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Executive Coaching as a Developmental Tool: How it can help Managers to improve their Performance in their Role as Leaders

Clarissa Peuthen

Master in Management

Supervisor:

MSc António Manuel Quitério Paulo, Invited Professor,
Iscte-Instituto Universitário de Lisboa

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Department of Marketing, Strategy and Operations

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Resumo

O uso de coaching executivo pelos gerentes como meio de desenvolvimento de liderança, tem aumentado significativamente nas empresas. Apesar deste aumento, os estudos empíricos nesta área são limitados. Com foco nesta limitação, esta tese foi realizada com o intuito de contribuir com dados empíricos, explorando o coaching executivo como ferramenta de desenvolvimento e a sua eficácia na melhoria do papel dos gerentes enquanto líderes. Foi realizada uma revisão da literatura sobre o coaching executivo e o desenvolvimento de liderança, seguida de uma pesquisa qualitativa na forma de entrevistas semiestruturadas, realizadas a 12 gerentes alemães com cargos de liderança, que passaram por um processo de coaching executivo. Estas avaliaram o processo de coaching, fatores que contribuem para uma prática de coaching de sucesso, benefícios do coaching executivo e o desenvolvimento de liderança.

Os resultados revelaram que o coaching executivo é uma boa ferramenta para que os gerentes sejam melhores líderes. Este revelou que a área de liderança foi onde apresentou maior benefício e ainda mostrou aumentar a autoeficácia, que é uma das pré-condições para o desenvolvimento de liderança. Foram ainda encontrados outros benefícios do coaching executivo, nomeadamente intrapessoais e interpessoais. Os principais fatores de sucesso para o coaching executivo são a capacidade do coach de construir um ambiente de confiança e ser um bom ouvinte; O foco do coach, a motivação interna e a vontade de mudar e trabalhar em si mesmos; uma relação de coaching com comunicação aberta, sem julgamentos e com honestidade; e um processo de coaching individualizado.

Palavras-chave: Coaching executivo, coaching, ferramenta de desenvolvimento, desenvolvimento de liderança

Classificação JEL: M12 – Executivos, O15 – Recursos Humanos

Abstract

The use of executive coaching as leadership development approach for managers has significantly grown in organizations. Despite of this growth, empirical research in this field is limited. To address this limitation, this thesis was designed to contribute valuable empirical data by exploring executive coaching as a developmental tool and its effectiveness for managers to improve their role as leaders. A literature review addressing executive coaching and leadership development was conducted followed by qualitative research in the form of semi-structured interviews with 12 German managers in leading positions who have undergone an executive coaching process with a focus on leadership development. The interviews investigated the coaching process, factors contributing to a successful coaching practice, benefits of executive coaching and leadership development.

Overall research findings reveal that executive coaching is a good developmental tool for managers to be better leaders. Not only was leadership the area where executive coaching was most beneficial, it also enhances self-efficacy which is the precondition for leadership development. Other benefits of executive coaching were particularly found to be intra-personal and inter-personal. The key success factors for executive coaching are the coach's ability to build a trustful environment and to be a good listener; the coachee's focus, internal motivation and willingness to change and work on themselves; a matching coaching relationship with open communication, no judgment and honesty; and an individualized coaching process.

Keywords: Executive coaching, coaching, developmental tool, leadership development

JEL Classification: M12 – Executives, O15 – Human Resources

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Glossary

Glossary of Acronyms

ICF	International Coaching Federation
CIPD	Chartered Institute of Personal Development

Introduction

This dissertation aims to acquire a deeper understanding of the impact of executive coaching as a developmental tool for managers to improve their performance in their role as leaders. The research questions are designed as followed:

1. Can executive coaching be a good leadership developmental tool?
2. How can executive coaching help managers improve their performance in their role as leaders?

Coaching is a growing industry that has been reported to earn an annual global revenue of \$2.849 billion USD in 2019. Worldwide, there are approximately 71,000 professional coach practitioners which is an increase of 33% in the past 4 years. In the latest ICF global coaching study, the majority of 65% of coach practitioners indicated that in 2019 their main specialty is the business coaching discipline with the majority of clients being managers (International Coaching Federation, 2020). Executive coaching is one type of business coaching that focusses, amongst other executives, on managers and classified leaders (Mattone, 2017). Even though executive coaching is not a new development approach to organizations (Horner, 2002), it has remarkably grown in popularity (Minzlaff, 2018) and demand (Horner, 2002). This is due to the fact that today's business world has become more volatile and competitive based on many factors like greater international competition, faster technological change, deregulation of change (Kotter, 2009), a globalized fast-paced and complex business environment, the movement towards flatter organizational structures (Webb, 2006) and ever-changing markets (Zuñiga-Collazos, Castillo-Palacio, Montaña-Narváez, & Castillo-Arévalo, 2019). To respond to these changes, the need for managers to be better leaders is undisputed (Kotter, 2009). They must constantly prepare for change (Horner, 2002), cope with those challenges (Zuñiga-Collazos et al., 2019) and develop quickly and in the context of their jobs (Underhill, McAnnally, & Koriath, 2008, p. 2). A subtler set of leadership competencies is needed (Sherman & Freas, 2004) which are applicable to those compelling needs (Webb, 2006). Organizations which have realized that leadership development is crucial for company success have an increased demand for executive coaching (Horner, 2002) and made it a high priority (Underhill et al., 2008, p. 1). As an important part of many organizations' development strategy (Joo, 2005), executive coaching offers a flexible and responsive approach to leadership

development (Webb, 2006) that can be used across industries in all types of organizations and contexts (CIPD, 2008, p.51).

Coach practitioners have identified an increased awareness of the benefits of coaching as future opportunity (ICF, 2016, p. 19). Overall research findings show that executive coaching is used by organizations to great effect for the benefit as development tool and that it is considered as good value for the time and money investment that it demands (Horner, 2002). A lot of literature exists that claims the effectiveness of executive coaching and its impact on leadership. However, further research is required, since evidence of empirical data is limited (Grover & Furnham, 2016).

