin. It was clearly true what people were saying about me'.* The results from the self-administered survey also supported what was in the 360s. *'It took a while for me to get into it. It probably takes a while for you to say, maybe I am like that'.* While he *'didn't worry about it'*, he *'certainly thought about* it'.

One of traits identified was stubbornness in pursuing courses he wants to follow. He was 'dismissive of people's ideas, way too early'. Also, he didn't connect very well with people: *'I come in on a Monday morning and get straight into work and forget to ask people how they are'.*

Most of the focus was on coaching for performance (80%) and on coaching for development (20%). In terms of emotional intelligence, Gary was *'looking to improve what I do now to advance myself"* and a lot of the conversation was around *'emotional day-to-day interactions with people'.*

Coachability: He *'probably had low expectations of coaching: 'Being honest, I probably wondered what this guy is going to add at all'.* While his motivation was low at the start, he was very motivated when he got into it (8-9). He worked very hard at bringing about the changes. He discussed coaching with colleagues – *'just to get feedback on how he was getting on'* and the feedback was generally positive.

Qualities of the coach: In the coaching sessions, Gary would *'have done most of the talking'* because that is the way it was set up.

> *It was quite an open style and quite constructive because he was able to throw back examples at me or questions to me or challenge me, so that was the sort of style it was'. He probably was quite good at 'persuading you to do something but actually*

> *persuading in a way that it was your own idea in the first place…. I found him very quiet, which was a challenge at the start.*

The coach was '*definitely a good listener*', but he would have liked him to give more feedback   He recollects that the feedback always came at the end of the session: '*maybe he was just drawing me out as much as he could, analysing and summarising*'. He rated the coach highly on psychological insights (8/10), but not on business acumen. But then that was '*not his job either*'.

 He didn't feel that anything would be reported back:

> *I did trust him, because I wouldn't have said some of the things to him if I didn't'. When you're talking about 'emotions and personal things you need to feel that the person is trustworthy.*

At the end of each session they would identify 'a couple of things' to be worked on over the next month.

Outcomes: Overall, Gary had a very positive response to the emotional intelligence coaching. He enjoyed the sessions and felt that everyone was getting something out of it.
He thought the coaching sessions were '*quite good, I probably used it in a very practical way, straight away*'. From the second session, he '*was able to give loads of examples of things I had done differently*'. He engaged his staff in conversations and discovered things he never knew about their lives. One particular woman was stressed trying to manage two small children and cross the city in time for work. He arranged for her to work from home 3 days a week. '*He did try and apply it*'. He thinks it is a good idea to involve other people in giving you feedback on your behaviour, they help keep you on track. He can't understand why the company didn't organise a second round of 360s: he thinks that was *stupid.*

He found the on-line modules very good. Using active listening from the negotiating module (rather than his normal confrontational style), he figures he saved the company £100,000. He's not sure that the coaching had anything to do with this.

He identifies the primary outcomes as definite behaviour changes, while the secondary outcome is a better work-life balance. He is now a lot more relaxed, a lot calmer. He discusses some work issues at home, which he never would have done. He probably trusts people a lot more. Last year when he went on holidays he turned his mobile off and didn't check his e-mails and sales went up!.

He describes himself as a '*filter more than I was before - where stuff would come down to me and I'd probably nearly add to it and throw petrol on it, and now I'd filter it*'. He's also more conscious that people a layer or two below him in the organisation are worried for their jobs – there's so much change in the company. He *definitely wouldn't have been a reflective person, but he is more reflective now.*

In terms of his recent promotion, he thinks that would have happened irrespective of coaching. But coaching has '*absolutely helped me to do the job*'. Definitely there's a tendency to slip back – but maybe never as far as you were before. He thinks involving other people helps keep you focused – people remind you. He sees coaching as part of his job – coaching in a commercial sense.

Profile: Seamus: early 50s. 15 years in the company; Deputy MD; B Band; 3-4 people reporting directly to him. At the moment the company is undecided about what to do with the business unit, there is very poor morale in his section and 25% of people have left. In the restructuring, he was turned down for the top job (*shafted*), so instead of being MD he is now deputy MD.

Traditional coaching

Seamus had a very positive coaching experience. While initially he viewed it with some caution and suspicion because he was not sure '*what would go back*', he was reassured by the coach who explained what it was about. He had about 6 sessions with the coach. He assumes he had more sessions than others because of illness in his family and because of the demotion: '*it probably was decided that executive coaching would help – probably somebody high up said, do whatever you need to*'.

Seamus describes himself as '*highly charged, having a high achievement drive*' and he finds '*managing upwards a challenging skill*'. He is highly numerate – fast to spot any mistake and is able to 'read' information. In his previous position as MD, '*he worked incredibly hard – it nearly killed him*'. His focus was on hard skills, rather than soft and '*an ability to stand back wasn't my style*'. He found it difficult to allow his team to have significant inputs.

He didn't have a problem with the feedback session, '*it's important to be honest and you are as others see you*'. He came out as low on empathy although he thinks he is empathetic, but '*wouldn't show it*'.

He wasn't aware of any particular approach on the part of the coach. He generally brought issues to the table, 'said *how I intended to deal with this – what do you think?*' The coach listened and gave advice. '*It was a good check-back*'. He had his own agenda and because of personal tragedy '*the work with the coach was very valuable to me in all sorts of ways*'.

He thought that the coach was a really good listener, with great psychological insight. He rated her 9/10 on coaching skills and 10/10 on psychological insight – '*she really knew how to ask the right question to get to the heart of the issue. She clarified my thinking*'. He also felt she was highly tuned to the corporate culture and to issues that senior executive faced.

He describes himself '*as a big fan of coaching*'. He '*really looked forward to the sessions*' and was very motivated to benefit from coaching. He worked very hard to bring about change – he regularly reads the *Emotional Capitalist* book – he keeps it by his bedside. He thinks that the whole success of executive coaching is:

> *'absolutely dependent on the relationship between the coach and the executives – like a tennis coach and player – trust is essential'.*

He trusted the coach absolutely and had a really good relationship with her; confidentiality was only an issue before the relationship developed.

His primary output has been increased self-awareness; he has *'picked up on things I need to work with – calmness in face of challenges'* and *'preparing for key events'*. He appreciates that it is *how* as much as *what* that matters, especially in managing up. In terms of leadership competencies, what makes a leader:

> *having all the answers is not the right route – the challenge is letting others come up with the answer and having the judgement to be able to deal with the point at which the answer is wrong.*

He spends more time thinking about how to phrase things – he needed to deal with an issue yesterday, he gave it thinking time and was pleased with the result. Also his behaviour has modified in that he has learned increased patience and his ability to lead is better (less of a tendency to think that 'the devil is in the detail'), he also works on showing empathy and thinking about the impact he has on others. Because he is more balanced himself, he finds he enjoys a better work-life balance. With his self-awareness he now has awareness of others and of emotional intelligence.

He thinks that coaching someone who works for you could be suspect. He has tried to advise one person.

If he were to associate coaching with his career, he would have to say it didn't work. His career is going backwards, and for many reasons outside everyone's control, the business unit is also doing badly. It is a difficult time, but coaching has certainly helped him deal with personal challenges. Although he can't show tangible results, he is a *'better rounded person and deals better with challenges – whether it has helped his performance – it's hard to say.*

Emotional intelligence

He found Martyn Newman 'brilliant' and subscribes to the view that emotional intelligence competencies and skills are needed at leadership level, but 'you need the ability and time to use the techniques'. You need to keep in mind 'what battles other people are trying to fight'. His coaching sessions with Kathy were *quite good*. She wasn't as challenging as Barbara; she tended to be non-confrontational and empathic, but he felt she understood people very well, including himself.

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Profile: Oliver: mid-50s; 30 years in company; A Band. Eight people report directly to him and underneath that, there is a team of about 50.

Traditional Coaching

Oliver worked with Paddy. During the feedback session he didn't feel threatened by the 360 – at his level '*he doesn't think you do'*. He learned that in some ways he was not as good as he thought, and in other ways he was better. Overall he did well, but some comments he thought were unfair. When he saw them he put it down to '*personal stuff'*, but immediately felt that he '*hadn't been giving that person enough time'*.

During the coaching sessions they used a leadership manual and worked through it. He found this very useful. He always did the homework – he felt '*you owed it to the coach to do the homework'*. He was very interested in the coaching, eager to do anything that would help him improve his current performance. He is a great believer in training and development.

He rated the coach very highly on coach skills and psychological insights. He was a good listener – he also thought he had a lot of business acumen and appreciated the position of senior executives – '*when that man spoke, you'd stop and listen'*. He trusted him and he liked him.

Oliver *got a lot out of coaching*; *the process allowed you to be very honest.* He has learned to think about what he wants to achieve; preparing the ground, getting people on-side before putting forward a plan. In the past he was often amazed when some of his really good suggestions weren't accepted. He thought everyone would see their merit. When they weren't accepted, he was often '*very annoyed and wouldn't hide it'*. Then another suggestion would be accepted which was definitely not as good as his. Now he realises that these other people had prepared the ground. He also gives more thought to how he'll handle people, especially one member of his team who is easily stressed.

He now has another coach and he thinks he's very good. He's politically astute, but if measured against his new boss, he could only give him 7/10. The new boss is a revelation – how he prepares the ground – '*he's a pleasure to watch in action'*. A key learning point with the second coach was about managing his time – learning not to procrastinate – learning how to delegate. Now he has learned to think – '*when a piece of paper crosses my desk – who can I get to do this for me*?' Previously, he would keep procrastinating and intending to do it himself, then giving it to someone else at the last minute, so there wasn't enough time to do the job properly. Everyone loses. He definitely works smarter now. He has a better work-life balance and a healthier lifestyle. He has lost two stone in weight in the last year.

Coaching won't have any effect on Oliver's career – he isn't interested in promotion. Any promotion within the company would require him to move from Northern Ireland and he would not be willing to do that. However, it is very relevant because he is very interested in improving his performance in the current job. He thinks it is very good that the organisation is encouraging people to improve

He recently did a Director's Course and really enjoyed it. He worked hard at this and got the exams first time. He learned about transformational leadership on this course.

Profile: **Laura**, mid-late 30s, B Band, 12 years in the company, 5 years in her current role. She has 3 people reporting to her, but she deals directly with all the MDs. Her job is *very operational…it is all about building relationships in my job… I have to pre-empt problems before they ever happen and in order to do that you have to have great relationships with people which is what I do quite well*. She describes as *extraordinary* the changes that have taken place in the company in the last number of years. She thinks it is great to be working for a company that is doing so well – not everyone is that fortunate. The LDP helped her to meet a lot of people in a lot of different companies: *there was an enormous opportunity to network with these people*.

Traditional Coaching

Process: Laura describes the results of the profiling as: *utterly fascinating for me to see my personality mapped out in this way and to start understanding some of the aspects of my personality*. She came out as high levels of independence and high levels of confidence – things that should have made her very arrogant. But Barbara reassured her that other factors such as coming from a large family had provided balance:

> So *it is alright to be this confident, it's alright to be this independent, that's just the person you are.*

She thinks that *Barbara was a brilliant person to do the profiling with.* Talking about how the sessions went, she felt:

> *There were no plans about this is what you are going to do. It was more about what you would like to talk about on the day. Certainly with Barbara it was chat, chat, it was great, just talking about me for hours on end, I just loved it.*

She thinks that maybe if Barbara were asked she would say *Oh yes, we had very specific targets to do, but I certainly did not feel that there were.* She knows it wasn't the same for others, some people had to do homework or go and learn things. She thinks her main weaknesses were lack of experience and lack of skill in certain areas.

The same things keep coming up over and over for her: *I need to take more time with people.* But time is something she doesn't have. She thinks the emphasis was on softer skills, *there were gentle rounding of my edges.* Laura felt the coaching was *a lot more about me learning a lot more about me. I view it as me understanding myself.*

Motivation: Laura entered coaching *absolutely wholeheartedly* – she'd give herself 8 on that. Maybe she was *a little bit cynical*, but it was a great opportunity and the *sort of challenge that you do not get very often.*

Emotional Intelligence:
Process: The timing of this course was just perfect for her: she was just back from her third maternity leave and *her confidence was a bit low*. While the initial coaching was viewed as helping her to understand herself, the emotional intelligence coaching was: *how you apply it all out.* This time she had Kathy as her coach. She was interested to see if there was much of a difference between her profile with Barbara and two years later*: I don't think that there was frankly, not a lot anyway.*

She found one of the scores from the emotional intelligence particularly interesting; *I scored myself way lower on empathy than anybody scored me in my 360, so that was good.* She didn't have a lot of faith in the supposed improvements in the EQI – she thought the improvements were measured on a different scale.

The coaching agenda: The coaching started off in terms of 'what things I wanted to look at' and moved to looking at the people she influenced. They talked about time-management, while it was all very positive, she didn't think that *it changed anything fundamentally*. She found some of the material made her uncomfortable:

> *you interact this way and that way or always leave with this kind of question. It felt a little false to me….Martyn* (Newman) *would tell stories about monumental shifts in people in Australia. That is great but we are not in that culture.*

She remembers discussing with Kathy how she would handle an upcoming interview:

> *I am not sure I would have changed anything in the way I approached the interview but I certainly did it with a great deal more clarity and a great deal more structure.*

Outcomes: The primary outcome from the emotional intelligence course is that it gave her the confidence to recognize that she has the qualities for leadership. She hasn't seen much change in people – even people who made changes in the beginning, like holding more team meetings, have reverted to their old style. She has tried to take on some new projects to move her out of her comfort zone. A secondary outcome she associates with coaching is more effective time management – *a little tactical thing that makes your life more efficient.* She also learned about managing stress. She now holds weekly Monday morning meets with her team and finds it extremely effective.

She hadn't tried her hand at coaching, although the prospect is fascinating, she doesn't think she has the skills to do now. On the other hand, she tries not to be directive but encourages people to find their own solutions. She feels that support for coaching is growing.

Profile: **Fiona**, early 30s, 3 years in the company, recently promoted to the S1 Band. Fiona has now responsibility for Performance Management, which is more about what will motivate a group of people, rather than dealing with individuals and *nitty-gritty day to day issues.* Although it's not main stream, she sees this role as much more strategic and thinks she has a natural fit with it. Fiona says she is: *very hard on myself, constantly pushing myself.* She can become very project focussed. When the emotional intelligence course was completed, Fiona requested further coaching; her second coach is also a woman. This coach helped her see that her new role was the right one for her at this time.

Process: As part of the emotional intelligence course, Fiona was coached by Kathy, although her feedback session was given by John: *He was very much just going through your report so you understood what it was saying.* One of the things that *knocked-me-over backwards* was that her profile showed as being assertive; she hadn't ever thought of herself like that. Her review from her peers showed that when she was in her *natural zone,* she was *absolutely grand.*

> *The 360 feedback also linked in with the profile, so when you see something in writing and then you confirm it to be true, you have to deal with it.*

With hindsight, she wonders if she was over-lead by the report; she thinks she might now disagree with elements of it more than she did the first time she read it. She also wonders about the improvements in her EQI score – maybe that's what it should have been in the first place.

Fiona had no preconceptions about what might come out of coaching, she went into it with an open mind and viewed it *more as my time as opposed to company time.* She thinks that some people have difficulty appreciating that if coaching is good for them, it will be good for everyone else as well. The coaching took place once a week for four weeks. She found this schedule a problem – *sometimes you had to manufacture something to talk about.* She enjoyed the coaching, although she didn't always look forward to the sessions – especially if she was having a bad day, although these sessions were often the most profitable in the end.

The GROW model was used to structure the first two sessions (Kathy explained this to Fiona), but it was more issue driven as the sessions went on.

Fiona has had 5 sessions with the second coach. She had an informal discussion over coffee with Vincent and Claire to set-up the coaching and she did feedback one progress report to Vincent.

Coaching Agenda: The coaching agendas were mostly about development. The sessions focused on influencing skills, handling confrontation and relationship building. Self-management was a focus; under pressure, Fiona forgot about managing up and managing down. She would get the job done, but *everything else went out the window*.

In the sessions, there was always time for issue discussion:

> *Sometimes the whole hour would be about an issue. It was very much about me and what was going on at that time, as opposed to what the course was supposed to be covering.*

The agenda with her new coach, Claire, is more open – she has a more open remit and is not tied to the programme.

Relationship with the coach: She has a good relationship with Claire, which she intends to continue with coaching. Fiona was also *very fond of Kathy,* she saw her *more as a friend than an advisor.* Although the feedback session with John was fine, she felt:

> *a better instant connect* with Kathy; *it was actually nice to have a female coach…in the organisation there are very few women you can bounce things off…she might understand more the struggle you have…I think there was value to it from that point of view.*

Qualities of the coach: She describes Kathy as *very strong in empathy…calm and supportive.* She was very good at:

> *bringing your thoughts to the floor and helping you assess how you feel about these. She asked good questions and made thought provoking comments. She also picked up on cultural elements within the organisation and that enabled you to talk about interactions; she was good on the dynamics of the organisation, maybe not on the commercial.*

She rated Kathy as 9/10 on coaching skills and on psychological insight.

> *That was one of the strongest part of her coaching, you didn't feel that you were being analysed, but with hindsight you definitely were.*

She finds Claire more challenging – *she keeps pushing and pushing until I'm talking about what I should be talking about.* It's not therapy, *but it helps me see what does upset me, so that I can overcome it.* She rates Claire 10/10 on coaching skills and psychological insights. Both of them score 6-7 on business acumen.

Outcomes: She came to have a better understanding of herself and is more comfortable with herself: *I am more sure of the person I want to be and how I want to come across.* One of the most positive things that came from the coaching was enabling Fiona to see how she:
> *could manage up without being overly assertive and to be able to manage within my own personality and style and not be trying to put on a different face.*

She thinks the coaching has made a difference. She is much more conscious of how she reacts in certain scenarios, so she can pull back quicker. Before she went into the coaching process she thought it wasn't possible to change the type of person you were, now she knows you can change habits. She has got over having a negative reaction to people disagreeing with her. She doesn't bring work home with her as much as she did, she feels she has a better work/life balance. She also thinks differently – she doesn't just think in terms of *projects having a defined outcome* – now she considers whether something is the right thing now, and will it still be right in 3 months time. She thinks she is *a lot more grey now, less wedded to outcomes.* She also thinks she is much more supportive to colleagues.

People have commented on *huge changes in me*. She explained to some people what she was trying to achieve, feedback on her progress has been helpful. She thinks that the coaching has helped in carrying out the new role: *I think I have achieved more in the role than I would have done without the coaching.*

She is only aware of transformational leadership through working with Vincent in the HR department. She thinks that if she was working in a department other than HR, she wouldn't have picked it up from the course.

Appendix D: Interview Themes

Interview themes

BACKGROUND

How long with C & C? What function? What band?

Did you have some preconceptions about the likely outcomes from coaching?

PROCESS

How is coaching process structured? Overall objective? Sessional objectives? Contract? 360 degree feedback? Feedback from coach?

What was the first session like?

Are you aware of any particular approach on the part of the coach.

Are you accountable in any way to the company?

In terms of coaching agendas, is there a dominant focus? What items did you bring to the table?

> Coaching for skills (learning sharply focused on a person's specific task)
> Coaching for performance (focused broadly on a person's present job)
> Coaching for development (focused on a person's future job)
> Coaching for the executive's agenda.

What emphasis on transformational leadership? On emotional intelligence?

Has it been difficult to move executives from a functional perspective to leadership perspective?

QUALITIES OF THE COACH

How would you describe the qualities of the coach?

How would you rate the coach on:

Coaching skills? – what is the nature of the skills you identified?
Business acumen?
Psychological insight?

How satisfied are you with the coaching experience?

RELATIONSHIP WITH COACH

How would you describe your relationship with the coach?
Compatability?
Respect?
Trust?

Is confidentiality ever an issue?