This work aims to find crosslines between executive coaching as a developmental tool and its effectiveness for managers to improve their role as leaders with the proof of empirical data. This is an advance on most previous studies and intends to diminish the lack of evidence in this field by only focusing on leaders as target group and coachee, with the use of a qualitative method. Furthermore, it will provide an understanding of the outcomes that can be achieved through executive coaching and contribute to developing enhanced knowledge in this area:

Research objectives for this thesis include:

- To present relevant literature concerning executive coaching and leadership development
- To identify crosslines of executive coaching as a developmental tool and managers improving their performance in their role as leaders
- To gather through interviews relevant data from managers who have experienced executive coaching as leadership developmental tool
- To analyze in which areas executive coaching has helped managers with leadership development
- To find out what the key contributors for a successful coaching experience are
- To determine whether executive coaching is a good developmental tool in terms of leadership development

Over the last two decades, there has been a boom in executive coaching. It has turned into a multibillion-dollar industry, which draws on the culture of self-improvement and self-help that enters the corporate world (Jacobs, 2020). The worldwide cumulative annual revenue in 2019 for coaching was \$2.8 billion (International Coaching Federation, 2020). Executive coaching has become a major leadership development strategy of our time (Albizu, Rekaldee,

Landeta, & Fernández-Ferrín, 2019) and it continues to grow in prestige and popularity. Organizations that use coaching stated that they are likely to implement it more in the future. (The Executive Coaching Forum, 2015, p. 5). According to the ICF Global Coaching Study from 2020 approximately 71,000 professional coach practitioners are operating worldwide in comparison to 2,100 professional coaches in 1999 (International Coaching Federation, 2020). It is used by numerous international organizations to influence the results of managers productivity (Podolchak, Prokopyshyn-Rashkevych, & Karkovska, 2019) and performance (Grover & Furnham, 2016).

This thesis will be of value not only for managers who thrive to be better leaders, but also for organizations that are thinking whether they should invest into the implementation of executive coaching as a developmental tool. Moreover, with this knowledge, coaches may be better to plan and implement executive coaching interventions by enhancing their practice and addressing the needs of their executives according to factors that have been perceived as more effective when delivering executive coaching from the coachee's point of view.

Chapter 1

Literature Review

1.1 Executive Coaching

1.1.1 General Coaching Definition and Scope

For decades performing artists, sportsmen and public speakers have made use of coaches to help them perform better (Horner, 2002). It is recognized as a positive and empowering approach for performance and development (Witherspoon & White, 2003) with a broad empirical base and extensive history on the general topic mainly in athletics. The use of coaching as a learning and development strategy (Joo, 2005) with a set of techniques to the practice of management (Kilburg, 2010, p. 59) has become very popular in the last years (Blackman, Moscardo, & Gray, 2016).

An analysis of 41 definitions by Rocha and Lace (2016) demonstrates that there is no unified definition of coaching. The nonprofit International Coaching Federation (ICF) is considered the main credentialing and accrediting body for training programs and coaches (Tugend, 2015) and defines coaching as a partnership with coachees for a creative and thought-provoking process that inspires the coachee to maximize their personal as well as professional potential (International Coaching Federation, n.d.a). Coaching is used in all contexts and types of organizations right across industry (CIPD, 2008, p. 51) with the broader coaching field including life planning, career counseling, nutritional and health advice, and skills training from public speaking to flirtation (Sherman & Freas, 2004). Coaching is also a possible practice to promote sustainable change in organizations by facilitating people in the period of change to encourage development, enhance goal achievement and support them to master change problems. A content and comparative analysis of coaching definitions showed that the aim of coaching is described by the keywords to improve, to create, to facilitate and to support (Rocha & Lace, 2016).

Most techniques, processes and methodologies as well as some of the practices come from psychology and counselling. Though, coaching is not only about psychology but also about understanding the broader context of organizations, management, processes and decision-making (CIPD, 2008, p. 10).

1.1.2 The Distinctiveness of Executive Coaching

In order to understand and clarify what executive coaching is and what it is not, it is important to look at how coaching is distinguished from other forms of helping relationships at the workplace (Jones, Woods, & Guillaume, 2016), that are closely related such as mentoring and counselling/therapy. All of these development forms provide some means of support, help or capability enhancement. Though, they have distinctly different outcomes and goals from executive coaching (Hill, 2010). One way to look at the differences is to compare the activities involved (CIPD, 2008, p. 12).

It can first be distinguished from mentoring. Even though coaching and mentoring have many similarities because both provide the option for individuals to reflect in a one-to-one relationship, there are some essential differences (CIPD, 2008, p. 12). Unlike a mentor, the relationship in executive coaching should be one of equals (Jacobs, 2020). Usually, the mentor is more qualified and experienced than the 'mentee'. The mentor is oftentimes a senior person in the company who passes on experience, knowledge and opens doors to opportunities that would be out-of-reach otherwise. It is an ongoing relationship which can last over a long time period being more informal and with meetings that can take place whenever the 'mentee' needs support, guidance or advice. The focus lies on personal and career development. A coach on the other hand, does not need to have direct experience of the formal occupational role of their client. The coaching relationship has in general a set duration with more structured meetings that are scheduled regularly. Here, the focus is in general on specific development issues/areas at work (CIPD, 2008, p. 13).

There are apparent similarities between coaching and counselling due to the fact that coaching's theoretical underpinnings, techniques and models, which are applied in organizational contexts, are derived from psychology and associated therapies. However, coaching and counselling are not the same thing. Counselling has greater depth and a broader focus. It is used to address performance and psycho-social issues with the goal to assist people understand the root causes of longstanding issues/problems that affect the performance at work. The agenda is agreed by the counsellor and the individuals with having only rarely other stakeholder involved. Coaching in contrary has a more narrow focus and does not attempt to resolve underlying psychological problems (CIPD, 2008, p. 14). It is believed that who receives the coaching is aware of its current state and mentally healthy (Zuñiga-Collazos et al., 2019). Personal issues may be addressed but the focus is on performance at work (CIPD, 2008, p. 11).

The agenda is generally set by the individual and in consultation/agreement with the organization (CIPD, 2008, p. 14).

Over time, executive coaching may touches on many aspects of the executive's leadership style, career, performance or personal life issues. Yet, what makes executive coaching distinguishable from these other types is, that a partnership among coach executive and organization is always involved. In addition, the individual goals, when engaging into executive coaching, always need to support and link back to strategic organizational objectives (The Executive Coaching Forum, 2015, p. 12).

1.1.3 Executive Coaching Definition and Scope

While life coaching and career counseling have practice techniques and concepts that an executive coach potentially uses, they only focus on the individual and his needs and goals. Whereas executive coaching focuses on both, the needs and goals of the sponsoring organization and the executive (The Executive Coaching Forum, 2015, p. 8).

Executive coaching is one type of business coaching that focusses, amongst other executives, on managers and classified leaders (Mattone, 2017). Furthermore, it involves a coach and the organizational context of the coachee, which is represented by the interests of his supervisor and organization, considering the fact that the organization pays for the coaching service in most cases. All together, they are the key stakeholders of the coaching process (The Executive Coaching Forum, 2015, p. 11).

Until a few years ago, it was seen as a sign of weakness in the business world to get assistance from a coach – an indicator that an executive had challenges that he needed to overcome. Nowadays, it indicates that someone is a serious corporate player who is highly valued by their employer (Jacobs, 2020). It is helping them to learn, perform, stay healthy and balanced, and guide their teams effectively to reach desired goals and exceed corporate and individual expectations (Mattone, 2017). Day-to-day work experiences are used as a learning opportunity with the facilitation of a coach. In order to learn from experience, self-reflection is encouraged. It has a practical focus with the aim of addressing real challenges in the workplace (Bolden, 2005).

The developing field of executive coaching and its definition is still subject of debate and discussion among researchers, practitioners and consumers (The Executive Coaching Forum, 2015, p. 11). Assessing the psychological and management literature on executive coaching, the most frequently quoted definition describes executive coaching as “a helping

relationship formed between a client who has managerial authority and responsibility in an organization and a consultant who uses a wide variety of behavioral techniques and methods to assist the client to achieve a mutually identified set of goals to improve his or her professional performance and personal satisfaction and consequently to improve the effectiveness of the client's organization within a formally defined coaching agreement" (Kilburg, 2010, p. 66-77). This thesis focusses on a more recent definition proposed by the executive coaching forum for whom executive coaching is a "one-on-one individualized process to benefit the leader and their organization. Working with goals defined by both the leader and the organization, a qualified and trusted coach uses various coaching methods and feedback data to develop the leader's capacity for current and future leadership. This coaching is guided by a coaching partnership to achieve maximum impact and the highest level of learning." (The Executive Coaching Forum, 2015, p. 8). In order to understand this definition, it is useful to break the terms down and look at each one separately (Horner, 2002):

- One-on-one: The main coaching activities occur between the coach and the individual leader(s).
- Individualized: The specific activities and goals are adapted to the unique aspects of the organizational system and the individual(s).
- Leader: A broad term to describe any individual(s) with the potential to make a significant contribution to the purpose and mission of the organization.
- Develop capacity: To develop new ways of learning, thinking, acting, feeling, leading as well as relating to others which builds organizational and individual effectiveness.
- Feedback data: For the leader to clarify, understand and commit to suitable coaching goals, a variety of data collection methods are applied to determine key factors and skills needed in the organizational context. The right use of standardized instruments and interviews affirms validity and accuracy of data gathered from people who represent a range of perspectives inside the organization.
- Qualified coach: Since no official licensing of executive coaches exists, it is important that the executive and the organization are protected by being aware of what competencies are necessary at basic and advanced levels for successful coaching.
- Coaching partnership: All partners are included in a win-win systems approach, where they communicate openly, plan the process together and work cooperatively toward achieving organizational objectives (The Executive Coaching Forum, 2015, p. 8-9).

1.1.4 The Purpose of Executive Coaching

The top reason companies invest into executive coaching is to develop their executives' leadership capabilities. In a study by Underhill et al., (2008, p. 9) coaches, leaders and organizations agreed that leadership development is the primary purpose of most coaching engagements. This is also confirmed by Rosha and Lace (2016) who conducted expert interviews and identified that development was the word most frequently used when defining the sense of coaching. Furthermore, the 2008 Learning and Development survey report by the CIPD, showed that coaching was primarily being used as a general personal developmental tool within wider management and leadership development programs (CIPD, 2008, p. 3).

Executive coaching is also referred to as activity that empowers leaders to achieve results that are beneficial for personal development and a client's organization (Rosha & Lace, 2016). Executive coaching does not offer ready-made instant solutions (de Haan, Culpin, & Curd, 2011), but rather it entails helping executives individually to learn, grow and change and to make the most of that process (Witherspoon & White, 2003). In addition, it enables managers to invest time into strategizing and thinking about changing habits, behaviors, processes and procedures (Wenson, 2010). The coach serves as outsourced supplier of candor, providing leaders individually with objective feedback that's needed (Sherman & Freas, 2004) to prepare for advancement (Witherspoon & White, 2003).

Given that coaching is situational, it depends on the executive and the situation what the coaching process involves specifically (Witherspoon & White, 2003). When an executive is being coached for development, he or she typically needs to get ready for a career move, which is often part of a succession planning discussion. The challenge may be for some to strengthen their leadership skills for higher levels in the company (Witherspoon & White, 2003). Although coaching may also have an impact on an executive's private life, it focuses on specific goals, skills and improvement at work that hopefully lead to achieving organizational objectives (CIPD, 2008, p. 12). It includes building resilience in companies and individuals and helping them to take up the challenges they face (CIPD, 2008, p. 51).

Executive coaching has become very common in leadership development. It is perceived as a viable lever in retaining top talent, developing high potentials, building a leadership pipeline and making executives ready for more demanding roles (The Executive Coaching Forum, 2015, p. 5). The aim is to achieve improved performance in the long term with an emphasis on rather facilitating progress than instructing with coaching adapting to the clients need (Horner, 2002).