Was feedback tough - how did you handle this feedback?

INPUTS

Did you have many expectations about the benefits that might flow from coaching?

Coachability - On scale of 1-10, how motivated were you to engage in coaching?

How would you describe the effort you made to bring about changes – was there a definite change strategy? (Homework – implementing new practices, practising new behaviours).

OUTCOMES

Do you actually enjoy the coaching sessions? Do you look forward to them?

What primary outcomes do you now associate with coaching?
Are you aware of any secondary outcomes? (learning how to learn)
What kinds of learning have taken place as a result of coaching? (Knowledge/Skills self-efficacy?)
Did some learning fall away/decay?
What specifically do you do differently now as a result of coaching?
Have outcomes from coaching impacted on your career prospects?
In what ways, if any, has your organisational performance improved as a result of coaching?

How do you gauge the outcomes?

Organisational climate: How widespread is support for coaching? How is it regarded within the top echelons? How open is the organisation to new learning?

Document 4:

Sentiments of Direct Reports of Coached Executives

1.0   Introduction

This research study examines whether direct reports of senior executives who have been coached, experience more job satisfaction, greater organisational commitment and advocacy and are better satisfied with their managers' and leaders' behaviours than the rest of the work force.   The research is based on an analysis of the results from a staff survey titled *Have Your* Say which was designed by Mori Ireland in conjunction with the HR team in C&C Group Plc.   The survey was issued by the company to all employees in February 2006.   This survey solicited staff views on their levels of satisfaction, on aspects of their jobs, on their commitment to, and advocacy of, the company, and on management and leadership style.

Executive coaching is part of a leadership development programme within C&C and is used as a strategic tool to enhance the leadership skills of senior C&C executives, all of whom have experienced some coaching.   To date, this leadership development coaching has taken two forms: traditional coaching, which took place in 2003/4 and focused coaching with an emphasis on developing emotional intelligence, which took place in 2005/6.   Common sense dictates, and many writers argue, that how leaders behave interpersonally and emotionally impacts on the organisation's work climate, affects employee morale and has a knock on effect on individual and organisational performance (Kiel et al., 1996; Kilcaid and Gordick, 2003; Quick and Makic-Frey, 2004).

Following a critical literature review on executive coaching, Document 2 developed a conceptual framework that identified important inputs to the executive coaching process and the ideal outcomes that should flow from coaching when these inputs are in place.   Document 3 sought to understand how executives experienced the coaching process, what significance they attached to the inputs, and what outcomes they achieved from executive coaching.   *Inter alia*, all executives found coaching to be insightful; it raised their self-awareness, improved their confidence, helped them to become more sensitive to the needs of their teams, made them more trustful of colleagues, improved their ability to influence and to delegate and enabled them to think more strategically.

This document, which includes a selective review of the literature on leadership styles and behaviours, identifies a considerable overlap between the ideal behavioural outcomes associated with executive coaching and the outcomes from a leader displaying emotional intelligence and/or from a company with transformational leadership processes in place. While it is not possible to make a causal relationship between outcomes from executive coaching and evidence of emotional intelligence or transformational leadership processes, it is reasonable to expect that some organisational benefits will flow from the coaching process and that these may be reflected in the levels of satisfaction, commitment and advocacy experienced by direct reports of executives who have been coached. Whether this has happened is the focus of Document 4.

2.0   Literature Review of Leadership Theory

Introduction
Identifying the multi-faceted aspects of effective leadership behaviour has engaged researchers in vigorous debate for almost 100 years, and many seminal papers have made significant contributions to the evolution of effective leadership theory. Chemers (1984:91) divides the scientific study of leadership into three periods, the trait period from around 1910 to World War II, the behaviour period from the onset of World War II to the late 1960s, and the contingency period from the late 1960s until his time of writing (Chemers, 1984:93). Bass's (1985) focus on transactional vs transformational styles of leadership is still current, as are theories of leadership competency models (which engage with developmental aspects of executive coaching). The notion of emotional intelligence as a prerequisite for effective leadership also has champions (Goldman, 1998, 2002; Newman, 2005).

While interest in leadership effectiveness continues to thrive, much of the research has been bedevilled by methodological limitations and flaws. The following overview of leadership effectiveness research attempts to articulate the most influential theories and give a flavour of how leadership theory has developed.

Trait theory

Trait theory is concerned with identifying the personality variables that separate leaders from those they lead. This approach is based on the premise that effective leaders have attributes that marked them off from their followers (Jones & George, 2007:565). Trait research tended to survey leaders and their followers on various personal characteristics thought to be associated with leadership; the findings were then compared to identify differences. Stogdill's (1948) seminal paper on 'The personal factors associated with leadership' identified several such traits: *Capacity* (judgement, intelligence, originality, etc.); *Achievement, Responsibility, Participation, Status*, and *Situation* (needs and interests of followers, objectives to be achieved, etc.). A more contemporary list is proposed by Jones & George (2007:565) who produce a table of traits and personal characteristics thought to be related to effective leadership; these include: intelligence, knowledge and expertise, dominance, self-confidence, high energy, tolerance for stress, integrity and honesty, and maturity.

Critique of the theory

While Stogdill's 1948 meta-analysis of 120 leadership studies identified a number of traits associated with leadership, it failed to establish a coherent pattern to leadership traits (Bass, 1981). This failure to discern a significant pattern to leadership traits is considered a watershed in leadership research; Stogdill contented that:

> *A person does not become a leader by virtue of the possession of some combination of traits, but the pattern of personal characteristics of the leader must bear some relevant relationship to the characteristics, activities, and goals of the followers. Thus leadership must be conceived in terms of the interaction of variables which are in constant flux and change.* (Stodgill, 1948 reproduced in Bass, 1981:66-67)

Stogdill's article is credited with redirecting leadership research away from trait theory and towards situational analysis, although he was of the opinion that both aspects influenced leadership (Bass, 1981:xiii). (It could be argued that Stodgill is articulating a contingency theory well ahead of Fiedler's 1964 model). Bass (1981:358) summarises the deficiencies associated with the trait model of leadership:

(1) little success had been attained in attempts to select leaders in terms of traits; (2) numerous traits differentiated leaders from followers; (3) traits demanded in a leader varied from one situation to another; and (4) the trait approach ignored the interaction between the leader and his or her group. Yukl (2002:201) is of the view that '*the abstract nature of most traits limits their utility for understanding leadership effectiveness*'.

Behavioural models

The focus now shifted to leadership behaviour. Chemers (1984:94) attributes the emergence of studies in leadership behaviour to the failure of the trait approach and the growing popularity of behaviourism in psychology. Research on leadership behaviour continued through the 1950s into the mid-80s. This research was particularly strong at Ohio State University where researchers identified two kinds of leader behaviours used to influence subordinates - *consideration* and *initiating structure* (Jones & George, 2007:566). These two categories of behaviour were found to be independent of each other, i.e. '*a manager may score high on both, low on both, or high on one and low on the other*' (ibid: 2007:567). The following describes some of the behaviours displayed by considerate managers/leaders, *inter alia*:

> '*considerate managers expressed appreciation for good work, stressed the importance of job satisfaction, maintained and strengthened the self-esteem of subordinates by treating them as equals ... put subordinates suggestions into operation, and obtained approval of subordinates on important matters before going ahead*' (Bass, 1981:360).

Initiating structure was concerned with facilitating task performance, goal achievement and organizational efficiency and effectiveness (Jones & George, 2007:567).

Chemers (1984:95) notes that '*the identification of two reliable dimensions of leader behaviour was a major step forward for the field of leadership. Optimism was high that research had finally cracked open the complexity of leadership effects*'. The consideration and initiating structure concepts of leadership provided an impetus for parallel research, e.g. Blake and Mouton's Managerial Grid Theory (1964) was particularly influential. This theory focuses on *concern for people* (similar to

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consideration) and *concern for production* (similar to initiating structure) and advocates the 'high-high' leader; one who is strong in both concern for people and concern for production. Both the managerial grid and the early Ohio State leadership studies influenced the direction of research and many studies were undertaken '*to test the idea that effective leaders make frequent use of task-oriented and person-oriented behaviours*' (Yulk, 2002:58).

Leadership styles

The pioneering studies of Lewin, Lippitt, and White (1939) and Coch and French (1948), are credited with initiating an interest in the consequences of participative leadership (Yukl, 2002:85). Chemers (1984:94) refers to '*classic research*' by Kurt Lewin and his associates who identified three styles of leadership: autocratic, democratic and laissez-faire. Lewin (republished in 1997) was concerned with the impact of leadership style on work group behaviour; his research concluded that work group behaviour is a function of leadership style, rather than the personality of the leader. Chemers (ibid) claims that this emphasis '*on autocratic, directive styles versus democratic and participative styles had a profound impact on later research and theory*' and research on the effectiveness of participative leadership was second only to the mountain of research on task and consideration leadership. In these research studies, Chemers notes that '*the criteria of leader effectiveness were usually subordinate satisfaction and performance*' (ibid).

Critique of the theory

Similar to Stogdill's (1948) findings about trait theory, leadership behavioural theory was found to lack consistency. Yukl (2002:75) reports how hundreds of studies were undertaken to see how consideration and initiating structure were '*correlated with criteria of leadership effectiveness, such as subordinate satisfaction and performance. Results from this massive research effort have been mostly weak and inconclusive*'. It would appear that qualitative research based on critical incidents and interviews supported the notion that high-high leaders are effective and that such leaders '*guide and facilitate the work to accomplish task objectives while at the same time maintaining cooperative relationships and teamwork*'. On the other hand*, '*survey research provides only limited support for the universal proposition that high-high*

leaders are more effective' (Yukl, 2002:59). As Jones & George (2007:568) put it (although they don't explain it):

> *The relationship between performance of consideration and initiating structure behaviours and leader effectiveness is not clear cut. Some leaders are effective even when they do not perform consideration or initiating-structure behaviours, and some leaders are ineffective even when they do perform both kinds of behaviours.*

A similar problem confounded the research on participative leadership. According to Yukl (2002:86) authors of several meta-reviews on the effects of participation reached different conclusions, although (ironically) they did agree that the research results lacked consistency. Similar to the results on high-high leaders, qualitative research findings have been *'more consistently supportive of the benefits of participative leadership'* and researchers have found that *'effective managers used a substantial amount of consultation and delegation to empower subordinates and give them a sense of ownership for activities and decisions'* (ibid). Yukl goes on to state that:

> *'after more than 40 years of research on participation, we are left with the conclusion that participative leadership sometimes results in higher satisfaction, effort, and performance, and at other times it does not'* (Yukl, 2002:86).

Chemers (1984:95) contends that up to this stage *'researchers were seeking to identify the "best" style of leadership. They had not yet recognized that no single style of leadership is universally best across all situations and environments'*. Yukl (2002:74) makes the point that similar to Trait Theory, behavioural researchers *'tended to look for simple answers to complex questions'*. He argues that *'It is likely that specific behaviours interact in complex ways, and that leadership effectiveness can not be understood unless these interactions are studied'* (ibid). That breakthrough came with the development of contingency theory.

Contingency Theory

Fred Fiedler first presented his contingency model of leadership in 1964. Jones & George (2007:569) describe how Fiedler *'used the term leader style to refer to a*

manager's characteristic approach to leadership and identified two basic leader styles: relationship oriented and task oriented'. Interestingly, Fiedler didn't think that leaders could be adaptive; according to Fiedler, '*leadership style is an enduring characteristic; managers cannot change their style, nor can they adopt different styles in different kinds of situations'* (Ibid). After years of further research Fiedler developed a contingency model that '*incorporated situational parameters into the leadership equation'* (Chemers, 1984:96).

Other researchers built on Fiedler's contingency approach, e.g. Vroom and Yetton's (1973) Normative Decision Theory. This model specifies which decision making style (autocratic, consultative or group style) is most likely to produce effective decisions under varying situations. Chemers (1984:98) notes that Vroom and Yetton's model assumes that leaders can quickly and easily change their behaviour to fit the demands of the situation, which is contrary to Fiedler's view . Tattenbaum and Schmidt developed a continuum of leadership behaviour and argued that forces in the manager, forces in the subordinate and forces in the situation would indicate appropriate behaviour and that the effective leader is '*one who maintains a high batting average in accurately assessing the forces that determine what his most appropriate behaviour at any given time should be …'* (Tattenbaum and Schmidt, 1975:128).

Another contingency theory, Robert House's (1971) Path-Goal theory, focused on what leaders can do to motivate their subordinates to achieve group and organizational goals. The premise of path-goal theory is that effective leaders motivate workers to achieve goals when they clearly identify the outcomes that subordinates are trying to obtain from the workplace, clarify the paths leading to work goal attainment, and reward those who perform well and achieve work goals (Jones & George, 2007:571). Jones & George (2007:571) identify Path-Goal theory as a contingency model '*because it proposes that the steps managers should take to motivate subordinates depend on both the nature of the subordinates and the type of work they do'*. In his 1996 paper, House presents a revised theory that moves towards an interest in value based and transformational leadership.

Despite being acknowledged as contingency models, Chemers (1984:99) suggests that both Fiedler's and House's models tended to '*largely ignore the characteristics of the subordinates*', this position was remedied by Griffin's (1980) research whose findings suggested that '*in addition to job characteristics, the needs, attitudes, and expectations of the follower have an important effect on the follower's reaction to leader behaviour*' (Chemers, ibid).

Critique of the theories

Contingency theories appear to avoid the harsher criticisms levelled at their forerunners. Fiedler (1971:156) critiqued 25 studies that purported to test his 1964 model and concluded that mixed methodologies had confounded the tests. However, Strube and Garcia's (1981) meta-analysis of Fiedler's contingency model provides support for the theory (Chemers, 1984:97).

In his 1996 paper, House presents a retrospective review of the development and history of path-goal theory and acknowledges that the theory has not been adequately tested and he notes several methodological limitations that affected research studies.

While contingency theory has a place to play in subsequent effective leadership theories, Yukl (2002:235) argues that a '*major limitation of the contingency theories is lack of sufficient attention to some leadership processes that transform the way followers view themselves and their work*'. These processes are explained by the theories of transactional, transformational and charismatic leadership.

Transactional approaches

Both trait, behavioural and contingency models of leadership all tend to concentrate on the leader's attributes, actions and attitudes. Transactional approaches widened the research focus to consider the exchange relationship between leader and follower. Chemers (1984:100) cites Hollander et al's 1970 research on the legitimation of leadership as among the most important contributions to the study of leadership. Hollander found that:

> *Members of groups exchange their competence and loyalty for group-mediated rewards which range from physical rewards such as*

> *income or protection to the less tangible rewards of honour, status, and influence* (Chemers, 1984:100).

In addition to the broadening of the research agenda, as stated above, in the late 1970s and early 80s, leadership theorists began to consider the role of attribution theory in leadership evaluations. Chemers (1984:102) cites Calder (1977) as arguing that leadership perceptions, judgements and attributions say more about the beholder, than about the leader and that perceptions of leadership effectiveness is distorted by perceiver biases and by an implicit leadership theory. Calder's (1977) findings are supported by research by Ayman & Chemers (1983) which led them to conclude '*that leader-behaviour ratings are more a function of the implicit theories which guide the "eye of the beholder" than they are of what the leader actually does*' (cited in Chemers, 1984:101-2). However, Jones & George (2007:573) suggest that '*effective managers seem to have a knack for determining what kinds of leader behaviours are likely to work in different situations*'. This is a point supported by Yukl (2002:66) who say that over time the '*optimal pattern of leader behaviour is likely to change as conditions change*', but he contends that effective leaders are likely to rely consistently on relations-oriented behaviours.

Leadership Competency Models

In 2006 *The Leadership Quarterly* published an article titled 'Leadership Competency Models' (Hollenbeck, McCall, & Silzer, 2006). This article made public a series of letters between Hollenbeck and McCall on the one hand and Silzer (2006) debating the pros and cons of leadership competency models. Silzer writes in defence of competency models, while Hollenbeck and McCall vigorously argue that '*the competency movement is based on a set of questionable assumptions*' (Hollenbeck et al, 2006:398).

Silzer outlines the evolution of competency models, noting a movement in the 1970s from a task-based to a person centred focus. The person-centred approach focused on knowledge, skills, and abilities (KSAs) and on initiative and interpersonal skills. In the 1980s, organizational change became even more rapid and assessment centres evolved to select people for management positions, not just for a specific position. At the same time, researchers became interested in personality and ability variables and their impact on job performance. In the 1990s, management models of performance

evolved to leadership competency models with a focus on *'fundamental KSAs that would identify fungible individuals who could be effective in a range of leadership positions'* (Hollenbeck, et al, 2006:401).

Briefly, their respective positions are as follows. Silzer (ibid:402) argues that competency models are helpful to both individuals and organisations. Individuals can benefit because, *inter alia,* competency models specify a range of useful behaviours that individuals can use as a template for self-development. Organisations can use competency models to indicate which leader behaviours are considered important and the models can be used as criteria to help select and develop suitable individuals.

In counter-argument, Hollenbeck and McCall make the point that the first Competency Conference held in Boston in 1994 was a huge success, but that the fate of many of the companies that made competency presentations is noteworthy: *'some have failed, some no longer exist, and many have struggled to survive'* (Hollenbeck, et al, 2006:406). They suggest that certain fallacious assumptions underpin competency models. In particular they state that:

> *'Competencies have distracted us from a focus on results, getting things done. Competencies cause us to focus on people, their personal characteristics, and even their personal behaviours, rather than outcomes, what gets done'* (Hollinbeck et al, 2006:408).

They liken a competency focus to the great person theory and state that *'generalizable competencies simply raise the question of how great the person'* (ibid).

Emotional intelligence

Since the mid-1990s, emotional intelligence is gaining ground as the new master competency. A special issue of *Leadership Quarterly* (2002, Vol.13, Issue 5) was devoted to the topic of emotions and leadership. Emotional intelligence, often referred to as a leadership competency, (Goleman, 1998, 2002; Prati, et al. 2003(a); Newman, 2005) is part of a new management paradigm. Indeed, Goleman's position is that while IQ and technical skills are important, *'emotional intelligence is the sine qua non of leadership'* (Goleman, 1998:93) and that the *'primal job of leadership is emotional'* (Goleman, Boyatzis and McKee, 2002:ix). Several authors contend that

how leaders behave interpersonally and emotionally impacts on the organisation's work climate, and affects employee morale and individual and organisational performance (Kiel et al., 1996; Kilcaid & Gordick, 2003; Quick & Makic-Frey, 2004). Kets de Vries (2005:62) claims that:

> *The emphasis on managing interpersonal relationships has grown as organizational leaders have come to realize that talent and human capital are what differentiates mediocre from high-performing organisations.*

The components of emotional intelligence divide into two sets of competencies: personal competencies such self-awareness, self-regulation and motivation that determine how we manage ourselves and social competencies such as empathy and social skills that determine how we handle relationships). A research study by Kellett et al, (2006:155) shows '*support for empathy's positive relationship with relations leadership and task leadership.* They make the point that their focus on empathy sits nicely with the '*recent emphasis on authentic leadership*' and cite Dasborough & Ashkanasy, (2002) as claiming that leaders who are genuinely empathetic '*become true, as opposed to pseudo-transformational leaders*' (Kellett *et al*, 2006:159). Other researchers also make links between emotional intelligence and transformational leadership (Barling et al, 2000; Sivanathan & Fekken, 2002). Cote & Morgan (2002:947) link pleasant emotions in the workplace with job satisfaction and '*with decreased intentions to quit by improving the quality of interpersonal encounters at work*'.

A critique of the theory

Although the concept of emotional intelligence as a prerequisite for leadership effectiveness has many proponents, its popularity does not go uncontested. Sternberg's review of Goleman's (1998) book *Working with Emotional Intelligence* suggests that many of the claims made by Goleman are unsupported by evidence and makes the point that Goleman's conception of emotional intelligence is so broad that '*it seems close to a conception of almost anything that matters beyond IQ*' (Sternberg, 1999:782).