By engaging with executives in customized ways that honor and acknowledge their individuality, executive coaching helps people to live more consciously, know themselves better and contribute more richly. (Sherman & Freas, 2004). The essentially human nature included in coaching is what makes it work but also hard to quantify (Sherman & Freas, 2004). Executives are faced with new assignments and rapid change. In order to stay effective, executives must learn the skills of self-transformation and learning (Hilton, 2003). Leadership plays an important role when looking at the scope of executive coaching. This includes enforcing and setting accountabilities, identifying, coaching and managing the right people as well as providing suitable operating processes as performance support (Hilton, 2003). Coaching leaders also includes a level of ethical or moral development that deals with the areas of integrity, courage and character. It addresses moral dilemmas, values and value conflicts. It deals with the development of the executive representing the interests of the key stakeholders in the company. The goal is to achieve sustainable growth and sustainable leadership that is align with the company's strategy instead of affecting performance only in the short run (Hilton, 2003).

The purpose is that organizational leaders, regardless if they hold actual leadership positions or not, develop leadership skills. The purpose remains the same whether the company is small or large, nonprofit or profit, governmental, private or publicly held (Underhill et al., 2008, p. 9). There are many reasons to hire an executive coach. It could include anything from building and growing and sustaining leadership capacity - to an executive who needs remediation for a leadership issue - to a leader who is transitioning into a new role (Underhill et al., 2008, p. 9). Many companies have realized how valuable coaching for leadership development is as a resource of retaining executives. To offer coaching is seen as demonstration of the company's commitment to developing internal talent and key leaders. It is a win-win situation for the company and the leaders. The company wins by gaining a leader who is stronger, faster developing and contributing to current and future business. The leader wins by obtaining increased opportunity for development and individual attention. He notices that the company is investing into his success and appreciates it. Many leaders credit specifically coaching as the reason for staying at their firms (Underhill et al., 2008, p. 11-12)

1.1.5 The Coaching Process

Coaching is an organizational intervention and, for this reason, it should be conducted in coherence with the organization's goals and objectives (The Executive Coaching Forum, 2015, p. 7). Therefore, executive coaching is most successful when it is a three-way partnership among the executive's organization, the executive and the coach. All together they are the key stakeholders in the coaching process even though the primary work is between the coach and the executive who are the center of the process (The Executive Coaching Forum, 2015, p. 7-8). While the coachee is a company executive, that has the responsibility to achieve organizational goals (Jones et al., 2016), the coach can be either an employee of the organization or an external to the organization (The Executive Coaching Forum, 2015, p. 9). More commonly though, an external coach with no direct relationship to the organization is hired for the coaching experience (Jones et al., 2016) whose services are requested for an agreed time period or a number of coaching sessions (CIPD, 2008, p. 16). Whereas some executives find their own coaches, large organizations hire coaches to develop top leaders (Jacobs, 2020). The coach is usually selected by the Human Resources department with the approval of top management. Often, executives select a coach based on first impressions or referrals (New Age Leadership, n.d.). Other criteria for choosing a coach are robust qualifications, the coach's methodology, the coach's philosophy, the metrics the coach uses, frequency of sessions and personal fit (Jody Michael Associates, n.d.). Executive coaching is mostly paid for by the executive's organization (The Executive Coaching Forum, 2015, p. 11).

During the coaching sessions, managers have the opportunity to observe their own behavior, receive feedback from the coach and learn to improve their performance in a private atmosphere, including confidentiality and non-judgement (Jones et al., 2016). According to The Executive Coaching Forum (2015), "the ideal coaching process includes: pre-coaching needs analysis and planning, contracting, data gathering, goal setting and development of a coaching plan, implementation of the coaching plan, measuring and reporting results and transitioning to long-term development." There exist a number of different approaches and emphases to executive coaching (Armstrong, Melser, & Tooth, 2007). Any coaching program can incorporate a range of activities and techniques (Blackman et al., 2016). The coach uses most likely the following practices: problem solving and planning, feedback, role play and on-the-job practice, dialogue, applying and teaching a variety of management and leadership tools, clarification of assumptions, roles and priorities, referral to other developmental resources (The Executive Coaching Forum, 2015, p. 10), listening, paraphrasing, summarizing, interpreting,

providing feedback and discovering connections with the current coaching interaction and other themes (de Haan et al., 2011). In executive coaching, there is not a one-size-fits-all approach (Greiner, 2018, p. 10). Since no two people are alike, coaching is individualized development process (Armtstrong et al., 2007). Every person has a unique knowledge base, learning style and learning pace, which means that executives make progress at their own pace (Witherspoon & White, 2003). Coaches set an individualized and relevant leaning pace and use intensively reflection on action taken (Horner, 2002). The specific activities and goals are customized to the unique aspects of the coachee and his or her organizational system. A variety of data collection methods is used to clarify, understand and commit to appropriate coaching goals by identifying key factors and skills that are required in the organizational context (The Executive Coaching Forum, 2015, p. 9-16). Designing suitable coaching objectives are crucial. Reporting on the coaching results is easier and more transparent when there are specifically and clearly identified objectives (Hilton, 2003).

Regular meetings, either in person or by skype build the coaching relationship (Jacobs, 2020). The focus lies on increasing the leader's strengths and evolving the key competencies that are needed to achieve desired goals (The Executive Coaching Forum, 2015, p. 10). It can be treated as either short-term intervention or as a longer-term developmental process (Bolden, 2005). This varies depending on different factors like: the types of goals, the frequency of meetings, the ways individuals prefer to work and the financial resources available (International Coaching Federation, n.d.b). According to Jones et al. (2016), even short-term coaching interventions have beneficial impact which is in accordance with Grant (2014) who states that only four coaching sessions can make a difference. According to Baron and Morin (2009), that it is ideal when the coachee had the opportunity to apply and practice the newly acquired knowledge of the coaching sessions in between sessions.

The International Coaching Federation (n.d.c) has developed eleven core competencies, that support better understanding about today's coaching profession and its skills and approaches used within. Those competencies are clustered into four groups:

A. Setting the foundation

1. Meeting Ethical Guidelines and Professional Standards - To understand coaching standards and ethics and to be able to apply and them properly in all coaching situations.
2. Establishing the Coaching Agreement - To understand what is needed in the particular coaching interaction and to reach an agreement with the potential and new client about the coaching relationship and process.

B. Co-Creating the Relationship

3. Establishing Trust and Intimacy with the Client - To create a supportive and safe environment that produces ongoing mutual trust and respect.

4. Coaching Presence - To be completely conscious and build a spontaneous relationship with the client, using a style that is confident, flexible and open.

C. Communicating Effectively

5. Active Listening - To focus fully on what the client is saying or not saying, to support the clients self-expression and to understand the meaning of what is said within the context of the client's desires.

6. Powerful Questioning - To ask questions that provide the information needed for maximum benefit to the client and the coaching relationship.

7. Direct Communication - To effectively communicate during coaching sessions and to apply language that has the biggest positive impact on the client.

D. Facilitating Learning and Results

8. Creating Awareness - To accurately evaluate and integrate various sources of information and to make interpretations that assist the client to increase awareness and thus achieve agreed-upon goals.

9. Designing Actions - To create together with the client opportunities for constant learning, during coaching as well as in work/life situations, and for taking actions that will most efficiently lead to achieving agreed-upon coaching goals.

10. Planning and Goal Setting - To develop and maintain a coaching plan with the client that is effective.

11. Managing Progress and Accountability - To hold attention on what is crucial for the client, and to give responsibility to the client in terms of action taking (International Coaching Federation, n.d.c).

1.1.6 Factors Influencing Successful Coaching

Although the coaching process across coaches is fairly standard, the approaches used by coaches vary widely and depend on their own intellectual traditions and academic backgrounds (Feldman & Lankau, 2005). Good coaches have an extensive knowledge of techniques, tools, models and frameworks from a great variety of theoretical backgrounds including occupational psychology, psychometrics, organizational theory, learning and counselling. Coaches should use the approaches that fit the purpose of the different clients and in different situations (CIPD,

2008, p. 35). According to Haan et al. (2011), coaching clients do not prefer any one behavior category above others since participants respond in different ways to coaching and the approaches used. Instead, a correlation could be found between the client's learning style and helpful coaching behavior. For this reason, it is not the preference for a particular technique, model or behavior that is making a difference, but alternatively the ability to use many techniques well and employ them at the right time (de Haan et al., 2011). It is suggested that general factors that are common to good coaching practices, such as the client expectations, the personality of the coach, the quality of the relationship between coach and client and the client's support system, predict helpfulness and make coaching successful. This perspective is supported by the qualities (understanding, listening and encouragement) that clients appreciated most in their coaches, as well as the positive attributes (kindness, flexibility, openness, availability) that were assigned to coaches when coaching had been perceived as more helpful than average (de Haan et al., 2011). The coach can play an instrumental role in motivating and encouraging the executive to learn and change, though the executive must be motivated internally and embrace the changes for them to be effective (Witherspoon & White, 2003). In order for coaches to receive attention and to get taken seriously from the busy executives, they need to create a visible connection to business imperatives and provide top-level support with the aim to help. Good coaches usually ground their work in the environment of the coachee, including the dynamics, goals and values of the client's organization as well as relationships at all levels (Sherman & Freas, 2004).

Another essential part to get the most out of coaching is that the climate and culture within the organization creates good conditions and supports learning and development (CIPD, 2008, p. 22). Blackman et al., (2016), has created a summary of details and characteristics of coaching, that help to achieve an effective practice. These factors relate to the coach, coachee, relationship, organizational context and coaching process and are shown in Table 1.1.

Table 1.1: Factors contributing to a successful coaching practice

Coach	Coachee	Relationship	Organizational Context	Coaching Process
Experience with coaching	Self-efficacy	Matching between coach and coachee	Support	Encourage appropriate action
Experience with relevant sector	Motivated	One-on-one interaction	Goal alignment	Uses priorities and timelines
Likeable	Locus of concept	Trust		Relates personal to organizational goals
Self-confident	Confident	Authority		Identifies blind spots
Empathetic	Committed	Challenge		Constructively views difficult issues
Warm	Involved	Commitment by both		
Organized	Effort			
Creative	Ability / Competency			
Calm				
Communicates clearly				
Honest				
Maintains Confidentiality				

Own illustration based on Blackman et al., (2016)

1.1.7 Benefits

Reading across the literature, a lot of benefits can be found when assessing executive coaching. Executive coaching is most effective when it is focused on sustainable and in general long-term development rather than a short-term performance fixation (Hilton, 2003).

Executive coaching benefits both, the leader and the organization (Grant, Curtayne, & Burton, 2009). Many organizations have viewed executive coaching as an approach to attract and retain talent (Underhill, et al., 2008, p. 9). It is a win-win situation for the leader and the company. The leader wins by obtaining increased developmental opportunity and individual attention. They appreciate the organization's investment in their success. The company, in terms, wins by gaining a leader who is stronger, faster-developing and contributing to current and future business (Underhill et al., 2008, p. 11-12).

According to the ICF Global Coaching Client Study, 99 percent of the people who were surveyed, stated that they were somewhat or very satisfied with their experience of coaching. Most coachees reported, that they noticed coaching benefits like better business management, improved work performance, increased team effectiveness, more efficient time management, and more opportunities and growth. Furthermore, they said that they perceived more effective communication skills, enhanced relationships, greater self-confidence, an improvement in wellness and better work-life balance. The majority of 86 percent of organizations stated that they at least made their investment back. Almost one-fifth experienced a ROI of 50 times their investment, when another 28 percent noticed a ROI of 10 to 49 times their investment (International Coaching Federation, n.d.b).

Especially for leadership development, coaching is a very effective tool for development, producing intangible and financial benefits for the business. Coaching sessions are rich learning environments with the benefit of enabling the coachee to apply the learning to different business situations. The motivation of others, team performance and decision making can be enhanced (Anderson & MetrixGlobal, 2001). Coaching gets executives to slow down, increase awareness, and acknowledge the impact of their words and actions. It enables them to perceive choices instead of simply reacting to events. Coaching can empower the leader to assume responsibility for the impact they have on the world. It helps them to reduce destructive behaviors, adapt to new responsibilities, enhance teamwork, improve retention including a perceived perk, facilitate succession, align individuals to shared goals, and promote organizational change. Another benefit of coaching at the top is that once leaders have altered

their behavior, influencing subordinates to follow and do the same becomes easier (Sherman & Freas, 2004).