Antonakis (2003, 2004) takes Prati et al (2003a, 2003b) to task for their proposal that emotional intelligence is an indispensable condition for effective leadership.

Antonakis's (2003) view is that current claims about emotional intelligence are not backed by robust research. He goes so far as to say that '*evidence supporting such claims is nonexistent, contradictory, incomplete, or misrepresented'*. In his 2004 paper he outlines '*some principles derived from basic guidelines used in psychometrics, which may be of use in evaluation EI research and EI claims*' (Antonakis, 2004:173). He asserts that he hasn't yet found even '*one study*' (his emphasis) that follows basic guidelines and '*shows that EI matters for leadership effectiveness*' (ibid).

Transformational leadership (TL)

James McGregor Burns' (1978) best-selling book on political leadership is credited with kick-starting the interest in transformational versus transactional leadership (Yukl, 2002:241). Burns described transformational leadership as appealing to followers' moral values, while transactional leadership motivates followers by appealing to their self-interest. While transactional leadership may involve values, they tend to be '*values relevant to the exchange process, such as honesty, fairness, responsibility, and reciprocity*' (Yukl, 2002:241).

Currently, Bass's (1985, 1996) theory of transformational leadership has received much empirical attention (Lowe & Galen, 1996). His theory develops the distinction between transactional and transformational leadership and describes the component behaviours that underpin each approach and the ways in which these behaviours impact on and motivate followers. However, Bass contends that although transformational leadership and transactional leadership are distinct processes, they are not mutually exclusive. Thus, while transformational leadership will increase follower motivation and performance more than transactional leadership, effective leaders use a combination of both types of leadership (Yukl, 2002:253-4). For example, '*many transformational leaders engage in transactional leadership as a sub-set of transformational leadership, e.g. they reward subordinates for a job well done and notice and respond to substandard performance*' (Jones & George, 2007: 578).

According to Bass & Avolio (1990), transformational behaviour has four components: idealized influence (charisma), intellectual stimulation (sharing information and

empowering employees), individualized consideration (supportive and developmental leadership) and inspirational motivation (communicating an appealing vision, using symbols to focus subordinate effort, and modelling appropriate behaviour. In contrast, transactional leadership involves an exchange process that may result in follower compliance with leader requests but is not likely to generate enthusiasm and commitment to task objectives, unlike Transformational leadership that inspires effort above expectations (Yukl, 2002:253). This response to inspirational leadership is referred to as the augmentation hypothesis.

Theoretical explanations for the augmentation effect have focused on the motivational effects of charismatic and inspirational leadership. Rafferty & Griffin (2006:38) offer an explanation for the augmentation hypothesis in addition to the one that proposes that workers produce more effort in response to a leader's charisma. They suggest that the development component of individualised consideration may help employees *'achieve beyond expectations not only because they are more inspired and motivated, but because they have developed and enhanced their skills'.* Their research findings suggest that developmental leadership is more closely related to positive outcomes such as job satisfaction and affective commitment to the organisation than is supportive leadership. In fact they argue that supportive leadership may not be transformational.

Bass sees followers as having free choice and autonomy within the leader's vision, *'thus transformational leadership requires employee empowerment, not employee dependence'* (Lowe & Galen, 1999:388). Yukl's description of transformational leadership behaviour echoes the notion of giving workers autonomy:

> *Transformational leaders probably do more things that will empower followers and make them less dependent on the leader, such as delegating significant authority to individuals, developing follower skills and self-confidence, creating self-managed teams, providing direct access to sensitive information, eliminating unnecessary controls, and building a strong culture of empowerment.* (Yukl's, 2002:261)

Although Yukl's description of transformational leadership behaviour may appear unambiguously attractive, it seems that assessment of transformational leadership

exists in the eye of the beholder (Yammarino & Dubinsky, 1994, Brown & Keeping, 2005), which is similar to Ayman & Chemers (1983) implicit theories findings.

Jones & George (2007:577) propose that Transformational Managers:

1) Are **charismatic** (an enthusiastic, self-confident leader who is able to clearly communicate his/her vision of how goods things could be)

2) **Intellectually stimulate subordinates**.   As part of the process of intellectual stimulation, managers '*openly share information*' with followers who now '*view problems as challenges that they can and will meet and conquer.   The manager engages and empowers subordinates to take personal responsibility for helping solve problems*'

3) **Engage in developmental consideration**.   Developmental consideration '*goes one step further than consideration ... the manager goes out of his way to support and encourage subordinates, giving them opportunities to enhance their skills and capabilities and to grow and excel on the job*' (ibid, p.578).

Both Rafferty & Griffin (2006:40) and Jones & George (2007:578) comment on research that describes positive outcomes from transformational leadership.   This research has found that when managers/leaders engage in transformational behaviour:

> *...their subordinates tend to have higher levels of job satisfaction   and performance. Additionally, subordinates of Transformational Leaders may be more likely to trust their leaders and their organizations and feel that they are being fairly treated, and this in turn may positively influence their work motivation* (Jones & George, 2007:578).

According to Bass (1996) transformational leaders can be found in any organization , at any level, and this type of leadership is universally relevant for all types of situations. Bass (1985:36) also noted that transformational leadership '*has an intense emotional component*' and research by Bono & Llies (2006) appears to link positive emotions to the charismatic leadership process. A research study by Garner and Stough (2002:68) found that emotional intelligence correlates highly with all aspects of transformational leadership.

Critique of the theory

Generally, Bass's theory of the distinctions between transactional and transformation leadership has been well received by reviewers and a meta-analytic review of the Multi-Factor Leadership Questionnaire (MLQ) literature found the transformational leadership scales to be reliable (Lowe & Galen, 1996). However, other researchers comment on the extent to which correlations between transactional and transformational leadership are high and significant (Antonakis et al, 2003; Bass & Avolio, 2000, Rowold & Heinitz, 2007) and Rowold & Heinitz (2007:122) make the point that much empirical research uses the terms '*transformational and charismatic leadership inconsistently and interchangeably*'.

Yukl (2002:262) suggests that theories of transformational and charismatic leadership seem '*to make an important contribution to our understanding of leadership processes*'. He also makes the point that some of the '*new wisdom*' can be found in theories from the 1960s and that most of the theories '*lack sufficient specification of underlying influence processes*', that they '*focus too narrowly on dyadic processes*' and don't pay enough attention '*to situational variables that determine whether transformational or charismatic leadership will occur and whether it will be effective* (ibid).

Summary and Conclusion

This brief and selective overview of some key leadership theories illustrates the diversity of the field and the methodological issues that hinder definitive findings. Despite these drawbacks, some principles seem well established and relatively undisputed, e.g. effective leadership behaviours encompass two aspects, task focus and relationship focus. This behaviour does not take place in a vacuum, but is contingent on situational factors, on followers' value systems and implicit theories, and on the choice of appropriate leadership behaviour. Potentially, so many factors moderate between leadership behaviour and follower perceptions that single determinants of effective leadership are difficult to identify. However, as Jones & George (2007:573) put it, *Effective managers seem to have a knack for determining what kinds of leader behaviours are likely to work in different situations.* This appears

to imply that situation moderators should not be an impediment to effective leadership.

Competency models of leadership are still in vogue and emotional intelligence is considered by many to be an essential leadership competency. Many contemporary leadership writers address the concept of transformational leadership which is widely accepted to be possible across all types of organisations and all levels of organisations. Transformational leadership is not dependent on charismatic qualities of individual leaders, but can be represented by transformational processes such as visionary objectives, open and honest communication, concern for employee development, empowerment and support for their endeavours. Employees treated in these ways are expected to experience greater job satisfaction, be more task motivated, expend effort above the norm and have greater commitment to the organisation.

3.0   Articulating concepts

Concepts tend to be multi-dimensional, thus when a researcher is seeking to measure a concept, it is important to appreciate the various components that the concept encompasses. Often, research and theory associated with the concept helps to lay a foundation for this (Bryman & Bell, 2003:73). Yukl refers to the confusion that surrounds behaviour concepts associated with managers and leaders:

> *Sometimes different terms have been used to refer to the same type of behaviour. At other times, the same term has been defined differently by various theorists.   What is treated as a general behaviour category by one theorist is viewed as two or three distinct categories by another theorist. What is a key concept in one taxonomy is absent from another. Different taxonomies have emerged from different research disciplines and it is difficult to translate from one set of concepts to another* (Yukl, 2002:61).

To further obfuscate the situation, concepts are abstractions, i.e., managerial behaviour categories are abstractions that '*do not exist in any objective sense'… 'they are merely abstractions that we use to make sense of, and organise, our world'* (ibid). Concepts can exist at various levels of abstraction, e.g. Executive Coaching and Transformational Leadership are highly abstract concepts, while the concept of empowering individuals is less abstract, and the act of delegating a particular function is moving towards being concrete.

The conceptual framework revisited

The process of executive coaching in C&C Group Plc is strategic. The aim is to develop technically proficient executives into leaders. The last round of executive coaching focused particularly on developing emotional intelligence competencies, i.e. developing the relationship side of leadership.

While much is written about the problems of putting bottom-line figures on the outcomes of executive coaching, many writers (Bluckert, 2006, Laske, 2004, Sherman & Freas, 2004, Kiel, 1996) agree that the organisation must be able to identify some

benefits. So, for example, improved employee satisfaction is thought to be an outcome of executive coaching (Kiel et al, 1996:69; Sherman & Freas 2004:84).

Laske (2004:1) suggests that the return on investment of coaching is twofold, i.e. it is observable by way of behaviour, and inferable by way of development. Sherman and Freas (2004:89) argue that although bottom line figures may be difficult to quantify, all companies benefit from the qualities that flow from coaching – '*more candour, less denial, richer communication, conscious development of talent, and disciplined leaders who show compassion for people*'. These outcomes parallel Bass's transformational leadership processes.

The conceptual framework proposed in Document 2 considers inputs and outcomes from executive coaching. Among the outcomes is increased self-awareness which Kilburg (1996) identifies as a prerequisite for behavioural change. As document 3 illustrates, all the executives I interviewed proclaimed themselves more self-aware and all were positive about the effects that executive coaching had on their relationships with their co-workers. *Inter alia,* executive coaching raised their awareness of the need to express empathy, increased their sensitivity to the needs of others, made them more willing to engage with others at a personal level, more trustful and supportive of colleagues, more willing to delegate and more inclined to seek team members' opinions before implementing decisions. These outcomes go some way to meet the leadership competencies that the HR Director sought from the coaching process, i.e. self awareness, influence, emotional acumen, team leadership, coaching and mentoring and business acumen.

As stated earlier, Jones & George (2007:578) associate Transformational Leadership with higher levels of job satisfaction (similar to coaching). They also felt that transformational leadership engendered more trust in leaders and in their organisations and produced better communication and more sensitivity to, and support for, workers (much of which is similar to Sherman & Freas's claim for executive coaching). It could be argued that the overlap between outcomes from executive coaching, from leaders displaying emotional intelligence and from transformational leadership processes is substantial. While this research does not attempt to draw a causal relationship between executive coaching and transformational leadership, it

seems reasonable to infer that the management style of coached executives will be enhanced and that this style will be evaluated positively by their direct reports.

4.0   Hypotheses testing

Yulk (2002:262) makes the point that much of current management theory is old wine in new bottles. Certainly many of the survey questions address areas of task efficiency and human relations; these questions reflect the two factors (initiating structure and consideration) which dominate much of traditional research into managerial behaviour. However, quite a number of the questions could equally be interpreted as addressing social processes associated with emotional intelligence, and transformational leadership processes such as individualised consideration which looks at developing and supporting workers. Ideal behavioural change outcomes from executive coaching aspire towards all the elements of emotional intelligence and transformational leadership so managerial and leadership response evaluations could loosely be interpreted as a partial validation of the success of executive coaching.

The survey also includes a section that addresses visionary and strategic leadership, concepts associated with transformational leadership and concepts that are obviously of interest to the organisation.

This research study seeks to test the following hypotheses:

1.   That direct reports of coached executives experience more job satisfaction than
     other workers.
2.   That direct reports of coached executives experience more organisational commitment than other workers.
3.   That direct reports of coached executives are stronger advocates of the organisation than other workers
4.   That evaluations of management behaviour are more positive from direct reports   of coached executives than from other workers
5.   That all workers perceive an improvement in communication and training, and development since the 2004 survey.

6. That C&C staff have confidence in the visionary leadership of senior
    managers

5.0   Method Section

A philosophical approach

The methodology section of Document 3 considers the nature of epistemology and outlines the philosophical debate between phenomenology and positivism. Phenomenology/interpretivism take the view that knowledge is socially constructed and that both researcher and subjects influence the outcomes of research (Easterby-Smith *et al.,*1991; Saunders, 2003; Stake, 2003). This was the approach taken in Document 3 where the focus of the research was the subjective experiences of executives to the coaching process.

In contrast, positivism is concerned with establishing objective knowledge and facts (Morgan & Smircich, 1980:493) which should be arrived at via objective measures, rather than subjective inferences (Easterby-Smith et al, 1991:22). This ability to be objective and to stand outside of the research process is challenged by Husserl (1962) who rejects the notion of objective knowledge (cited by Morgan and Smircich, 1980:493). However, in the positivist tradition a researcher is likely to use a structured methodology, and quantitative research that favours statistical analysis (Saunders et al, 2003). Despite these precautions to exclude biasing factors, many aspects of quantitative research have inherent biases (Kramer, 1996; Oppenheim 1996, Ellinger & Bostrom, 2002, Brown & Keeping, 2005, Bono & Ilies, 2006). This is a point that will be developed further under the section 'Limitations of the Research Instrument'.

The notion of positivism and phenomenology/interpretivism as competing, irreconcilable paradigms is widely discussed in the literature (Morgan & Smircich, 1980, Hassard, 1990, Byrman & Bell, 2003) but there is also an argument for the richness of divergent approaches (Martin, 1990) and Bryman & Bell (2003:24) comment that management researchers are not constrained by a dominant paradigm but are free to choose the approach that best facilitates their research. Saunders et al

(2003:88) argue for combined approaches within the same piece of research and Gill & Johnson (1997:127) hold the view that methodological pluralism will reduce the bias inherent in a single-method approach.

A quantitative approach is required for Document 4; this contrasts with Document 3, which is a qualitative piece of research. The thinking behind the contrasting approaches is to engage the researcher with different forms of research. Having established a position as a social constructionist in Document 3, I find it difficult to rationalise a positivist approach in Document 4, although the findings from Document 4 should enrich understanding of whether outcomes from executive coaching impact at an organizational level. Holding on to the social constructionist perspective, it could be argued that, while large sample surveys may appear to fall within the positivist paradigm, in reality, people's responses are unlikely to be clinically objective but will reflect the biases brought about by their personal experiences. However, many of the trappings of a positivist approach – having a more impersonal role, focusing on explanations, rather than understandings, and articulating and testing hypotheses will inform Document 4.

Ethical issues

Informed consent, confidentiality and consequences are ethical issues that may arise at different stages of research (Easterby-Smith et al, 1991, Kvale, 1996, Saunder et al, 2007). On the question of informed consent, it could be argued that the purpose to which the survey is now being put is different from that consented to by the respondents. However, although the focus of my analysis is particular (comparing the evaluations of managerial behaviour of direct reports of coached executives to similar evaluation from other workers), it is not radically different from the initial purpose, which, *inter alia,* was to elicit views on aspects of managerial and leadership behaviour. From a confidential perspective, survey respondents were guaranteed anonymity, it isn't possible to identify individual respondents.

The classification section of the survey is extensive so, theoretically, it might be possible to pin-point a particular respondent. While confidentially may potentially have been an issue in the original analysis of the findings by *Mori,* its code of practice that prevents isolated analysis of groups of fewer than 10 people goes some

way to preserve anonymity. A statement to this effect was inserted by *Mori* at the top of the classification section. In my analysis of the data, confidentiality is absolute. Only the broad categories of age, gender and job description will be used as independent variables, thus the prospect of adverse consequences for respondents need not be a consideration.

Saunders, Lewis and Thornhill (2007:192) stress the importance of objectivity during the analysis stage; objectivity will help to ensure that statistical accuracy is preserved and that data is not presented selectively to support a position. Any departure from objectivity at the analysis stage has obvious implications for the discussion and the final conclusions. I have no vested interest in the outcomes of the research, so objectivity is not an issue.

6.0   The Research Instrument

Have your say, 2006 was a follow-up survey to *Have your say, 2004*. Structurally, the two questionnaires were almost identical. According to a *Mori* executive, the questions in these surveys are based on a list of '*normative questions*' used to gauge employees' attitudes. The survey can accommodate specific questions that address individual company interests. For example, Section 10 in the 2006 survey sought to identify what progress employees perceived had taken place in training and development, communication, and reward and recognition since the 2004 survey.

The survey was issued in early 2006 using both on-line and manual distribution. Although the classification section is comprehensive, respondents were guaranteed anonymity. To boost the survey response rate, *Mori* produced posters encouraging everyone to *Have Your Say* and local managers were asked to encourage workers to complete the survey, enclose it in its envelope and post it either internally in special boxes or by free-post back to *Mori*.

Survey structure
Overall the survey was a comprehensive document, looked professional, was well-laid out, easy to follow and had clear instructions. It appeared to address directly many concerns that employees might have and framed questions in a concrete, rather

than an abstract, way. The survey used a variety of measurement scales that should help respondents avoid automatic responses. Response options included ranking, single choice from a range of possible responses, and response scales based on a 5 or 6 point Likert approach.

The survey was divided into **10 sections**, plus an **extensive classification section** that categories employees based on gender, age (3 broad groups), working pattern (full-time, shift, etc.), place of work (choice of company within the Group), geographic location (Dublin, Cork, etc.), tenure, nature of department (sales, finance, etc.), status (bands of management or 'none of the above'), salaried or hourly paid, and function within department (Administration, maintenance, etc.).

This classification section was preceded by *The Mori Ireland Promise* (already referred to) that the questionnaire answers will never be linked back to an individual and that the views of groups of less than 10 will not be looked at separately.

Limitations of the research instrument

Although a lot of positives can be said about this particular survey, by their nature, attitude surveys are an imperfect research instrument. The minority nature of respondents, the tricky issue of formulating survey questions and the difficulty of accurately recalling behaviours are some of the issues that confound researchers. Use of the Likert scale, while prevalent in attitude surveys, also has implications for the range of statistical techniques that can be used to test hypotheses. In this particular survey, the lack of scale precision was possibly its most serious deficit.

The representative nature of respondents who are, generally, a minority of those surveyed, is always problematic. Even if the survey sample were a perfect representative sample of the total population, do respondents differ in some psychological or attitudinal way from the majority who failed to complete the survey? Although the response rate to this survey is high (43%), it could be argued that even this substantial minority may be different in some ways from the majority who did not respond.

The thorny issue of survey questions is raised by several writers. Oppenheim discusses how the very formulation of a question potentially distorts the question, and he wishes it were possible to look into the minds of respondents, rather than ask them questions. As he expresses it:

> *...the possible misunderstandings they (questions) provoke in the respondent, the choice or phrasing of the answers, and the recording procedures all have influences on the final result that we could well do without. Would that there were ways of looking into the minds of our respondents without having to ask them any questions at all!* (Oppenheim, 1996:121)

The directing influence of questions is a point made by Kramer (1996). He argues that although survey data may accurately show '*how individuals weigh and prioritise among the variables that have been selected by the research*', they may not touch on '*the naturally occurring set of categories, dimensions or variables that individuals would spontaneously find salient or invoke*' (Kramer, 1996:239) and Ellinger & Bostrom (2002) talk about the 'noise' created by answers given to questions experienced as irrelevant by respondents.

The ability to devise deep, probing, contingent type questions has so far been limited in leadership behaviour surveys. Yukl comments on how measures of participation have been formulated; he refers to these as '*weak methods*' that fail to reach the nub of the issue:

> *In most of the studies subordinates were asked to rate how much involvement they had in decisions, or to rate the leader's general use of participative decision procedures. No effort was made to identify the particular mix of decision procedures that were used or to determine whether these procedures were appropriate for the types of decisions being made. In effect, these studies tested only the general hypothesis that more is better when it comes to participation* (Yukl, 2002:87).

He further comments that the outcome criterion is often flawed. Rather than measure satisfaction with the way a particular decision was handled, researchers often use job satisfaction as the outcome criteria. He describes job satisfaction as '*a relatively insensitive criterion that is influenced by many things besides participative leadership*' (Ibid).

While the **Likert scale** is one of the most widely used attitude measurement scales (Diamantopoulos & Schlegelmilch, 2000:29), it does have limitations. The Likert approach uses an ordinal scale which establishes an ordered relationship between the items being measured. *'In ordinal scaling numbers are used to indicate whether a person, object etc. has more or less of a given characteristic than some other person or object* (Diamantopouloos & Schlegelmilch, 2000:25). These ordinal variables, although they can be ranked higher or lower, are not fully numerical and the distance from one score to the next is undefined (Healey et al, 1997:51), thus we cannot tell how much more of a characteristic is possessed by the variable. There are varying views on how problematic this is.

Oppenheim (1996:12) uses a horse race analogy to explain the weakness in ordinal sequence ranking. For example, while there may be just a neck between the winner and second place, the horse coming in third may be trailing well back. Thus although the results of the race are presented in terms of 1st, 2nd and 3rd which appears to imply a consistent relationship, there may be quite a difference in achievement (and distance) between the 3 horses. Diamantopouloos & Schlegelmilch (2000:30) argue that if ordinal measures are used as though they were interval, then serious errors may occur '*in interpreting data and the relations inferred from data'*. This is the purist position taken by statisticians. However, they go on to say that if, on the other hand, the rules are strictly obeyed, then '*powerful modes of measurement and analysis'* are cut off. They suggest taking a pragmatic approach and treating the scales as if they are interval ones. In this context, they recommend that the response alternatives be appropriately numbered so as '*to communicate to the respondent that the intervals between the scale points are intended to be of equal distance'* (Ibid). The nature of continuous data also implies several data points, and Sprent & Smeeton (2001) suggest that a minimum of 7 points is required for calculating ordinal data in a manner best suited to interval data. Oppenheim (1996:200) suggests that the reliability of Likert scales tends to be good (a reliability coefficient of .85 is not unusual); and that this is so partly because of the range of answers offered to the respondents.

In addition to issues about the nature of questions and the nature and range of responses, it would appear that surveys that invite workers to **evaluate managerial/leadership behaviour** are further bedevilled. Schriesheim et al (2006:32) comments on the subjective nature of the relationship between managers and workers, what they refer to as '*an individual level effect*', thus two workers may experience the same behaviour, but rate it differently. Brown & Keeping (2005:247) contend that it is well established that '*behavioural ratings are not simply a function of the direct recall of actual behaviour*', but are confounded by several factor that include respondents' implicit theories and prototypes, i.e. what subjective leadership theory does the respondent hold? This point is also made by Lowe et al (1996) in their meta-analysis of the MLQ literature. Bono & Ilies (2006:325) also support this view and note '*concerns among leadership scholars about whether or not questionnaire methods of assessing leader behaviours actually capture leader behaviour…*'. In addition to implicit theories, they note that performance outcomes may be used as a substitute for actual behaviour and that leader and/or follower characteristics may also bias ratings.

Perhaps the survey's most potent deficiency is the **lack of scale precision**; this lack of refinement is evident in several questions. For example, Question 1 which seeks to gauge employee satisfaction has a 5 point scale which doesn't allow respondents to register 'satisfaction'! The scale offers a choice of: *Very satisfied, Fairly satisfied, Neither, Fairly dissatisfied, Very dissatisfied.* It could be argued that *fairly satisfied* is not a positive accolade, but implies some level of dissatisfaction. Furthermore, the word *fairly* is highly subjective – how satisfied is *fairly satisfied?* This type of response option is repeated in questions, 4, 6, 8, 9, 16, 17, 18, and 20. In addition to the unsatisfactory nature of how the response choices are worded, the limited number of responses offered (usually five), has implications for the range of statistical techniques that can be used with the data. Outside of the ordinal nature of the scale, the limited number of responses removes the possibility of ignoring the fact that the data is not continuous – this might have been feasible if the response options reached seven or higher (Sprent & Smeeton, 2001).

While it is difficult, if not impossible, to counteract the bias that is likely to be inherent in respondents, it may be possible to address other weaknesses. The fact that

the survey respondents represent 43% of employees is a healthy response, by survey standards. Although Yukl's points about measuring participation are well made, it could be argued that this survey does attempt to build in some notion of contingency. For example, in Section 5, Questions 10b and 10p do include contingency elements: '*Consults me on matters where I can contribute*' and '*Makes decisions quickly when needed*'. However, it must be acknowledged that Question 10a '*Acts on my ideas*' does not include any element of appropriateness, so the implication is, more is better.

7.0   Choosing the right statistical technique

Statistical techniques vary in their effectiveness depending on the question being addressed and the nature of the data; various techniques have different underlying assumptions and requirements (Pallant, 2005:94). At their highest level, techniques sub-divide into two broad categories, parametric techniques and non-parametric techniques. Each make different assumptions about the nature of the date which influences their approaches. Parametric techniques assume a normal distribution (difficult to achieve in the social sciences) while non–parametric techniques can cope with non-normal distributions.

Within these two broad categories, techniques cluster into two major grouping: those that explore the *relationship among variables*, e.g. between age and job satisfaction and those that explore the *differences between groups* e.g. gender differences and job satisfaction (Pallant, 2005:94). These techniques can also be thought of as related measures versus independent measures. With related measures the same units are compared on different characteristics, for example comparing B Band managers on their expression of job satisfaction and organisational commitment. With independent measures, different units are compared on a given characteristic, e.g. the job satisfaction level of *B Band* Managers and *SI* Managers – neither affects the other (Diamantopouloos & Schlegelmilch, 2000:68).

Variables also divide into two major types: independent and dependent variables. Independent variables (IVs) are different conditions or characteristics that subjects or respondents bring to the research situation. These variables are known as predictor variables because they predict the dependent variable (DVs), which is the response or

outcome variable (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007:2). It is important to appreciate that what constitutes an IV or a DV depends on the research context and on the question being asked, and what may be an IV in one set of circumstances, may be a DV under different conditions (ibid).

A non-parametric approach

This research study uses mainly non-parametric statistical techniques to test hypotheses. Several considerations influenced this decision. One such consideration was the very strong direction from lecturing staff in NTU that Likert scales are not suitable for parametric statistical techniques. This assertion is based on the fact that a Likert-type scale has no neutral point and so readings of means and standard deviations from such a scale are meaningless. (Irrespective of this fact, many management researchers cited in this paper have made use of a Likert-like scale response on a four point scale and offer statistics that include means and standard deviations). Sprent & Smeeton (2001:28) write about the ethical issue of researchers using both types of statistics, what they call '*competing tests*', but publishing only the P-value that is most favourable to their preferred conclusion '*regardless of whether it is obtained by using appropriate tests*'. This seems to imply that provided results are presented in an unbiased fashion that both types of tests can be carried out on the same data set.

A second consideration was that, on questions that offered Likert-type response options, the *Mori* survey did not include numbered intervals to alert respondents to a sequenced distance between the responses. Thus it is not possible to infer that respondents could interpret a particular numerical distance between the scale response options. For this reason, although much of the output from SPSS includes the mean and standard deviation, this is seldom referred to in my analysis. For the purposes of this analysis, the focus is on the pattern of responses, rather than on numerical calculations, which Oppenheim (1996:200) argues is best suited to ordinal data..

A third consideration is the skewed nature of the distribution, which is illustrated in the exploratory data analysis section. Parametric statistical techniques assume a normal distribution while non-parametric techniques make fewer assumptions about the underlying population distribution. While non-parametric techniques tend to be

less powerful than parametric techniques, they are ideal for use when data '*is measured on nominal (categorical) and ordinal (ranked) scales*' (Pallant, 2001:255). Pallant (2005:82) also makes the point that although it is possible to manipulate skewed data, i.e. '*transform*' variables via mathematical formulas until the distribution becomes more normal. However, she says that there is considerable controversy surrounding this approach.

My ambivalence around which set of statistical techniques to use was resolved when a colleague commented that using less powerful techniques that produced valid conclusions was preferable to using powerful statistical techniques that produced invalid answers. Thus I came down on the side of using non-parametric techniques to analyse the data. These non-parametric techniques include Chi-square for independence, Mann-Whitney U Test, Kruskal-Wallis Test, and Spearman Rank Order Correlation.

8.0   Data Handling Methods

Introduction

As stated previously, this survey did not originate with me. Thus the initial work of designing the survey, setting up an Excel and SPSS data base, coding and entering the responses, and screening and cleaning the data was completed prior to my getting the Excel and SPSS files. I did, however, take a pro-active approach to ensuring that the data complied with expectations.

Screening and cleaning the data

Although the data had been entered by a professional market research company, I went through the process of examining the data for values that might fall outside the range of possible values, i.e. were all answers coded within the range of possible answers.   All values in the file were in order. Although tedious, this was a useful exercise to familiarise me with the range of coded values. It also helped me to interpret the statistical tables.

Missing values

The issue of missing values '*is one of the most pervasive problems in data analysis*' (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007:62). Missing values refers to respondents omitting to complete all sections of a survey. While randomly missing values may not be significant, non-randomly missing values can be serious '*because they affect the generalisability of results*' (ibid). In a large sample, if 5% or less data points are missing, this is unlikely to be a major problem; however, missing responses do affect effective sample size (Diamantopouloos & Schlegelmilch, 2000:71).

A significant number of missing values occur throughout the survey, e.g. 15% of respondents in the 'Job Description' category failed to provide a job description. One way of dealing with missing values is to exclude all cases with missing values from the analysis, but this would obviously greatly reduce the sample size. Another way to deal with missing values is to use the *Exclude cases pairwise* option in the SASS programme. This excludes cases only if they are missing the data required for the specific analysis (Pallant, 2005:118); this was the approach taken in the analysis of the survey.

Assessing Normality

Assessing normality is concerned with whether the distribution of scores on the dependent variable is 'normal' (symmetrical, bell-shaped curve). SPSS provides information on skewness and kurtosis and histograms that indicate where the normal distribution should fall. The normality of a distribution influences the appropriateness of using various statistical techniques.

As mentioned previously, parametric techniques make the assumption that the distribution of scores on the dependent variable is normal. Such normal distributions are often associated with continuous data which is '*measured on a scale that changes smoothly, rather than in steps*' (Tabachnick & Fidell, 2007:6). In contrast to parametric techniques, non-parametric techniques do not assume a normal distribution and thus are often referred to as '*distribution free*' assumptions (Sprent & Smeeton, 2001:2).

How normal a distribution is can be assessed by the degree of skewness or kurtosis shown by the curve. Skewness is concerned with a concentration of cases at either the left (positive skewness showing positive values) or the right (negative skewness showing negative values) of the distribution (Pallant, 2001:54). Kurtosis is concerned with how peaked the distribution is - '*kurtosis values above zero indicate a distribution that is too peaked ... and kurtosis values below zero indicate a distribution that is too flat*' (Tabachnich & Fidell, 2007:79). When a distribution is normal, the values of skewness and kurtosis are zero. Tabachnick & Fidell (2007:81) suggest that '*frequency histograms are an important graphical device for assessing normality...*' Chart 1 below, a frequency histogram, illustrates the skewed distribution responses to question 1.

Chart 1: Histogram of satisfaction with the company

Histogram

Mean =2.08
Std. Dev. =0.96
N =762

Q.1a Satisfaction with company as employer
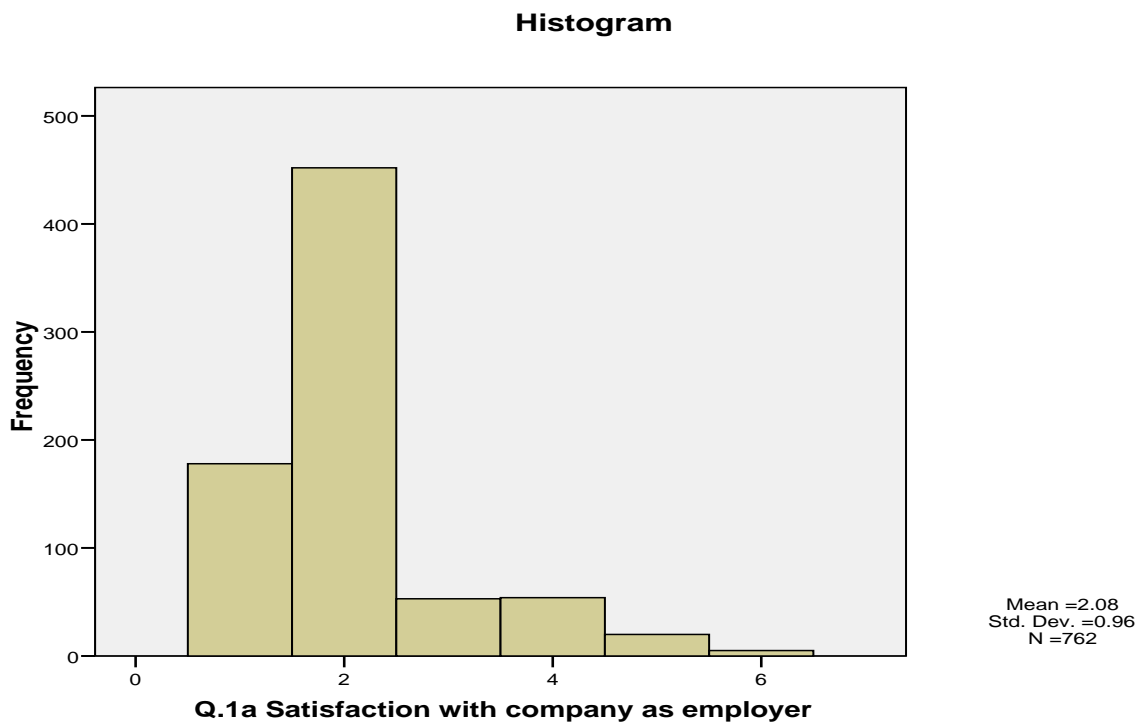
Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis testing, which appears to be intrinsic to quantitative research, is concerned with measuring dimensions of a concept. The hypothesis articulates a specific proposition which is tested for significance via statistical techniques. These techniques are designed to help the researcher decide whether sample results can generalise to the population as a whole (Diamantopouloos & Schlegelmilch, 2000:65).

Diamantopouloos & Schlegelmilch (2000:136) are prescriptive in their approach to hypothesis testing; they advise the following steps:

1. Formulate the null and alternative hypotheses.
2. Specify the significance level
3. Select an appropriate statistical test
4. Identify the probability distribution of the test statistic and define the region of rejection
5. Compute the value of the test statistic from the data and decide whether to reject or not reject the null hypothesis.

They state that the null hypothesis (H_0) should contain a statement of equality, the alternative hypothesis (H_1) will contain a statement of inequality and thus contrast with the null hypothesis. A null hypothesis can be expressed in different ways, for example: (1) 'There is no difference in the job satisfaction levels of women and men', or (2) 'Men and women experience the same levels of job satisfaction'. Diamantopouloos & Schlegelmilch (2000:135) advise that hypothesis involving '*a nominal variable are best stated as differences between groups*' while '*hypothesis involving variables at higher levels of measurement are best stated as relationships*'.

Only the null hypothesis can be disproved, the alternative hypothesis cannot be proved; as they express it:

> *Only null hypotheses can be tested – if they are rejected, this is taken to signify support for the alternative hypothesis. We can never test an alternative hypothesis directly, and nor can we ever prove a hypothesis. The hypothesis we are trying to disprove is always chosen to be the one in which there is no change ...this is why it is usually referred to as the null hypothesis* (Diamantopouloos & Schlegelmilch, 2000:133).

Saunders et al (2007:443) make the point that many researchers do not specify hypotheses in the written document '*thus although hypothesis testing has taken place, it is often only discussed in terms of statistical significance'.*

Errors associated with hypothesis testing

Two types of error are associated with hypothesis testing - Type 1 error where the null hypothesis is rejected when it should have been accepted, and Type 2 error, when a false null hypothesis is accepted. Type 1 error is considered to be the more serious, thus extra care should be taken not to reject the null hypothesis without strong evidence. A reassuring fact is that a large sample size minimises the risk of wrongly rejecting the null hypothesis (Diamantopouloos & Schlegelmilch, 2000:139).

The alpha level (P-value) set for the statistical test determines the degree of risk the researcher is willing to take in rejecting a true null hypothesis; the lower the alpha level, the less risk of rejecting a true null hypothesis, thus the significance level is the probability of making a mistake and rejecting a true null hypothesis. Diamantopouloos & Schlegelmilch (2000:139) explain the value of significance levels:

> *... by using a particular significance level, we can 'partition' all possible test results into (a) those that lead us to reject the null hypothesis (and thus indirectly support the alternative hypothesis), and (b) those that prevent us from rejecting the null hypothesis.*

The power of a test is defined as the probability of rejecting a false null hypothesis. The lowest alpha level is 0.001 (1 in a 100 chance of rejecting a true null hypothesis), which is the level of significance used for hypothesis testing in this piece of research.

Sprent & Smeeton (2001:16) make the point that a low P-value that rejects the null hypothesis may not have practical significance and that statistical significance and practical significance may not be synonymous. They suggest that knowing tail probabilities is '*useful when comparing the performance of different tests'.*

9.0   Findings

Introduction

The findings section divides into two areas. Initially, Findings outlines the results from the exploratory data analysis (EDA) which profiles the sample respondents and gives an indication of sentiment across the organisation and what job factors are most valued by the work force.

The second area focuses on hypotheses testing to determine whether direct reports of E and B Band executives (those who have experienced executive coaching) report stronger levels of job satisfaction, organisational commitment and advocacy than other levels of staff and whether they are more satisfied than others with the behaviours of their managers.

The responses of E & B Band executives are omitted from all of the hypotheses testing. The rationale for this is the discrepancy in numbers of respondents in this Band (more than double the number employed) which invalidates their responses and the fact that the focus of interest is on their direct reports, rather than on the executives who have been coached.

Measures of Reliability

Cronbach coefficient alpha is the most commonly used statistic for measuring the internal consistency and reliability of a scale; it indicates how free it is from random error (Peterson, 1994; Pallant, 2005). Its job is to test the degree to which the items that make up the scale are all measuring the same underlying attribute. Values range from 0 to 1, with higher values indicating greater reliability. *'Ideally the Cronbach alpha coefficient of a scale should be above .7'.* However, this is difficult to achieve when scale items are fewer than 10 (Pallant, 2005:90).

For this research study the internal consistency of scales with an item pool larger than 5 was checked using Cronbach's coefficient alpha technique. Four questions had item pools greater than five – question 4 with 7 items had an alpha of .702), question 6 had 11 items and an alpha .893, question 10 had 20 pool items (alpha .957) and question 16 had 7 items and an alpha of .829. Thus for the four questions, the measure of internal consistency exceeded the recommended .7, and therefore can be taken as internally consistent. These questions concern staff's attitudes towards their jobs and towards managerial behaviour and are dealt with under the relevant section.

Exploratory Data Analysis (EDA

This exploratory data analysis establishes a mini-view of the survey respondents. Although the classification section of the survey is extensive, only one key classification (job description) is relevant for this research study, although others are included i.e. gender, tenure, wage structure so that the reader can get a feel for how the workforce is structured. Also included is a chart illustrating job factors in order of their importance to the work force.