Even though, coaching focusses primarily on the attainments of goals that are aligned with the leadership objectives of the organization and not on the enhancement of the individuals well-being, the study showed that the levels of well-being at the workplace increased. In addition, they improved their levels of resilience and self-confidence. This is another proof, that coaching is benefiting both, the organization and the employee (Grant et al., 2009).

A meta-analysis, which was conducted by De Meuse, Dai, & Lee, (2009), showed that executives gained moderately to large in skill and/or performance. It impacts a wide range of organizational and individual outcomes such as productivity, team performance, individual skills and behaviors, employee job satisfaction and a few business deliverable measures (De Meuse et al., 2009). Furthermore, experts point out various advantages for organizational and individual development. Among them new opportunities for developing self-awareness and stimulating the ability for an individual to organize ones thinking process more structural and clearly which is especially helpful for managers in periods of organizational change. Individuals become more tolerant and open to different views which helps them to build better relationships based on respect and trust within the organization (Rosha & Lace, 2016). It promotes skill enhancement and acquisition which results effectively in skill-based outcomes. Moreover, executive coaching develops confidence and self-efficacy, increases motivation and satisfaction and reduces stress (Jones et al., 2016).

1.2 Executive Coaching as Leadership Development Tool

1.2.1 Leadership Definition and Scope

Leadership is about dealing with change. Today's business world has become more volatile and competitive than ever based on many factors like greater international competition, faster technological change, the deregulation of markets, and the changing demographics of the work force (Kotter, 2009). Leaders cope with change by determining a direction, developing a vision and setting an overall strategy. They delegate responsibility and empower people to carry out the tasks (Bertocci, 2009, p. 12). They think long term and build success through employees. A good leader gains authority by their mindset and behavior (Templeton, 2010). In short, leaders lead people (Kruse, 2013).

A wide variety of leadership definitions exists within the related literature which reflects the diversity of approaches in this field. Although there has been a dramatical change of the context of leadership over time, the content of leadership has not altered much. The fundamental actions and behaviors of leaders have stayed essentially the same (Kouzes & Posner, 2012, p. 15-16).

Kruse (2013) defines leadership as social influence process, which maximizes other people's effort to the purpose of achieving a goal.

According to Yukl (2011), leadership is the process of influencing others to agree and understand what needs to be done as well as how to do it. Furthermore, it is the process of facilitating collective and individual efforts to achieve shared objectives.

Asking a group of businesspeople what effective leaders do will lead to hearing a sweep of answers. Leaders motivate, they set strategy, they build a culture, and they create a mission. Asking the question what leaders should do, the response is most like that their job is to get results. The mystery of how leaders provoke the best performance from their followers is old (Goleman, 2011, p. 40).

Leadership knows no religious or racial bounds, no cultural or ethnic borders. Leaders live in every city and country, in every function and organization. Exemplary leadership can be found everywhere (Kouzes and Posner, 2012, p. 14).

Leadership is a set of abilities and skills that can be identified and be available to anyone. Leaders do not get extraordinary things done alone. They mobilize their followers to strive for shared aspiration. In other words, leadership can be seen as relationship between the people who desire to lead and people who decide to follow. The quality of the relationship is crucial and matters the most when it comes to achieving extraordinary things. (Kouzes & Posner, 2012, p. 30).

1.2.2 Leadership Development

Leadership does not happen automatically when a certain pay grade or position is reached. Having a certain title or a high position in a company's hierarchy does not make you a leader (Kruse, 2013). In order to improve the managers performance in the role of a leader, leadership development is required. People cannot change their leadership style or improve their emotional intelligence without the support from others. It is important to get feedback on how actions affect followers and to access progress with a learning agenda (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2009).

According to Templeton (2010), “You don’t have to be born with leadership skills. They can be learned.” However, there has been a great debate whether or not it is possible to develop and train leaders. It has been argued that good leaders have an innate combination of personal characteristics and ability which means that leaders are ‘born not made’. This assertion has been questioned to the extent, that leadership competencies and behaviors can be learned and acquired over time. Today’s view lies somewhere in the middle. The argumentation is, that many leadership qualities such as strategic thinking, communication skills and self-awareness can be learned but core personal characteristics like dominance and sociability cannot be developed (Bolden, 2005, p. 3). This is also confirmed by an article that shows the work of two Academic Leadership Fellows Programs groups who discussed whether outstanding leaders are made or born. The group supporting that leaders are born argued that specific innate traits are necessary in order to become an outstanding leader when experiences and circumstances in life present themselves. The group supporting that leaders are made argues that hard work, training and experiences result in becoming an outstanding leader. The answer is most likely not only one viewpoint or the other, but instead a combination of both. Leaders most probably arise from a combination of development through reacting to environmental factors as well as genetic predisposition. Whether a financial opportunity or an evidence based endeavor, the leadership industry is committed to making leaders and exceeds \$14 billion annually (Boerma et al., 2017).

Executive coaching has become a major leadership development strategy of our time (Albizu et al., 2019). Through executive coaching, leadership behavior and social competence skills can be improved by acquiring the required tools to effectively guide, develop and lead their followers (Anthony, 2017). It is undoubtedly that becoming a better leader is more complicated than trusting in one’s abilities. Nonetheless, self-efficacy is proven to be a key component when it comes to leadership. As research indicates, executive coaching is suggested for improving leader self-efficacy during leadership development (Dwyer, 2019).

1.2.3 Coaching Effectiveness for Developing Leaders

Coaching is proven to be very effective in helping executives to develop sustainable leadership competencies. There is increased demand for executive coaching from organizations which have realized that leadership development is crucial for company success (Horner, 2002).