While EDA should be guided by the nature of the data and the research questions, Saunders et al (2007:420) say that it is now acceptable to use EDA flexibly and perhaps find unanticipated relationships within the data. They go on to cite Sparrow (1989:43-56) as suggesting that exploratory analysis should begin by looking at individual variables and their components, e.g. specific values, highest and lowest values, and proportions. Saunders et al (ibid) also refer to the use of diagrams to help explore and understand the data.

Nature of the survey

This is a census survey issued to all employees of C&C Group Plc. At the time of the survey, the company employed 1760 people. Seven hundred and sixty two (762) surveys were returned (a 43% response rate). Five hundred and eighty-four (584) of the returned surveys were paper based (77%) and 178 were completed on-line (23%).

Respondent profile

Gender

Gender breakdown is 530 males (70%) and 222 females (29%); 10 respondents did not state their gender. The Mann-Whitney U Test was used to explore whether there was a difference in satisfaction levels between males and females. As the results below show, there is no significant difference in the satisfaction levels of males and females employee. Table 1 shows that the mean rank for both across satisfaction with the company and satisfaction with the job is very close. The P-value is very high: .941 for satisfaction with company and .829 for satisfaction with the present job, thus there is no statistically significant difference in their levels of satisfaction.

Table 1: Male and Female levels of Satisfaction

	C.1 Gender	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Q.1a Satisfaction with company as employer	Male	530	376.16	199367.00
	Female	222	377.30	83761.00
	Total	752		
Q.1b Satisfaction with present job	Male	530	377.51	200081.00
	Female	222	374.09	83047.00
	Total	752		

Test Statistics(a)

	Q.1a Satisfaction with company as employer	Q.1b Satisfaction with present job
Mann-Whitney U	58652.000	58294.000
Wilcoxon W	199367.000	83047.000
Z	-.074	-.216
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.941	.829

a Grouping Variable: C.1 Gender

Age

Respondents had a choice of 3 (fairly broad) age band categories; 45 % of respondent workers are the 16-35 band, 41% in the 36-50 band and 13% in the 51+ band. Thirteen people (1.7%) declined to state their age.   Figure 1 illustrates.

Figure 1: Breakdown of employees by age bands

Breakdown of Employees by age bands
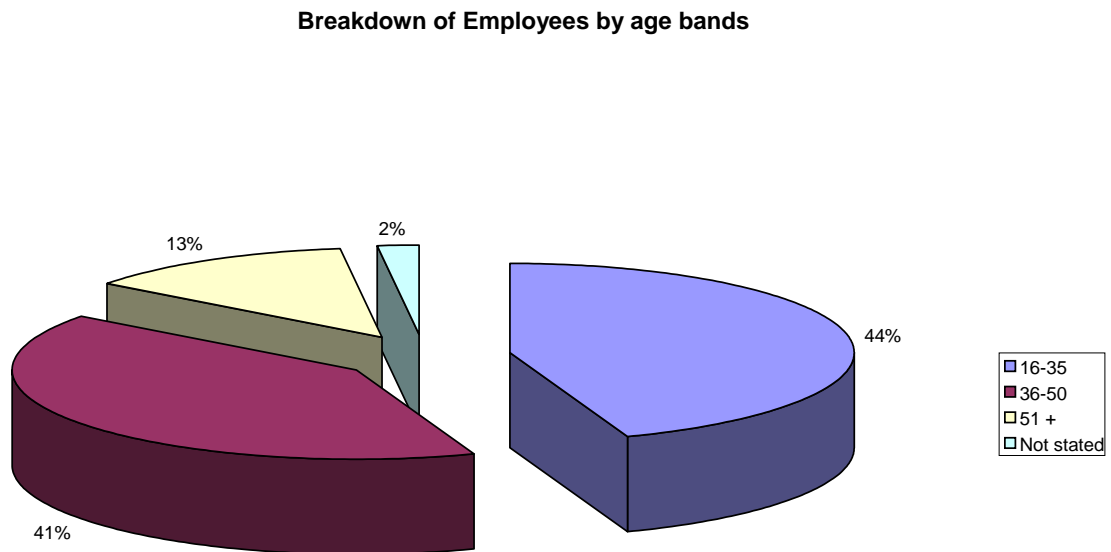
Diamantopouloos & Schlegelmilch (2000:27) make the point that, statistically, the use of age bands is less than ideal and that open intervals, (in this case 51+), means that the true width is unknown. They deplore this approach '*because measurement opportunities have not been fully capitalised*'; they argue that by nature, age is a ratio variable, but using age bands means ending up '*with an ordinal measure of a ratio variable and consequently we cannot even calculate the average age of the respondents*'.

Tenure

Twenty seven (27) percent of the workforce have worked in C&C for less than two years; 19% are there 3-5 years; 20.5% are there 6-10 years and 33% are there over 11 years.

Figure 2: Length of tenure
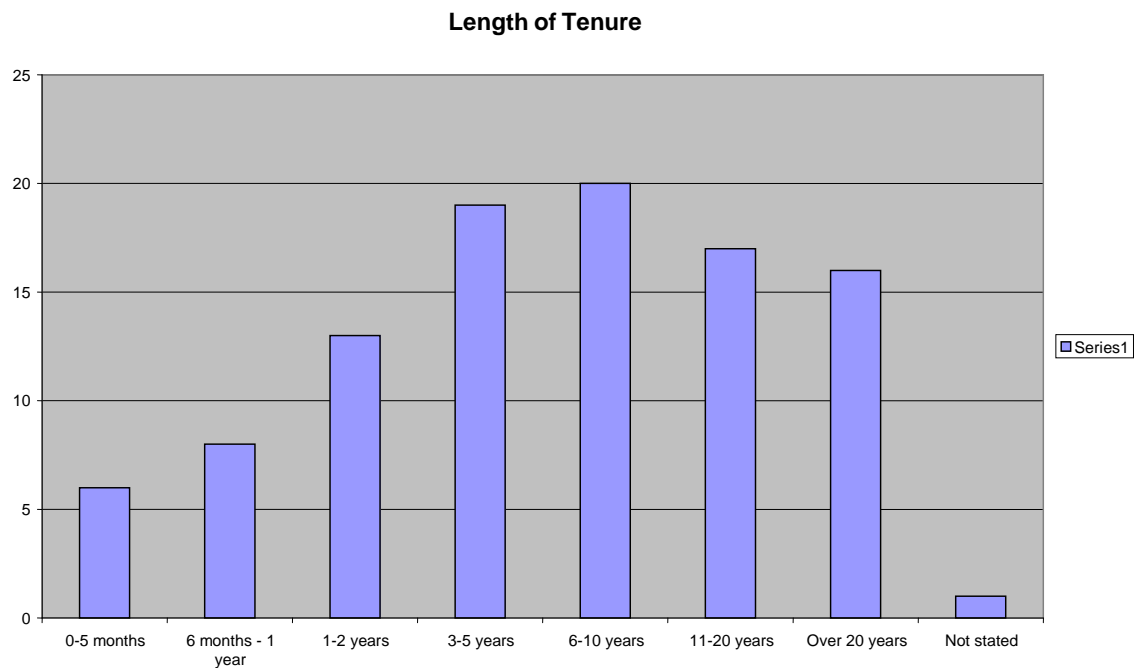
As Figure 2 illustrates, the distribution is skewed towards longer tenure.

Wage structure

Eighty-three (83) percent of the workforce are full time; 59% are salaried while 38% are paid by the hour. Eighteen (18) respondents did not answer this question.

Job description

When asked to describe their 'Band' (this is the company jargon for hierarchy), eighty four (84) persons claimed to be in the elite E or B band, ninety-nine (99) in the senior manager S1 or S2 band; ninety-nine (99) in the middle management/supervisor L or M band and 358 staff ticked 'None of the above', which in effect means non-managerial. Quite a considerable number, one hundred and fourteen staff, didn't answer this question. Figure 3 illustrates.

Figure 3: Status of employees

Status of employees
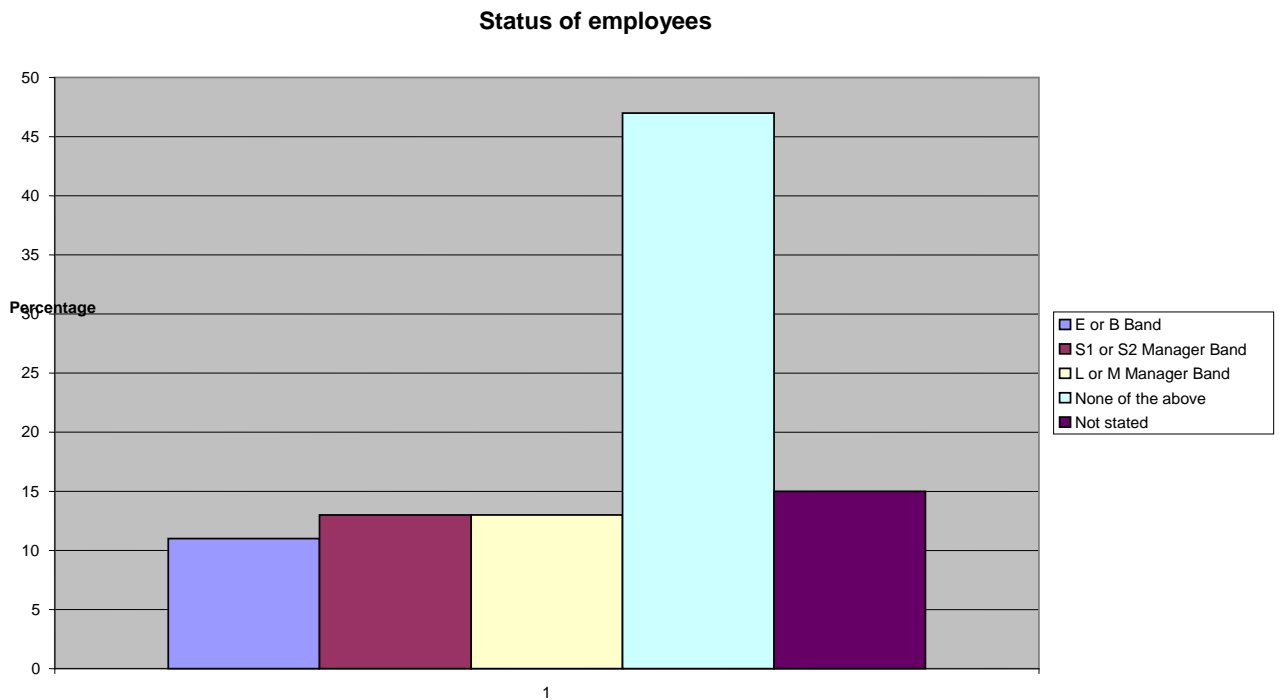
This particular data set creates at least two problems. Respondents were given the choice of designating themselves into a managerial role, or choosing the option 'None of the above'. From the high number of missing values, it could be inferred that the 'None of the above' option did not appeal.

The second problem concerns a known inaccuracy in the responses. According to information I received during Document 3 interviews, circa forty people were designated as E or B band, however, 84 survey respondents classified themselves in this band. A phone call to the HR department of C&C established that in January 2006 managerial staff broke down as follows:

- 39 staff in the A and B Band combined
- 112 staff in the S1 and S2 Band combined
- 163 staff in the L and M Band combined

Thus the 84 people designated themselves as being in the E or B Bands perhaps gives a new meaning to the term 'self promotion'! Even ninety-nine responses from the S1 & S2 managers (an 88% response from the category) is out of step with the overall response rate of 43%. However, it could be argued that because these

managers were given the role of survey champions that they would be more diligent in answering. (L and M Band managers had a 61% response rate and the band 'None of the above' had a 31% response rate).

Table 2: Cross tabulation of Age and Status

C.8 Band * C.2 Age Group Cross tabulation

		C.2 Age Group				Total
		16-35	36-50	51 +	Not stated	
C.8 Band	E or B Band	33	37	14	0	84
	S1 or S2 Manager Band	28	59	15	0	102
	L or M Manager Band	49	36	15	1	101
	None of the above	182	132	40	4	358
	Not stated	48	47	14	8	117
Total		340	311	98	13	762

An examination of Table 2, a cross-tabulation of Age and Status, shows that 33 staff in the youngest age group (16-35) claim to be in the E or B Band. Staffs in the E Band are on the Board of Directors, staffs in the B Band are Functional Directors. It is unlikely that 33 out of a possible 39 directors are between the ages of 16 and 35. However, what the chart does illustrate (if it can be believed) is that the majority of the workforce is under the age of 50.

Workers value systems

Question 7 asks respondents to identity what their 3 most important factors are. Figure 3 illustrates that good basic pay is by far the most significant job factor and feedback on performance is least valued.
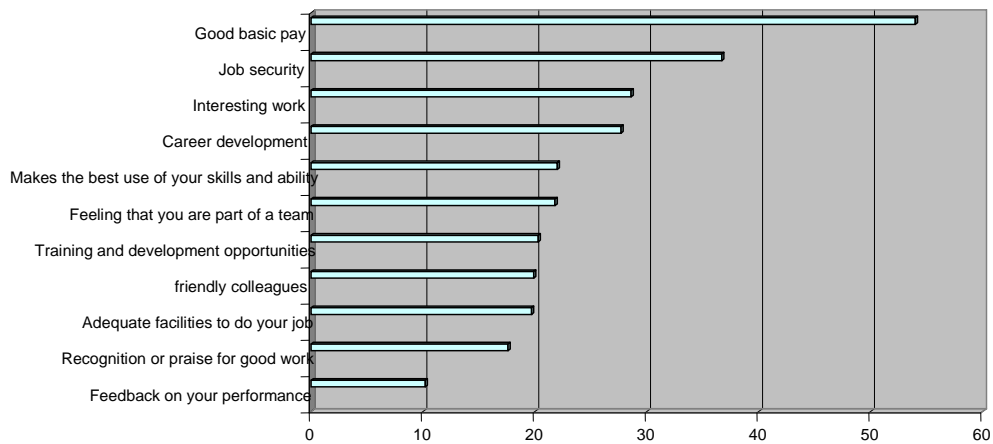
Summary of sample profile

Survey respondents would appear to be predominantly male, mostly full-time workers, the majority of whom are salaried rather than hourly paid. Disregarding the E/B band and those that failed to register their status, 203 respondents are managerial, and 358 are workers, thus proportionately, managers are over-represented in the sample. The age profile of the respondents tends towards the younger bands while most workers have been with the company for upwards of 3 years and many are there for more than 20 years. What these workers most value is good pay and job security (transactional values), followed by interesting work which could be interpreted as a factor to some extent within

the influence sphere of line managers. Surprisingly, the least valued job factors are recognition for good work and feedback on performance.

Exploring Correlations

As part of the process of EDA, I undertook a series of correlations to look for unusual relationships between the data. '*Correlation analysis is used to describe the strength and direction of the linear relationship between two variables*' (Pallant, 2005:121). Spearman's Rank Order Correlation (rho) is the non-parametric equivalent of Pearson's product-moment correlation coefficient which is designed for use with interval level (continuous) variables; Spearman's rho is designed for use with ordinal

or ranked data. While most data was correlated either positively or negatively, few correlations crested the .5 level. However, item pools of questions were strongly correlated, as would be expected.

Tables 3 and 4 illustrate some of the levels of correlation with the company as an employer. As can be seen from Table 3, neither good basic pay nor job security is very strongly correlated to job satisfaction, although the correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed). More surprisingly, as Table 4 shows, feeling proud to work for C&C, only correlates at a level of .514 with satisfaction with the company and 0.451 with satisfaction with the job. However, being satisfied with the job makes for a stronger correlation with satisfaction with the company.

Table 3: Correlations between satisfaction with company and pay and security

			Q.1a Satisfaction with company as employer	Q.6e Good basic pay	Q.6k Job security
Spearman's rho	Q.1a Satisfaction with company as employer	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.478(**)	.317(**)
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
		N	762	762	762
	Q.6e Good basic pay	Correlation Coefficient	.478(**)	1.000	.230(**)
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
		N	762	762	762
	Q.6k Job security	Correlation Coefficient	.317(**)	.230(**)	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.
		N	762	762	762

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Table 4: Correlations between Proud to work for company and satisfaction levels

			Q.4b I feel proud to work for this company	Q.1a Satisfaction with company as employer	Q.1b Satisfaction with present job
Spearman's rho	Q.4b I feel proud to work for this company	Correlation Coefficient	1.000	.514(**)	.451(**)
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.	.000	.000
		N	762	762	762
	Q.1a Satisfaction with company as employer	Correlation Coefficient	.514(**)	1.000	.567(**)
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.	.000
		N	762	762	762
	Q.1b Satisfaction with present job	Correlation Coefficient	.451(**)	.567(**)	1.000
		Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000	.
		N	762	762	762

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

Direct Reports of Coached Executives

Introduction

The approach taken in this section is to consider the survey questions in groups. One general null hypothesis is pertinent for all questions – that all employees articulate the same levels of satisfaction, commitment and advocacy, thus there is no difference in attitudes between direct reports of coached staff and other workers.

The first section deals with employee sentiment in terms of satisfaction, organisational commitment and advocacy. The second section considers a range of questions that elicit general organisational sentiment and the third section looks at whether improvements since 2004 are acknowledged and at how managerial behaviour and leadership is evaluated.

The nature of non-parametric statistical tests limits the range of techniques available for this analysis.   As the nature of the research study would suggest, there is a heavy reliance on between group analysis, so the appropriate non-parametric techniques are Kruskal-Wall tests which allows comparison between 3 groups and Mann-Whitney U tests which are used to test for differences between two independent groups.

Section 1: Levels of Satisfaction, commitment and advocacy

Company and job satisfaction

The following tables and comments focus on how employees in C&C responded to questions 1a and 1b. As mentioned in the section 'Limitations of the Research Instrument' the response options in Question 1 do not offer a 'Satisfied' response. Table 5 below shows the results of a Kruskal-Wallis Test to see if there is a significant difference in the level of satisfaction across the 3 bands. This test is a nonparametric alternative to one-way ANOVA. It allows comparison of scores on a continuous variable for three or more groups (it is a between group analysis). Scores are converted to ranks and the mean rank for each group is compared. It is important to note that the values given to response choices impacts on how mean ranks should be interpreted. For all of the scales, 1= very satisfied, or strongly agree, whatever is the most positive response and the less favourable responses are allocated a higher value, so, e.g in this question 1, very satisfied = 1, fairly satisfied = 2, neither = 3, fairly dissatisfied = 4 and very dissatisfied = 5. Thus the higher the mean rank, the more the responses lean toward the negative.

Table 5: Satisfaction levels of S1 & S2, L & M managers and non-managerial staff

	C.8 Band	N	Mean Rank
Q.1a Satisfaction with company as employer	S1 or S2 Manager Band	102	236.30
	L or M Manager Band	101	260.51
	None of the above	358	299.52
	Total	561	
Q.1b Satisfaction with present job	S1 or S2 Manager Band	102	228.84
	L or M Manager Band	101	249.13
	None of the above	358	304.85
	Total	561	

Test Statistics(a,b)

	Q.1a Satisfaction with company as employer	Q.1b Satisfaction with present job
Chi-Square	18.397	26.717
df	2	2
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000

a Kruskal Wallis Test
b Grouping Variable: C.8 Band

The significance level is below .001, thus it is possible to conclude that there is a statistically significant difference in how satisfied various categories of workers are across the three groups.

To tease out the question of satisfaction, two Mann-Whitney U Test were conducted to explore whether S1 & 2 managers and L & M managers differed in terms of satisfaction and whether S1 & S2 managers differed from non-managerial workers. The Mann-Whitney U Test technique is used to test for differences between two independent groups on a continuous measure. This is the non-parametric alternative to the t-test for independent samples.

Table 6: Satisfaction levels of S1 & S2 and L & M managers

	C.8 Band	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Q.1a Satisfaction with company as employer	S1 or S2 Manager Band	102	97.42	9936.50
	L or M Manager Band	101	106.63	10769.50
	Total	203		
Q.1b Satisfaction with present job	S1 or S2 Manager Band	102	98.19	10015.50
	L or M Manager Band	101	105.85	10690.50
	Total	203		

Test Statistics(a)

	Q.1a Satisfaction with company as employer	Q.1b Satisfaction with present job
Mann-Whitney U	4683.500	4762.500
Wilcoxon W	9936.500	10015.500
Z	-1.328	-1.054
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.184	.292

The results of the Mann-Whitney U tests shows a P-value of 0.184 for Q1a and 0.292 for Q1b. These alpha levels indicate that there is no significant difference between the satisfaction levels of the two sets of managers. The second Mann-Whitney U test

examined the levels of satisfaction of S1 & S2 managers and non-managerial staff.
Table 7 below shows the results.

Table 7: Levels of satisfaction of S1 & S2 managers and non-managerial staff

	C.8 Band	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Q.1a Satisfaction with company as employer	S1 or S2 Manager Band	102	190.38	19419.00
	None of the above	358	241.93	86611.00
	Total	460		
Q.1b Satisfaction with present job	S1 or S2 Manager Band	102	182.15	18579.50
	None of the above	358	244.28	87450.50
	Total	460		

Test Statistics(a)

	Q.1a Satisfaction with company as employer	Q.1b Satisfaction with present job
Mann-Whitney U	14166.000	13326.500
Wilcoxon W	19419.000	18579.500
Z	-3.921	-4.541
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	.000

a Grouping Variable: C.8 Band

This test has a P-value of .000, thus there is a statistically significant difference between S1 & S2 managers and the non-managerial workforce. The null hypothesis is rejected and the alternative hypothesis, that: *There are differences between the levels of satisfaction of S1 & S2 managers and the levels of satisfaction of other bands of workers* stands.

Figure 5 gives a visual impression of the difference in satisfaction between managerial and non-managerial workers.

Figure 5: Net satisfaction with the company

Net Satisfaction with company
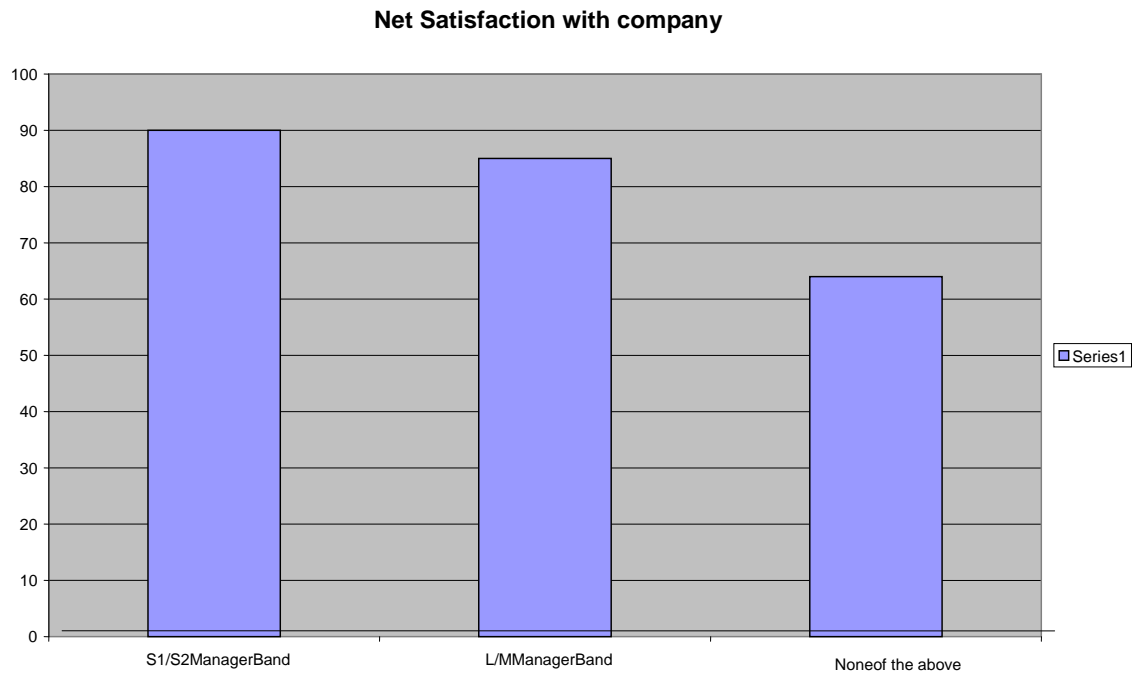
Rating the company

A Kruskal Wallis test on Question 2 also rejected the null hypothesis that there is no difference in how the various bands rate the company. Again a look for Table 8 shows that those who rate the company highest (interpreting the lowest score as the most positive) are the highest ranking middle managers.

Table 8: Rate the company as a place to work

	C.8 Band	N	Mean Rank
Q.2 Company as a place to work	S1 or S2 Manager Band	102	242.88
	L or M Manager Band	101	255.65
	None of the above	358	299.01
	Total	561	

Test Statistics(a,b)

	Q.2 Company as a place to work
Chi-Square	13.903
df	2
Asymp. Sig.	.001

a Kruskal Wallis Test
b Grouping Variable: C.8 Band

Table 9: Rating company as a place to work (Mann-Whitney U test)

C.8 Band		N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks
Q.2 Company as a place to work	S1 or S2 Manager Band	102	194.93	19882.50
	None of the above	358	240.64	86147.50
	Total	460		

Test Statistics(a)

	Q.2 Company as a place to work
Mann-Whitney U	14629.500
Wilcoxon W	19882.500
Z	-3.219
Asymp. Sig. (2-tailed)	.001

a Grouping Variable: C.8 Band

The Mann-Whitney U test shows a level of significance of P-value =.001. This low P-value indicates that there is a statistically significant difference between the two groups. Figure 6 illustrates how the 3 groups stand relative to each other.

Figure 6: Net rating of company as a place to work

Net Rating of Company
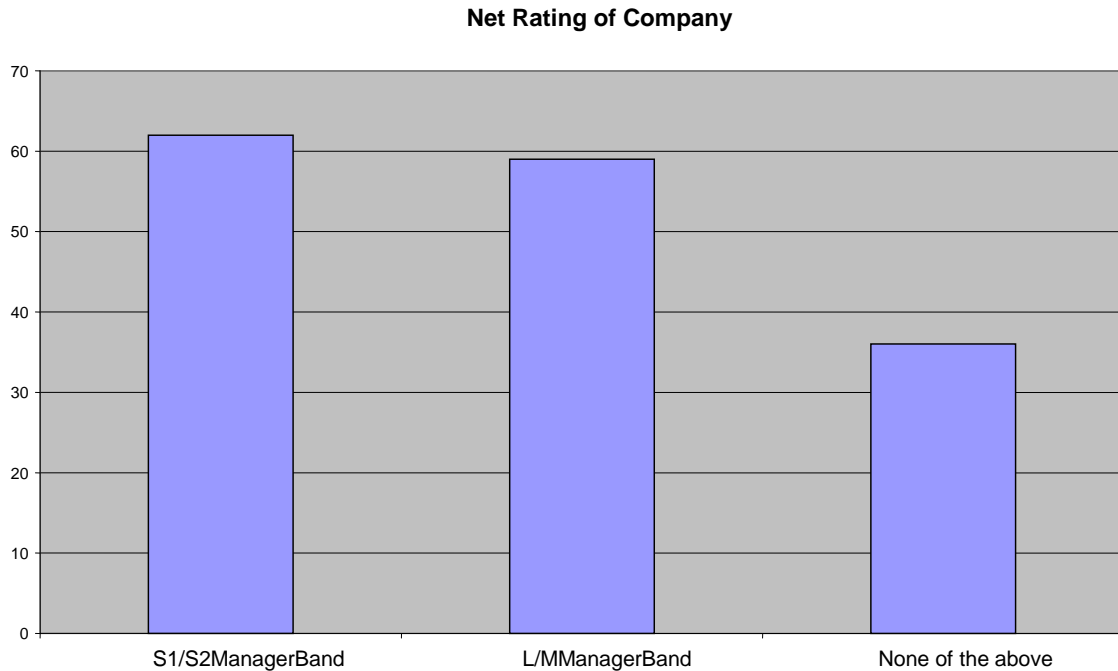
Questions 3 (how involved are you with the company), and question 5 on advocacy (how highly would you speak of the company) all show the same pattern.

Section 2: General Issues

Issues around pay and performance are addressed by Questions 8a and 8b. The results of a Kruskal Wallis test is revealed in Table 10 below.

Table 10: Pay and Performance

	C.8 Band	N	Mean Rank
Q.8a/1 I feel my pay adequately reflects my performance	S1 or S2 Manager Band	102	212.69
	L or M Manager Band	101	241.68
	None of the above	358	311.56
	Total	561	
Q.8a/2 Pay is fair when compared with similar organisations that I know of	S1 or S2 Manager Band	102	225.59
	L or M Manager Band	101	251.38
	None of the above	358	305.14
	Total	561	
Q.8b There is adequate recognition for good performance	S1 or S2 Manager Band	102	228.58
	L or M Manager Band	101	245.76
	None of the above	358	305.88
	Total	561	

Test Statistics(a,b)

	Q.9a/1 I feel my pay adequately reflects my performance	Q.9a/2 Pay is fair when compared with similar organisations that I know of	Q.9b There is adequate recognition for good performance
Chi-Square	39.487	24.768	25.541
df	2	2	2
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000	.000

a Kruskal Wallis Test
b Grouping Variable: C.8 Band

There is a statistically significant difference in how the groups responded across the three statements. Again, the S1 and S2 managers were the most positive and the non-managerial workers the least positive.

 Degrees of understanding. The results from question 9 show a similar pattern to what has gone before. The Kruskal Wallis test statistics are shown in Table 11.

Table 11: Degrees of understanding

	Q.9a I feel that I understand my company's current overall objectives	Q.9b I feel that I understand my department's objectives	Q.9c I have a clear understanding of the job I am expected to do	Q.9d I have a clear understanding of the contribution that my job performance makes to my company
Chi-Square	54.493	69.931	14.099	24.430
df	2	2	2	2
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000	.001	.000

a Kruskal Wallis Test
b Grouping Variable: C.8 Band

Again, a Mann Whitney U test established that there is no statistical difference in the perceptions of the two sets of managers and that the difference lay between managers and workers.

Question 12 (how well are you kept informed), question 13 (how credible is the information you receive) all show a statistically significant difference across groups with P-values of .001.   In all instances the most positive responses come from the S1 & S2 managers and the least positive come from the non-managerial workers thus null hypotheses that suggest equality of attitudes are rejected.

Section 3: Improvements since 2004 and Managerial Behaviour

Improvements since 2004

Table 12 shows the results of a Kruskal Wallis test on the extent to which improvements since the 2004 survey are acknowledged by different bands of workers.

Table 12: Improvements since 2004

	C.8 Band	N	Mean Rank
Q.20a There has been significant improvement on communication since the 2004 'Have Your Say Survey'	S1 or S2 Manager Band	102	237.97
	L or M Manager Band	101	206.90
	None of the above	358	314.17
	Total	561	
Q.20b There has been significant improvement on training and development since the 2004 'Have Your Say Survey'	S1 or S2 Manager Band	102	199.99
	L or M Manager Band	101	230.88
	None of the above	358	318.22
	Total	561	
Q.20c There has been significant improvement on reward and recognition since the 2004 'Have Your Say Survey'	S1 or S2 Manager Band	102	221.14
	L or M Manager Band	101	248.14
	None of the above	358	307.33
	Total	561	

Test Statistics(a,b)

	Q.20a There has been significant improvement on communication since the 2004 'Have Your Say Survey'	Q.20b There has been significant improvement on training and development since the 2004 'Have Your Say Survey'	Q.20c There has been significant improvement on reward and recognition since the 2004 'Have Your Say Survey'
Chi-Square	46.917	57.955	29.508
df	2	2	2
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000	.000

a Kruskal Wallis Test
b Grouping Variable: C.8 Band

As the above tables show, there is a difference in perception across the 3 groups as to whether there has been an improvement sine 2004.

Two Mann-Whitney U tests were then conducted to see where the difference lay. The first test compared the responses between S1 & S2 managers and L & M managers and found there was no statistical difference. The second tested the difference between S1 & S2 managers and 'None of the Above' category. It found that the difference was statistically significant at .000.

The following chart from Mori illustrates how attitudes towards senior management have shifted since 2004.

Chart 2: Employees' Perceptions of Senior Management

Perceptions of Senior Management

	Agree	Disagree
Senior management have a clear vision of where your company is going	2004: 54% / *Private Sector Norm: 43%* — 70%	9% 2004:23%
I have confidence in the senior management team of my company	*Private Sector Norm: 41%* — 56%	17% 2004: 25%
Senior management clearly communicate their vision for your company	44%	29% 2004: 41%
Senior management are interested in listening to staff opinion	35%	41%
Senior management show a real commitment to internal communications with staff	2004: 31% — 35%	36% 2004: 47%
Staff are consulted on management decisions which affect them and their work	31%	45%
Speaking up on issues where you disagree with management can damage your career prospects	39%	28%

Managerial Behaviour Issues

Questions 4, 6 and 10 look at aspects of the job in terms of resources and in terms of describing managerial behaviour. There is a lot of overlap in these questions, which is good for testing the validity of the scale. As mentioned earlier, all of these questions had an adequate Cronbach Alpha Coefficient of above .7.

Because the focus is on a comparison across groups, the Kruskal Wallis test is the ideal non-parametric test for groups of three. Test results from question 4 are shown overleaf.

Table 13: Attitudes towards the job (question 4)

	C.8 Band	N	Mean Rank
Q.4a I feel valued and recognised for the work I do	S1 or S2 Manager Band	102	208.35
	L or M Manager Band	101	248.56
	None of the above	358	310.85
	Total	561	
Q.4b I feel proud to work for this company	S1 or S2 Manager Band	102	209.28
	L or M Manager Band	101	236.01
	None of the above	358	314.13
	Total	561	
Q.4c Company morale is good	S1 or S2 Manager Band	102	238.76
	L or M Manager Band	101	245.22
	None of the above	358	303.13
	Total	561	
Q.4d There is too much red tape (bureaucracy) in my company	S1 or S2 Manager Band	102	316.27
	L or M Manager Band	101	289.92
	None of the above	358	268.43
	Total	561	
Q.4e My company is a customer-focussed organisation	S1 or S2 Manager Band	102	314.05
	L or M Manager Band	101	275.16
	None of the above	358	273.23
	Total	561	
Q.4f I am treated with fairness and respect	S1 or S2 Manager Band	102	225.80
	L or M Manager Band	101	239.26
	None of the above	358	308.50
	Total	561	
Q.4g I intend to look for a new role within the company/ C&C Group	S1 or S2 Manager Band	102	279.91
	L or M Manager Band	101	297.27
	None of the above	358	276.72
	Total	561	

	Q.4a I feel valued and recognised for the work I do	Q.4b I feel proud to work for this company	Q.4c Company morale is good	Q.4d There is too much red tape (bureaucracy) in my company	Q.4e My company is a customer-focussed organisation	Q.4f I am treated with fairness and respect
Chi-Square	39.811	49.566	19.714	7.721	6.025	32.867
df	2	2	2	2	2	2
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.000	.000	.021	.049	.000

a Kruskal Wallis Test
b Grouping Variable: C.8 Band

As the results from this test illustrate, most questions show a significant difference across the groups. An examination of the figures in Table 12 shows that the S1 & S2 managers are the most positive, and the non-managerial workers are the least. However, two questions, 4d about red tape and 4e about the company being customer focussed, do not show a significant difference at the 001 value level. Interestingly, Table 12 also shows that the S1 & S2 managers agree least with the notion of there being too much red tape in the company and also agree least that the company is customer focused.

Question 6 which looks at job factors has 11 items and Question 10 which looks at the behaviour of managers has 20 items. Because of the cumbersomeness of these questions, their Kruskal Wallis Tests are not illustrated.

In question 6, the first and the last items (adequate facilities to do your job and job security) had an alpha level of .002 indicating that there is no differences between the groups on these questions. All other responses had an alpha level of .000.

The results from the Q10 test shows that, with the exception of two questions that had an alpha value above .001 (10f 'Gives me the right information to do my job' – P-value .008 and 10i 'Is good at managing people' - .003) all the other pool items fell on or below the .001 level. Thus for 18 of the items there is a difference across the groups. As has been illustrated by other Tables, the most positive responses come from the managerial ranks, with the S1 & S2 managers the most positive. Interestingly, although there is no statistical difference between the S1 & S2s and the L & M managers, the L & M managers are marginally more positive across many of the items in question 10, which departs from the usual pattern.

The following two charts (used by *Mori* in a presentation to C&C management) provide more information on Question 10. Responses to questions are presented on a sliding scale from most positive to least positive.

Chart 3 (C&C): Evaluations of Line Management behaviour

Line Management - 1

	Always/Usually	**Never**
Is committed to the company	2004: 78% 83%	1%
Is approachable	78%	6%
Treats me fairly	73%	5%
Is supportive if I have a problem	71%	7%
Makes clear what is expected of me	67%	8%
Is good at delegating responsibility	67%	8%
Makes decisions quickly when needed	66%	8%
Is open and straightforward	2004: 60% 64%	11%
Gives me the right information to do my job properly	62%	9%
Encourages us to work as a team	2004: 55% 61%	17%
Holds regular team briefings	2004: 54% 61%	12%

Line Management - 2

	Always/Usually	**Never**
Is good at managing people	57%	12%
Keeps me in touch with what's going on	57%	12%
Consults me on matters where I can contribute	52%	14%
Gives me credit if I've done a good job	49%	22%
Deals decisively and fairly with people who don't perform satisfactorily	43%	19%
Gives me feedback on how well I'm doing	42%	26%
Implements my training and development needs	36%	30%
Acts on my ideas	35%	10%
Discusses my training and development needs	34%	33%

As the two charts illustrate, line managers are good at transactional aspects of management, but fall down somewhat on the development and empowering aspects of management.

C&C Group Management and Leadership Questions

Q.16 & 17 look at the vision of senior management and at the C&C Group management, how integrated they appear to be, how well people understand their role and have confidence in their leadership and in their ability to take the business forward.

Table 14: Visionary leadership

	C.8 Band	N	Mean Rank
Q.16a Senior management have a clear vision of where your company is going	S1 or S2 Manager Band	102	247.49
	L or M Manager Band	101	242.23
	None of the above	358	301.49
	Total	561	
Q.16b Senior management clearly communicate their vision for your company	S1 or S2 Manager Band	102	256.39
	L or M Manager Band	101	260.86
	None of the above	358	293.69
	Total	561	
Q.16c Senior management show a real commitment to internal communications with staff	S1 or S2 Manager Band	102	255.72
	L or M Manager Band	101	257.25
	None of the above	358	294.90
	Total	561	
Q.16d Senior management are interested in listening to staff opinion	S1 or S2 Manager Band	102	221.82
	L or M Manager Band	101	251.57
	None of the above	358	306.16
	Total	561	
Q.16e I have confidence in the senior management team of my company	S1 or S2 Manager Band	102	238.95
	L or M Manager Band	101	236.76
	None of the above	358	305.46
	Total	561	
Q.16f Staff are consulted on management decisions which affect them and their work	S1 or S2 Manager Band	102	243.50
	L or M Manager Band	101	248.25
	None of the above	358	300.92
	Total	561	
Q.16g Speaking up on issues where you disagree with management can damage your career prospects	S1 or S2 Manager Band	102	319.42
	L or M Manager Band	101	316.19
	None of the above	358	260.13
	Total	561	

	Q.16a Senior management have a clear vision of where your company is going	Q.16b Senior management clearly communicate their vision for your company	Q.16c Senior management show a real commitment to internal communications with staff	Q.16d Senior management are interested in listening to staff opinion	Q.16e I have confidence in the senior management team of my company	Q.16f Staff are consulted on management decisions which affect them and their work	S. i y r
Chi-Square	18.270	6.569	7.775	27.195	24.642	16.059	
df	2	2	2	2	2	2	
Asymp. Sig.	.000	.037	.020	.000	.000	.000	

a Kruskal Wallis Test
b Grouping Variable: C.8 Band

(A small part of the above table is missing because of its width). The test statistics show an alpha level of .000 for questions 16a, d, e, f, and g. This level rejects the null hypothesis that there is no difference between the groups. However, in the matter of senior management clearly communicating vision, at the alpha level of .001 (which is being use in this study), the test does show some difference between the groups as do the results for question 16c which shows a statistically significant difference as to whether senior management show real commitment to communicate with staff.