The study of Finn (2007) reveals that executive coaching is a powerful approach for developing leaders. He conducted three studies with leaders who volunteered in executive coaching sessions to provide empirical evidence of the behavioral and psychological effects of executive coaching. According to these studies, executive coaching enhances the psychological state of positive affect, self-efficacy, developmental support, developmental planning and openness to new behaviors. Leader's behavior, especially in communication as well as the transformational leadership scope of individualized consideration, inspirational motivation and intellectual motivation as perceived by the team member's in the study. Finn (2007) suggests that the psychological effects might function as mediators of change in terms of leader behavior.

Another interesting study of coaching effectiveness from the coaches perspective was conducted by Albizu et al., (2019). A survey among 176 executives in Spain, who have undergone an executive coaching process with a certified coach by a recognized association in Spain was conducted. The coachees who participated in the survey were working as area or project leaders, middle managers, chief executives, presidents, managing director, functional managers or had responsibilities in the human resource area. The research variables included the coach, coachee, process and relationship. The study analyzed their impact on coachee satisfaction which impacts learning and consequently behavior (Albizu et al., 2019). This study did not focus on leadership development but on development of executives in general. However, the results are still interesting for this thesis as they show, that executive coaching is an effective tool for learning and behavioral change among executives and can be taken in consideration for development purposes. The study also indicates that suitable action by the coach has an impact on the coachee's learning. This shows how important it is to select experienced coaches (Albizu et al., 2019).

Theeboom, Beersma, and van Vianen (2014), conducted a meta-analysis of the effects of coaching on five individual-level outcome criteria namely: performance and skills, coping, well-being, goal-directed-self-regulation and work attitudes. They reported significant positive overall effects.

The results of a study that was undertaken by Armtstrong et al., (2007), indicate that executive coaching has vital beneficial effects in the workplace. It was especially valued by

coachees for building self-efficacy including specific outcomes which lead to increased ability to assertively and confidently communicate with staff and colleagues. The study found that a high percentage of respondents (78%), experienced executive coaching to be beneficial for their professional development and work performance. Furthermore, 71% of respondents indicated that it had a fundamental influence on the way they approach colleagues and work (Armstrong et al., 2007). Participants also reported that the things provided by executive coaching were also things that were crucial to them in terms of their work. Especially for interpersonal and intrapersonal domains, a high score of extent and significance was detected. The results of the study propose that coaching has the greatest influence in the area of self-efficacy, which is the belief/perception people have regarding their capability to take action and achieve goals. A great sense of self-efficacy improves personal well-being as well as accomplishment in various areas including work. This suggests that the change that is produced through executive coaching is rather in the area of interpersonal and intrapersonal relationships than in the area of management tools and techniques. Nonetheless, pursuing interests and career goals as well as setting direction for oneself and others by guiding and prioritizing subordinates are also highly rated. In the conduct of relations at the workplace, enhancing self-efficacy is a powerful effect. In the course of leadership development, it is deemed that self-efficacy is a pre-condition for leadership. In summary, executive coaching is a highly effective intervention method to change workplace behaviors and attitudes through developing self-efficacy (Armstrong et al., 2007). Armstrong et al., (2007), put the specific learning outcomes of their study into 6 groups.

1. Intra-personal benefits: mindfulness and self-awareness leading to agency or action
2. Inter-personal benefits: assertive communication, engaging with others confidently and emotional and social literacy
3. Instrumental focus: focus on performance and work priorities and self-organization
4. Leadership: motivating others, team organization and managing teams
5. Career direction: professional direction and career goals that are more conscious
6. Adaption to work life: lower stress levels, job satisfaction and work/life balance

Horner (2002), claims that the majority of 76% of participants in her study felt that no other development tool was able to offer similar benefits as executive coaching. In her research, she explored attributes of executive coaching and the development of leadership competencies among executives. She tested the development of ten leadership competencies (emotional self-

awareness; self-confidence; accurate self-assessment; initiative; adaptability; influence; empathy; communication and teamwork; developing others and collaboration) by using qualitative and quantitative research methods. The overall findings showed a positive perception of executive coaching effectiveness in acquiring these ten leadership competencies. The competence to act flexibly as needed by different situations is an important leadership ability that can be developed through executive coaching. It can be further improved if the leader can correctly assess which leadership behavior is needed and switch between different styles. This research confirms that leaders gain accurate self-assessment and greater self-awareness which help to develop flexibility. Furthermore, perceived benefits of coaching included time-efficiency, increased motivation, the opportunity to reflect and confidence and personal well-being (Horner, 2002).

The effectiveness of executive coaching on leaders, does not only have benefits for the leader itself, but also for its followers. The study of Anthony (2017) found that leaders, who have undergone leadership coaching, are providing their followers more likely with individualized consideration. Not only do they improve their own competence skills and leadership performance, but they also enhance the ability of their follower's to acquire further knowledge and skills which as a result have a positive effect on the organization. The study was conducted with a survey among 75 leaders and 188 followers of US based telecommunications company and alumni. The results suggest that when leaders receive individual support are more driven to provide for their followers a productive and positive work environment. It draws upon transformational leadership theory and demonstrates how important it is for leaders to model the behaviors acquired through their coaching experience. Thus, coaching for leadership helps leaders to improve their social competence skills and leadership behavior by acquiring the tools needed to effectively guide, lead, and develop their followers (Anthony, 2017).

Chapter 2

Methodology

2.1 Research Context

The research context for this thesis included managers of corporate companies in Germany. The managers must have undergone an executive coaching process in the last five years that consisted of a minimum of five coaching sessions with a focus on leadership development. Basic criteria for selection were that the coaching sessions were conducted by a professional coach external to the company who was not involved in the company culture.

Other general criteria for the selection of managers incorporated that their current position included leading a team of at least three direct reports, holding medium or high level positions within the company, namely with direct report to the board (as 1st level management) or report to a leader who is at 1st level (with themselves in the 2nd level or hierarchy).

2.2 Research Design

The research was based on primary qualitative data. A semi-structured interview was chosen as the best method to get a more complete picture and more comprehensive information from leaders and their individual executive coaching and leadership development experiences. Executive coaching experiences can be very unique and different. For this reason, it is important to capture the variety of experiences and opinions as detailed as possible.