Table 15 Perceptions of C&C Group Management

	C.8 Band	N	Mean Rank
Q.17a C&C Group management seems detached from the rest of the business	S1 or S2 Manager Band	102	284.81
	L or M Manager Band	101	268.71
	None of the above	358	283.38
	Total	561	
Q.17b I have a good understanding of the role of C&C Group	S1 or S2 Manager Band	102	254.27
	L or M Manager Band	101	280.62
	None of the above	358	288.72
	Total	561	
Q.17c I have confidence in C&C Group management taking the business forward	S1 or S2 Manager Band	102	252.29
	L or M Manager Band	101	258.09
	None of the above	358	295.64
	Total	561	
Q.17d C&C Group management shows good leadership and direction	S1 or S2 Manager Band	102	259.37
	L or M Manager Band	101	259.84
	None of the above	358	293.13
	Total	561	

Test Statistics(a,b)

	Q.17a C&C Group management seems detached from the rest of the business	Q.17b I have a good understanding of the role of C&C Group	Q.17c I have confidence in C&C Group management taking the business forward	Q.17d C&C Group management shows good leadership and direction
Chi-Square	.773	3.848	9.186	6.129
df	2	2	2	2
Asymp. Sig.	.679	.146	.010	.047

a Kruskal Wallis Test

As the test statistics show, there is no difference across the 3 groups at the 001 alpha level for any of the sections of question 17. Thus the null hypothesis stands that there is no difference in their attitude to C&C Group Management.

Conclusion

The foregoing statistical analysis has been limited by my decision to use non-parametric techniques. Because of this decision, a lot of the analysis was repetitive and perhaps most insight was provided by bar charts which visually illustrated what could only be inferred from the statistics. However, the conclusions are not in doubt: how S1 & S2 managers feel about aspects of the company is different from other workers, but perhaps not entirely in the way expected.

10.0 Discussion

The following discussion focuses on three aspects of the research study: the outcomes from the statistical analysis and the inferences that can be drawn about managerial and leadership behaviour in C&C Group Plc.

Statistical analysis

As the statistical analysis indicates, and the bar charts show, there are differences between how different bands of workers feel about their company, their job and their managers across many of the survey questions. To an extent, therefore, the null hypothesis falls that there will be no differences between how S1 & S2 managers feel and how other bands of workers feel across a range of issues. However, this finding is misleading in that an alternative hypothesis that states that S1 & S2 workers will

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have greater satisfaction, commitment and advocacy than other bands of workers will not stand. The difference lies between S1 & S2 managers and the general workforce, but there is no statistical difference between S1 and S2 managers and L & M managers that is likely to have a practical significance.

On the question of C&C Group Management, the work force is in agreement to the extent that there is no statistical difference in how the various bands rate the Group management. This is not necessarily a consolation for the top managers.

How then can these results be interpreted? It could be argued that the levels of satisfaction of the two management hierarchies have little to do with leadership styles, but has more to do with exchange relationships between the managers and the company in which good salaries and status are exchanged for loyalty (Chemers, 1984:100). To some extent this is reflected in the important job factors in that pay, job security and career development come out top of the list.

Progress since 2004

The purpose behind this research study was to assess whether executive coaching of the top team which started in 2004 was reflected in positive evaluations of job satisfaction, commitment, advocacy, leadership styles and leadership visions in 2006. Although the focus of the statistical analysis was on direct reports of coached managers, it is useful to look at the overall company progress since 2004.

The Mori chart below shows the progress over the two years and compares the company with industry norms.

Chart 4: Headline Figures for Employee Sentiment

Headline Figures – Overall
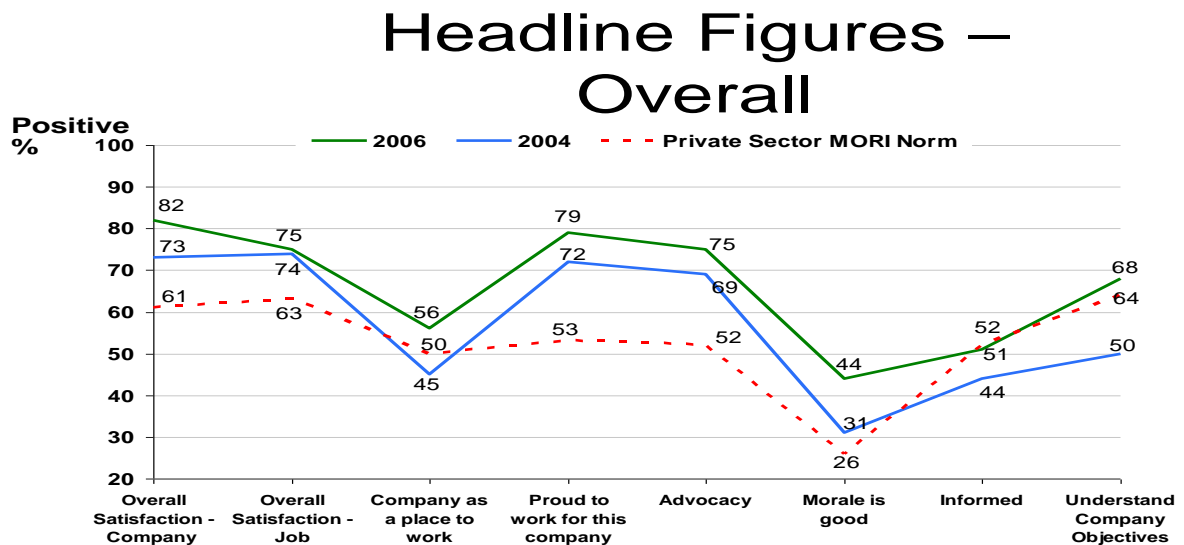
As the chart shows, 2006 sentiment is a considerable improvement on 2004 sentiment and is comfortably above the private sector norm. Some of the quirks of survey results can be seen in the finding that 79% of employees 'Feel proud to work for this company', an emotional statement that could be interpreted as transformational in orientation, yet only 56% of employees are positive about the 'Company as a place to work'. These anomalies can't be understood by analyzing survey answers. Yukl's (2002) general critiques of leadership surveys seem well founded.

Managerial behaviour

The expected outcomes from executive coaching include quality communication, more sensitivity to the needs of workers, and more willingness to empower and develop. In a similar way, transformational leaders also empower followers and they are conscious of what individuals need for career development. They are good team leaders, share information, and reduce organisational bureaucracy. They are also capable of conveying their vision for the organisation and inspiring the workforce (Yukl's, 2002:261).   All these positive behaviours are likely to result in high levels of job satisfaction and more trust in leaders (Rafferty & Griffin, 2006, Jones & George, 2007). This type of leadership correlates with emotional intelligence (Garner & Stough, 2002) and is not confined to top management, but can be found across all organisations at any level (Bass, 1996, 1997).

Mori's analysis of Question 10 which looks at managerial behaviour is insightful (p.58). This analysis grades the answers to the questions in percentages from most to least positive. Table 15 (based on an interpretation of the literature) allocates Question 10 statements across the components of transformational leadership (and, by implication, the outcomes from successful executive coaching) and inserts employees' assessments of managerial behaviour to each statement.

Table 15: Employee Assessment of Transformation & Transactional Leadership

<table>
<tr><td colspan="3">Transformational/Transactional Leadership Processes and employee assessments (Q.10)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Inspirational Motivation (charisma and good communication)</td><td>Individualised consideration Developmental & Supportive</td><td>Intellectual Stimulation (engages and empowers)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Is committed to the company (83%) Makes decisions quickly when needed (66%)|</td><td>Developmental Discusses my training and development needs (34%) Implements my training and development needs (36%) Gives me feedback on how well I am doing (42%) Gives me credit if I've done a good job (49%)</td><td>Engages Keeps me in touch with what's going on (57%) Encourages us to work as a team (61%) Holds regular team briefings (61%)</td></tr>
<tr><td>Transactional
Makes clear what is expected of me (67%)
Treats me fairly (73%)
Gives me the right information to do my job (62%)
Deals decisively and fairly with people who don't perform satisfactorily (43%)</td><td>Supportive
Is supportive if I have a problem (71%)
Is approachable (78%)
Is good at managing people (57%)
Is open and straightforward (64%)</td><td>Empowers
Acts on my ideas (35%)
Consults me on matters where I can contribute (52%)
Is good at delegating responsibility (67%)</td></tr>
</table>

As the table shows, C&C managers are not assessed consistently across the components of transformational or transactional leadership. From a transactional leadership perspective, their ratings are high, except for their ability to deal with under-performers. Jones & George (2007:578) identify this ability as a base that underpins transformational leadership. The managers are at their strongest in terms of supportive leadership, which is relationship oriented and meets the expectations of both emotional intelligence and executive coaching. From a role-modelling

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behaviour perspective, the perception that they are committed to the company is very positive.

Their weakest showing is in the area of developmental consideration which Rafferty & Griffin (2006:38) suggest is a key ingredient for ensuring an effort over and above the norm. In fact, in many instances C&C managers don't meet Bass's twenty-five year old (1981:360) definition of considerate managerial behaviours, i.e. they don't appear to (a) express appreciation for good work (b) put workers suggestions into operation or (c) look for input on important matters before taking decisions. However, Yukl (2002:86) does make the point that participative leadership does not necessarily influence higher satisfaction or performance. Furthermore, respondents' choices on important job factors suggest that these are not their highest consideration.

Leadership behaviour

Question 16 focused on how leadership behaviour was viewed by employees. Table 16 (that arbitrarily assigns the questions to what I perceive to be transformational processes) shows in percentages how positively various statements were rated.

Table 16: Transformational Leadership Processes

Transformational Leadership Processes Section 7/Question 16 Leadership approach		
Inspirational Motivation (charisma and good communication)	**Individualised consideration** Developmental & Supportive	**Intellectual Stimulation** (engages and empowers)
Charisma • **Senior management have a clear vision of where the company is going (70%)** • **Senior management clearly communicate their vision for your company (44%)** • **I have confidence in the senior management team of my company (56%)**	*Developmental* • **Speaking up on issues where you disagree with management can damage your career prospects (39%)**	*Engages* • **Senior management show a real commitment to internal communications with staff (35%)**
	Supportive	*Empowers* • **Staff are consulted on management decisions which affect them and their work (31%)** • **Senior management are interested in listening to staff opinion (35%)**

As the above table illustrates, Senior Management shine in only one area – having a clear vision of where the company is going (70%) and 56% of staff having confidence in them is quite positive. Other than these two positives, the responses paint a poor picture of senior managements' transformational processes. In line with the managerial behaviour assessments, they are perceived to be particularly weak on empowerment and also weak on engaging staff.

However, it must be acknowledged that bad as these assessments are, they are an improvement on how senior managers were assessed in 2004. In fact 42% of staff acknowledge a significant improvement in communication, 48% acknowledge a significant improvement in training and development, and 23% see a significant improvement in reward and recognition since 2004.

This study does not attempt to make a causal link between executive coaching and company sentiment. Many changes had taken place in the company between 2004 and 2006 and at the time of the survey in 2006 the company was buoyant and doing exceptionally well. In Document 3, the coach who conducted the initial round of executive coaching made the point that executives in the company were more relaxed and more secure financially since its flotation, and one interviewee said she felt very fortunate to be working in a company that was doing so well. These factors which are extrinsic to managerial behaviour may have influenced the overall levels of satisfaction. The perceptions prior to 2004 may reflect the dinosaur nature of the company at that time, a condition to which many interviewees referred.

Conclusion

As this research study shows, S1 & S2 managers differ significantly from other staff in their evaluations of managerial and leadership behaviour. These differences lie between themselves and non-managerial workers and there are no statistical differences between their perceptions and those of other managers. Thus it is difficult to infer that their levels of positive assessments have to do with being direct reports of coached executives, unless you assume that the positive effects of executive coaching are percolating down the organisation, but haven't yet reached the non-managerial workforce.

From an overall perspective, it could be argued that between 2004 and 2006 substantial progress has been made in job satisfaction, commitment and advocacy across the company. While executive coaching and the leadership development programme have no doubt contributed to improvements, there may be a some way to go before the ideal outcomes from executive coaching reflect themselves in transformational leadership processes.

11.0 Limitations of the Research

As articulated earlier, survey instruments by their nature have many drawbacks. This particular survey, although relevant in many ways, was not specifically designed for eliciting outcomes from executive coaching nor gauging the extent of transformational leadership processes.

A confounding problem with the survey is the manner in which respondents classified themselves into workforce bands. Because the focus of the study was on direct reports of E & B band managers, rather than on the senior managers themselves, to an extent, the problem was circumvented in that no inferences were drawn from a statistical analysis of E & B band managers.. However, it does raise an issue about the general veracity of the survey responses. The particular presentation of Likert scale responses in the survey (no numbers and few intervals) steered me in the direction of non-parametric techniques, which limited the statistical analysis, so, for example,   it was not possible to carry out probing techniques such as factor analysis and multiple regression.

Despite these limitations, the research did come out with definite findings (direct reports of the coached executives are more positive in their attitudes than other workers); how these findings might be interpreted is less clear.

12.0 Looking forward to Documents 5

Documents 5 and 6 mark the final stages of the DBA. Documents 2 and 3 have focussed exclusively on executive coaching.   Document 3 related the experiences of executives who had been coached and identified the outcomes that the executives attributed to the coaching process. Document 4 broadened the perspective to consider leadership styles and via an analysis of a company survey, made a loose connection between executive coaching outcomes, emotional intelligence, transformational leadership processes and levels of satisfaction, commitment and advocacy.

Document 5 intends to maintain this broadened perspective and to research whether the levels of satisfaction that direct reports of coached executives experience has to do

with transformational leadership processes or whether this satisfaction is more transactional in nature, i.e. related to pay and status. The research will be qualitative, and will most likely seek to elicit critical incidents that reveal the sources of satisfaction, commitment and advocacy.

13.0 Reflections on Document 4

Document 4 has been a steep learning curve. It is more than 25 years since I've had to concern myself with statistics and even then it wasn't a favourite subject. Coming to grips with the SPSS Programme was an achievement, and I must acknowledge how instructive I found Pallant's (2005) (aptly named) *SPSS Survival Manual.*

Although I would have preferred to design my own questionnaire, this wasn't an option as the company survey had been issued only months before. While it might appear that getting a ready-made SPSS and Excel file lightened my load, in fact I don't believe that this was so. It took me a long time to get to grips with the data and to configure it in ways that were useful to me. I would like to acknowledge a really useful conversation I had with Sally that helped me think my way through the morass of questions.

I also appreciated the help I got with from statistically minded colleagues who were generous with their time. My original idea of looking at transformational orientations as a basis for analysis didn't work out, but in the process I was taught how to collapse questions and transform the data which gave insights into other aspects of SPSS. Whether to go parametric or non-parametric definitely was the question. I got so much conflicting advice from experts with different perspectives that the decision was almost a throw of the dice – however, as I mentioned in the document, the comment about valid results was the deciding factor. One definite outcome from the ambivalence around the Likert Scale, is that I find myself sceptical about statistical results which previously I would have accepted without a second thought.

For Document 4 I also made my first use of EndNote, a programme that manages references, citations and bibliographies. I have some way to go before becoming expert in this programme, but I feel it will be time well invested for Document 5.

Perhaps the most insightful learning came from the review of the literature on leadership behaviour and leadership styles; I really enjoyed becoming familiar with the evolution of the theory and the concept of transformational leadership and inspirational motivation and people making efforts above the norm. Although this theory is very intuitively credible, a dialogue with a colleague gave me an additional perspective. He had made an extra effort to ensure contacts with employees for work placement for students and when I jokingly said that he must be responding to transformational leadership, he replied that he did it because there was no leadership, but he thought it should be done!

I found Yulk's (2002) critiques of the various theories and their research instruments formative. I had assumed that the clinical nature of quantitative research guaranteed clean results. I feel that my perspective is now a lot more sceptical and questioning. I also appreciate what the various statistical techniques are purporting to do, so I can better judge their appropriateness. I am also conscious that reflecting on these happenings has influenced my perceptions and, in a sense, influenced my value system (Lincoln and Guba , 2000:183; Bryman and Bell, 2003:27). All this has been a very positive learning experience for me.

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Document 6:

A reflective journal on the DBA experience

1.0   Introduction

This Doctor of Business Administration (DBA) project, which has absorbed my attention for the best part of four years, is almost at an end. Getting to this stage has been an exhilarating (and occasionally frustrating) journey, replete with opportunities to learn by doing, insights borne of reflection, exciting new concepts to contemplate, and a host of interesting research participants to meet and interview. Document 6 attempts to capture some of these experiences and to highlight the personal and professional learning that are outcomes of the DBA process.

The document starts by providing a brief personal profile, it then considers ways in which the DBA contributed to professional and personal growth, how it fostered reflection and reflexivity and describes the ways in which the stages of the DBA contributed to various learning milestones and how these in turn resulted in personal and professional insights. It includes the salient roles of supervisors, faculty staff, my learning set and particular colleagues and friends.

2.0   A personal profile

Because a researcher's biography, mindset and approach can be influential in the research process in that we bring what we are to what we do, it may be useful for the reader to have some understanding of my background. The most important roles in my life have been those of wife, mother, lecturer, tutor, academic researcher, friend and colleague. More recently, I have engaged in a small amount of coaching.

Prior to becoming an academic, I worked in various positions, e.g. administration/secretarial, pre-school Montessori teacher, Speech and Drama tutor. Although I always aspired to have a third level qualification, I was in my early forties when I completed a BA in Communication Studies and started work as a part-time lecturer. Some years later, I completed a Master of Business Administration (MBA) and shortly afterwards became a full-time lecturer in the Business Faculty of The Dublin Institute of Technology (DIT). Four years ago, I started on the road to a DBA and close to the beginning of Document 5 I retired from being a full-time lecturer. It could be said that, regarding third level education, I was a late starter and I am now a late finisher.

Both the structure and the emphasis of the DBA from Nottingham Trent University (NTU) attracted me. The structure was contained and documents were based around practical assignments, an aspect I appreciated because my academic interest was in writing Irish business case studies suitable for graduate and postgraduate analysis. I decided on Executive Coaching as a topic for the DBA because of the interest I felt in this subject following a Diploma Course in Executive Coaching that I attended as part of a process of self-development. The course introduced theory around the concept of coaching and provided training sessions in coaching. As part of the course programme, participants were required to engage in pro-bono (unpaid) coaching. I thoroughly enjoyed all aspects of this course and it whetted my appetite to understand more about coaching. Through the good aegis of one of the course facilitators, I met the HR Director of C&C Group who had recently introduced coaching into his company. He readily agreed to allow me interview some of his senior executives who had been coached, and so the topic area for the DBA had a research focus. If I am honest, I have to admit that I thought the DBA would be a relatively easy journey and not the hugely challenging one it turned out to be!

3.0 The DBA as a vehicle for personal and professional growth

For me, the DBA has been akin to a process of action learning: 'a continuous process of learning and reflection supported by colleagues, with an intention of getting things done. Through action learning individuals learn with and from each other by working on real problems and reflecting on their own experiences' (McGill & Beaty, 1992: 21). When I looked back on the triggers for reflection and learning that emanated from the DBA, I discovered quite a similarity between them and the triggers for self-awareness emanating from coaching outlined in Document 5. The DBA stimulated reflection via various mediums, e.g. readings that introduced new concepts, lecturers who emphasised the notion of healthy scepticism, discussions with supervisors, learning set participants, and colleagues that helped clarify concepts and issues, and conversations with research participants that shed light on the process of coaching. These learning incidents could be thought of as critical incidents (Flanagan, 1954) that facilitated learning through reflection. The reading and research that informed all documents underpinned my personal and professional development and the requirement to reflect on the learning process within each document enriched

the experience. Preparing and presenting every document was personally challenging and feedback from supervisors was always constructive, insightful and thought provoking. Each document contributed its own learning points until the learning became a critical mass that engendered new ways of approaching, and thinking about, professional practices and new ways of considering how the world worked; in other words, the cumulative output of the various documents produced a form of double-loop learning (Argyris 1977, 1999).

4.0   Developing reflexivity

Many management development programmes now include conscious reflection as a means of enhancing learning experiences that subsequently lead to changes in practice (Edwards, 1999). Edwards (Ibid) puts forward multiple reasons (thirty-six) why people reflect, five of which particularly resonate with me. He argues that reflection allows one to explore mindsets, foster self-development, increase self-confidence, gain multiple viewpoints, and uncover discrepant reasoning. He argues that reflection 'enables a person to make sense of a prior experience and then form concepts and generalizations to guide future actions' (Edwards, 1999:70). Reflexivity is a more challenging concept. Lincoln and Guba (2000:183) describe reflexivity as: 'the process of reflecting critically on the self as researcher, the 'human as instrument'. This is what Bluckert (2005:177) calls developing our 'observing self' and 'our capacity to be in object mode – an ability to notice one's own experiencing and to be able to helicopter above it to observe and reflect on it'. In other words, it is learning from our experiences by 'thinking about our thinking' (Raelin, 2002:66).   I particularly like Raelin's (2002:66) definition of reflective practice which he describes as:

> … the practice of periodically stepping back to ponder the meaning of what has recently transpired to ourselves and to others in our immediate environment. It illuminates what the self and others have experienced, providing a basis for future action. In particular, it privileges the process of inquiry, leading to an understanding of experiences that may have been overlooked in practice.

This definition seems to encompass what would be commonly understood as reflection, looking backwards to learn from experience, but it also emphasises

awareness of others and the impact that reflection may have on the nuances of practice.

I found that Edwards' (1999:74) discussion on the nature of reflection, which incorporates reflexivity, provided a useful framework that illustrated how my reflective process developed as the DBA progressed. He identifies three dimensions of reflection: time, depth, and orientation. Time refers to when in the process of practice reflection occurs – before, during, after. Depth refers to the level at which enquiry takes place – surface, subsurface or core. Edwards likens surface enquiry to Kolbs's (1984) learning cycle reflective observation component. Subsurface enquiry 'exposes underlying assumptions and beliefs', core reflection would subject these underlying assumptions to 'critical reassessment' (ibid), which in turn can lead to double loop learning. Orientation encompasses two possible directions that reflection can take – subject (the self) and/or object. ('something other than the self') and he contends that most reflection takes this latter direction, that is one tends to reflect on the experience, rather than reflecting on the self's experience of the experience.

Prior to the DBA, I would have thought of myself as an organised person who planned for the future and reflected on experiences, looking back on events and attempting to discover what had worked and not worked, and how this knowledge might improve my future approaches to various situations (Schon, 1991). When I look back now, I know that my previous reflections were surface, focusing exclusively on content and process, but rarely addressing premise (Mezirow, 1990). In terms of the time dimensions of reflection, my process would have been to plan for, and reflect on, events. I believe I strengthen this pattern as the DBA progressed, and certainly, the planning for both Documents 3 and 5 generated intense prior and post reflection as I attempted to plan for the research and subsequently to interpret the multiple experiences of the research participants.

Schon (1991) advocates reflection-in-action. I think that the interaction between lecturer and students facilitates reflection-in-action, but as Schon points out, 'managers do reflect-in-action, but they seldom reflect on their reflection-in-action' (Ibid:243). I think that for various reasons, e.g. the comfort of habitual ways, linked to inertia (Shaw & Perkins, 1991), in my professional practice I rarely reflected on my

reflection-in-action. I would like to be able to claim that during the research interviews my 'reflection-in-action' antennae was constant, but I have to admit it only worked intermittently. I deduce this because in the analysis/interpretation stage of Document 5 there were issues that could have been resolved more clearly had I honed my ability to reflect-in-action, e.g. I could have probed research participants as to why they did not challenge the coach about lack of progress. Having acknowledged that I need to work on this aspect of reflection, I do believe that, because of its emphasis on conscious reflection, the DBA did deepen my ability to be reflective and reflexive.

While I was conscious (in theory) of the notion of underlying assumptions and the extent to which they could influence interpretation, naively I had not identified many underlying assumptions that might alter how I viewed things. When underlying assumptions came to my attention, I was willing to acknowledge that attending the Diploma Course in Executive Coaching had predisposed me to expect positive outcomes from coaching, but other than that, I had not delved very deeply into how any assumptions of mine could influence my interpretation of the research. Both lecturers and supervisors emphasised the importance of surfacing assumptions and being aware of one's own inputs. However, the process of appreciating how my assumptions could influence my thinking came so slowly that I tend to agree with Johnson & Duberley's (2003) views that we become prone to thinking in particular ways that reflect our social and historical conditioning. They argue that surfacing underlying assumptions is extremely difficult, but that this process can be facilitated by group conversations and discussions.

4.1 The role of conversations in aiding reflection and reflexivity

While many authors encourage reflexivity (Weick, 1995; Schon, 1991; Edwards, 1999; Pillow, 2003; Aitken & Deaker, 2007; Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Willig, 2008), some tend to be dismissive of too much introspection (Skeggs, 2002). Others argue that reflexivity is enhanced when peers and colleagues can discuss their thoughts in a safe environment (Schon, 1991; Preskill & Torres, 1992; Smith, 2001; Raelin, 2002). This is what Schon, (1991) calls a Reflective Practicum – a safe environment in which reflective conversations can be held. Raelin (2002:67) goes so far as to argue that Socrates's famous phrase 'the unexamined life isn't worth living' has been 'misinterpreted as a call for more introspection, the actual meaning is that we need to include others in the examination of experience.' The DBA structure initiated a

'learning set' of cohorts who were valuable as supportive colleagues. At meetings of this group, various ideas and inputs always provided fresh perspectives and there is no doubt that the group created a 'gestalt' that was more than the sum of its parts. In addition to the formal learning set, I was fortunate that three work colleagues were at various stages of pursuing a DBA through NTU; this shared interest generated many insightful conversations and discussing the stages of various pieces of research with Joan, Edmund and Phil certainly helped me make sense of it all.

Shortly after getting the feedback on Document 2, myself and Phil (who had just finished Document 4) made a trip to Bangor to meet with Prof. Sally Sambrook, a mutual external supervisor. Conversations with Phil and Sally helped me understand aspects of the role of researcher that had previously escaped me. Phil explained how her current role of academic manager inclined her to empathise with the managers she interviewed in pursuit of her research. Another aspect of our conversation brought up the notion of power as an issue. This was a new concept for me as I had previously thought that, if anything, the interviewee held the balance of power in that they could refuse the interview and perhaps slant the interview content to enhance perceptions of themselves. Naively, I had never thought that I might impose my worldview on a subsequent interpretation. Sally also raised the notion that research was an exchange, that the researcher also gives something when he/she helps people to think things through. Over the course of the research that informed documents 3 and 5, I think I achieved this. Schon (1991:243) refers to how rarely managers get practice in articulating their thinking to others, thus they often 'have little access to their own reflection in action'. Several research participants, including the C&C HR Director and the M&V Coach, spontaneously acknowledged that our conversation had helped them to reflect on their practices. In one instance, the interview facilitated an executive to reflect on the experience of being coached. This was particularly gratifying, as that executive had previously acknowledged a disinclination to reflect. During discussions with Sally, the notion of using discourse as a framework for analysis was proposed, but I found it hard to get comfortable with that idea. In fact, for a long time I struggled mightily with the notion that the language people used reflected their reality. I was familiar with the idea that one man's terrorist is another man's freedom fighter and that words connote different things to different people. It was only while doing some reading for the literature section of Document 5 that the

notion of dominant discourses creating mind-sets clicked with me. This was a profoundly insightful moment in that it awakened me to the ways in which some of my own taken-for-granted assumptions had remained unchallenged. I realised that I too was steeped in the dominant discourse of business rhetoric where SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, realistic and within a time frame) objectives create a target for most projects, but may not necessarily suit the developmental nature of executive coaching.

5.0   The Learning Journey

The following section provides a brief description of the learning that flowed from the DBA process. Each Document produced its own rich learning experiences and the following examples provide only a taste of the total learning that the DBA provided.

The literature reading for Document 1 introduced me to the notion of the learning organisation, to the concepts of single and double loop learning, to espoused and enacted theories and the influence of beliefs on behaviour (Argyris, 1977, 1999; Senge, 1990; Pearn et al.,1994; Ellinger & Bostrom, 2002; Tjepkema et al. 2002). I found these concepts fascinating and they motivated me to consider my own behaviour. Outside of being an educational institute, to what extent was my organisation a learning organisation and how did I contribute, if at all, to this phenomenon? I was particularly struck by Senge's (1990) argument that within organisations often the best ideas are never put into practice because they conflict with deeply ingrained ways of thinking and acting. Senge advocates 'surfacing, testing and improving our internal pictures of how the world works' (1990:175) and claims that it is not so much the gap between espoused theories and theories in use that creates a problem, but the fact that the gap is unacknowledged. The danger lies in believing that 'we've learned something just because we've got the new language or concepts to use, even though our behaviour is completely unchanged' (Ibid:202). I had learned something and I wanted to ensure that my behaviour did not remain completely unchanged. I became active in programmes organised through the 'Teaching & Learning Centre', which was a resource for all lecturers, and via its workshops and seminars, I became familiar with the concepts of directed learning and problem-solving learning. These new methods fed into my approach to class work and, I believe, enhanced my ability to do a good job.

The second critical piece of learning from Document 1 (which followed through in all documents), were the insights I received from the quality of supervisor feedback. My supervisors encouraged me to be less descriptive, to tighten-up my writing and be meticulous in my referencing; they also challenged me to become a more critical thinker. The quality of their feedback caused me to reflect on the relationships I had with my dissertation students. I began to question whether my feedback to them was always as encouraging and appropriate as it could be; on reflection I realised that I was often more inclined to talk at them rather than having an open dialogue. Thus, dissertation consultations became a process of reflection-in-action for me.

In the readings for Document 2, I became immersed in what had been written and researched about executive coaching. The technique of writing a critical literature review was different from other papers I had written in that it required me to reflect on a synthesis of previous research. The combination of these readings, plus the coaching practice which was part of the Executive Coaching Diploma Course, also influenced my approach as dissertation supervisor. Reflecting some of the techniques of coaching, I became less directive and more facilitative, encouraging students to think things through for themselves, rather than handing them an answer. (In the beginning, students may not always have appreciated this new approach!). The critical literature review also helped me appreciate the myriad approaches to coaching and fortified my own efforts at coaching.

The preparation and the process of Document 3 provided a significant chunk of personal and professional learning. In the course of developing the research for Document 3, I had the opportunity to take the emotional intelligence questionnaire (*Bar-On EQI)* which many executives in C&C had taken as part of the Emotional Intelligence Leadership Development Programme prior to coaching. Retrospectively, I was very interested to find that my response to the feedback practically mirrored the response of one of the female executives – we both felt that the profile had boosted our confidence. In addition to giving me insights into my own strengths and weaknesses, this experience also helped me converse more informatively with the executives about their profiles, thus it had both a personal and professional outcome.

Document 3 was also my first serious entry into the realm of methodology. Similar to colleagues in my action learning set, issues around methodology were initially problematic. I had several nudges from Prof. Stewart before I finally understood that methods are neutral and one's philosophy determines a positivist or interpretivist position. My sentiment draws me towards an interpretivist position, but for a while I worried that I might be a closet positivist because of a tendency to compare and contrast and count the numbers as some sort of validating way of determining 'the truth' (even though I knew there was no truth). Our learning group had many vigorous arguments about competing positions and I find it reassuring to know that discussions about ontology go back thousands of years to Socrates and Aristotle and are likely to continue well into the future.

Various readings for the methodology section emphasised the notion that researchers bring their background, their attitudes and their prejudices to bear on the research (Lincoln & Guba, 2000; Bryman & Bell, 2003). At the time, this was quite a sobering concept that engendered an amount of soul-searching as I tried to define the values and underlying assumptions that I brought to the research process. As mentioned previously, I found these concepts difficult to implement, despite a willingness to do so. I was ready to acknowledge that the recently completed course on Executive Coaching predisposed me to value the notion of coaching to enhance personal and organisational performance and perhaps to favour the notion that if coaching didn't work out, the fault was likely to lie with the executive, rather than with the coach. None of the findings from Document 3 clashed with this partisan view.

In the course of preparation for Document 3, I learned a lot from listening to one particular lecturer (Dalvir Fredericks) who spoke about her own ethnographic research. Her reason for undertaking this research was interesting; she found that her experiences in 'the messy world of business' were very different from the ideal scenarios offered by text books, and she wanted to explore the reality. During the interviews for Document 3 I found that the academic phrase of Transformational Leadership (Bass, 1985) meant nothing to any of the C&C executives, which fed into Dalvir's view that the real world of business is somewhat removed from textbook theories. I became more sceptical of the pat answers that text-books sometimes offer.

Dalvir offered us insights and practical advice from her experiences of working within companies. She suggested that we should be conscious of the clues in the environment that would help in understanding the politics of the organisation and said that one's biography is quite important because it influences what you notice. She suggested that we should be alert from the minute we enter a building and she also flagged the notion that you might sometimes have a strong identification with the person telling the story and that you need to be aware of your responses to interviewees. Prior to this counsel, in an interview scenario my focus would have been almost exclusively on the content of the interview, thus my remit was broadened and I was definitely more sensitive to nuances in the environment and my responses. In a sense I was again reflecting-in-action (Schon, 1991). I was interested to note that, perhaps because of my biography (I was a secretary in a much earlier phase of my life), one of the nice things I noticed about both companies was the pleasant manner of the receptionists and the fact that all staff were on first name terms. I became more aware of my feelings, recognising that I felt quite empathic with one woman interviewee, who was successfully juggling family and home life with work commitments, but occasionally felt impatient with the men who worked exceedingly long hours, to (in my view) the detriment of their family life. Recognising these feelings helped counterbalance their impact. Dalvir also pointed out that not only are we editing the interview, but that the interviewee is also editing for our benefit. Senior managers, she said, like to 'present as competent and polished'. At the time of the Document 3 interviews, I found it hard to credit that perhaps I was not always getting the full story; by the end of the research for Document 5, this was a live issue for me! However, although Easterby-Smith et al. (2002:57) talk about 'contamination from people in organisations wanting particular results', I must acknowledge that I experienced no such pressure from anyone within either organisation.

Certainly, both Documents 3 and 5 engendered intense reflections as I considered the various positions put forward by the research participants and grappled with how to interpret and present these with the minimum intrusion or distortion. To borrow Shron's words, I had many 'a reflective conversation with the situation' (Shron, 1991:241). In the writing up of both documents, despite the plentiful use of quotes, I

was conscious of the paucity of the written word to capture the nuances of conversation (inflection, tone, body language) and the personality of the speaker.

Getting Document 4 off the ground was frustrating. Although I would have preferred to design and issue my own questionnaire, this was not an option as a company survey had been issued only months before. The HR Director kindly offered me his professionally designed questionnaire and the associated SPSS file produced by the survey company. I found the questionnaire flawed in several ways, e.g., many questions were ambivalent and the limited range of reply choices constrained analysis. Other problems also existed, for example, eighty (80) staff ticked the top management classification section, but only 30 people were entitled to do this. Thus, all findings that factored in the opinions of 'top management' were bogus. Reflecting on this material allowed me to appreciate the flawed nature of some of the findings presented to top C&C management and was another insight into the messy world of business.

Within Document 4, perhaps the most enjoyable learning came from my (brief) review of literature on leadership behaviour and leadership styles. A major section of the questionnaire was concerned with perceptions of leadership styles, thus I wanted to familiarise myself with leadership theory. I found Yukl's (2002) critique of the various theories and their research instruments formative and fascinating. It really brought home to me that a theory is just that – a theory. The combination of these readings, plus the experience of analysing the questionnaire, sharpened my ability to reflect on, and think critically about, the foundations underpinning research results and about theories proposed in academic articles. This certainly contributed to my professional development.

Several strands of learning came from Document 5. The preparation for Document 5 was an exercise in managing uncertainty, which I do with some difficulty. I needed to find another company undertaking executive coaching and willing to allow research. Although I had a strong network connection that facilitated an introduction to the M&V HR Director, I still had to wait many weeks before she had time to see me and many more weeks before she forwarded the names of the contacts. I was fortunate to know that this behaviour was not unusual for her, nevertheless it was a new experience for me and one I found very frustrating. However, it did help me empathise with research students who meet with unresponsiveness. This said, I must

acknowledge the pro-active co-operation and goodwill of all the M&V executives and coaches whom I interviewed (twelve executive and three coaches). An exceptional example is Diarmuid who offered to make two contacts for me, (with the coach and with Fiachra) and several weeks after the interview he forwarded me a pod-cast on coaching that he thought might be useful. Similarly, my ex-student sponsor within the company was pro-actively helpful. While Document 5 recounts the experiences of five executives, future research papers will relate how the other executives fared with their coaches.

Similar to other documents, the readings for Document 5 were informative. It was interesting to see how various scholars were suggesting that the essence of coaching linked to reflection (Duffy, 2008; Du Toit, 2007; Gray, 2006), which ties in with the notion that reflective practice is a critical step towards professional development (Kolb, 1984; Schon, 1991). De Haan's (2008) twin papers on the doubts experienced by coaches was, for me, professionally reassuring because as a fledgling coach I could empathise with many of the doubts articulated by his research participants. Dagley's (2006) research into HR professionals' assessments of coaching was helpful when I came to consider the discrepancy between the HR Director's assessment of executive coaching and that of the CEO.

The closing stages of Document 5 were fraught with anxiety about what to make of the interview with the CEO. It was a last minute decision to seek an interview with the CEO (again encouraged and facilitated by my contact within the company). Retrospectively (and after intense reflection), I realise that coping with the complexity generated by this interview was a powerful analytical experience that I think has lessened my fear of qualitative analysis and will stand to me in future research.

6.0   Conclusion

Completing the DBA is for me a form of academic self-actualisation (Maslow, 1968). Aitken & Deaken (2007:2) suggest that 'personal growth is dependent on developing new ideas but also eliminating or modifying old ones'. A process of reflection facilitated by learning colleagues and by supervisors and lecturers has spurred both my personal and professional growth (which I think are seamless). I feel privileged to

have had the benefit of their inputs and experiences. Overall, the DBA has been a very rewarding and enriching process, enhanced by its emphasis on reflection. Before engaging with the DBA, my reflections had been confined to content and process, I would have been unaware of the need for premise reflection (Mezirow, 1991). This was possibly the first time I was formally required to reflect on and document the learning and insights I gained from any academic experience. Doing so has given me a keener sense of myself, and has created opportunities for transformative learning via a questioning of assumptions and beliefs that had previously been unchallenged (Raelin, 2000).

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