The interview was designed in German and English. The outline of the semi-structured interview can be found in Annex A. The interviewees were asked a total of 40 questions, which were a mix of open-ended and close-ended questions that allowed the interviewee to answer as detailed as possible. A structured guideline was established to address all relevant topics for this thesis that helped to guide the interview. It included introductory questions addressing the leader and his position in the company, followed by questions covering the organizational support, the coaching process, the relationship with the coach, the coach, the coachee himself and benefits. Hereinafter, the semi-structured interview continued with questions exploring the leadership development of the interviewee through executive coaching. Last but not least some closing questions to end the interview with an overall reflection of the manager were asked.

2.3 Data Collection

Eligible managers were approached via e-mail, LinkedIn and phone calls. I used my professional contacts and created hereby a ‘snowball effect’ that helped me to find 12 suitable interview partners.

The population of the interviews comprised managers in Germany that fulfilled all of the previous defined criteria. 10 of the interviews were conducted via phone calls and two interviewees agreed to fill in the interview themselves in a word document and send it back to me as it was more convenient for them. The interviews that were conducted via phone call, were recorded with permission of the interviewee for later analysis and transcription. The interview was conducted within 20 to 45 minutes with an average time of 25 minutes, depending on engagement of the interviewee and how detailed he or she answered the questions.

2.4 Data Analysis

Qualitative data analysis was used as semi-structured interviews were conducted. The interviews were transcribed and shortly summarized immediately after execution, which can be found in Annex B.

General observations of the interviews are shown in the next chapter, according to the order of the questions asked with only small meanderings. Thereafter, an analysis of the combination of the literature and the general observations of the interviews are shown. Here, the findings are not following the order of the interview anymore, since there have been many links and interconnections between the different topics. The analysis shows crosslinks between executive coaching, the factors contributing to its effectiveness, benefits and leadership development.

Chapter 3

Results

3.1 General Information

The interview was conducted with six female and six male managers. Even though, all interviewees were from Germany, almost all interviews were conducted in English. Only two interviews were conducted in German and later translated to English for the purpose of this thesis. Table 3.1 gives a general overview of the interviewees' information showing their position and the time they are working in this position and the company. For further analysis of the outcome and to maintain the promised anonymity of all managers, each interviewee was assigned a number.

The positions hold by the managers who were interviewed included General Manager, Project Manager, Financial Manager, Global Marketing Manager, Marketing Manager, Supply Chain Manager and Network & Business Development Manager. The time in their position and company ranged from two months in the position, and two years in the company to 11 years in the position and company.

Table 3.1: General information of interviewees

Interviewee	Time in position and company	Position
1	7 years	General Manager for Communication, Fundraising and Corporate Relations
2	3,5 years in the company 3 months in the position	Project Manager
3	11 years	Financial Manager
4	2 years	Project Manager
5	2 years	Global Marketing Manager
6	5 years	Marketing Manager
7	5 years in the company 1 year in the position	Supply Chain Manager
8	2,5 years	Network & Business Development Manager
9	4 years	Project Manager
10	3,5 years	Marketing Manager
11	3 years	Project Manager
12	4,5 years	General Manager

3.2 Organizational Support

With no exception, all interviewees stated that they felt supported by their organization. Furthermore 11 out of 12 interviewees said that their organization created good conditions for learning and development. The reason that one company did not create good conditions for learning and development was explained by Interviewee 8 with “changes are not a priority or only partly desirable”.

The organizations of all interviewees paid for the executive coaching sessions. This was also the number one reason given by the interviewees why they felt supported.

“The fact, that they paid for my executive coaching sessions showed me that they care about me and my development. It made me feel appreciated and hence supported” (Interviewee 12).

3.3 Coaching Process

Table 3.2 shows the number of coaching sessions and the time frame when the coaching sessions took place. The average number of coaching sessions was 8,3 with a minimum of five coaching sessions (which was a basic criterion for being an eligible interviewee) to 13 coaching sessions, that were divided into 2x3 days and 1x4 days. The time frame in which these coaching sessions took place varied. The coaching sessions were distributed over several weeks and months and even over a year (within 12 - 15 months). In most cases, 2-4 weeks was the most common time span in between coaching sessions. Only one interviewee had coaching segments that took place on consecutive days.

The coach was chosen by the majority of eight interviewees by themselves. Four Interviewees stated that the company chose the coach. Five of the interviewees who chose the coach themselves, said that they chose a coach based on recommendations by friends, colleagues or the company. Other criteria for choosing a coach were: good accessibility, flexibility, charisma of the coach, experience of the coach, “vibe” and relationship between coach and coachee as well as references.

The coaching goals were set in seven cases by the coachee and in four cases both, the coachee and the company, set the coaching goals together. Only in one case, the company set the coaching goals with the coach alone. A small correlation was found between the interviewees who chose the coach themselves and the interviewees who set the coaching goals themselves. When the company chose the coach, the company was also more likely to be involved in the goal setting process.

Except for two cases, personal and organizational goals were related. In both cases, where the goals were not related, the company chose the coach and in one of those cases the company was the one setting the goals with the coach alone.

Table 3.2: Number of coaching sessions and time frame

Interviewee	Number of coaching sessions	Time frame
1	7	Within 12-15 months
2	10	Every 4-6 weeks
3	10	First 6 sessions every 2 weeks, the last 4 sessions once a month
4	6	Every 2 weeks
5	5	Every 2 weeks
6	10	Every 1-2 weeks
7	6	Every 2 months
8	3 coaching segments with: 2x3 days and 1x4 days	Within 12 months
9	10	Every 2 weeks
10	6	Once or twice a month
11	10	weekly
12	7	Every 2-4 weeks

When the interviewees were asked whether their coaching sessions focused primarily on personal development or work related tasks, the outcome was very equal as shown in Figure 3.1. However, most interviewees stated, that even though the focus was on one thing, it was interrelated with the other one and no clear separation was possible. Hence, personal development reflects on work related tasks and vice versa. Except for one interviewee who had mostly work related tasks and stated that it would have been nicer to have more personal development included, there could not be a preference identified. In general, everyone preferred it the way how they experienced it.

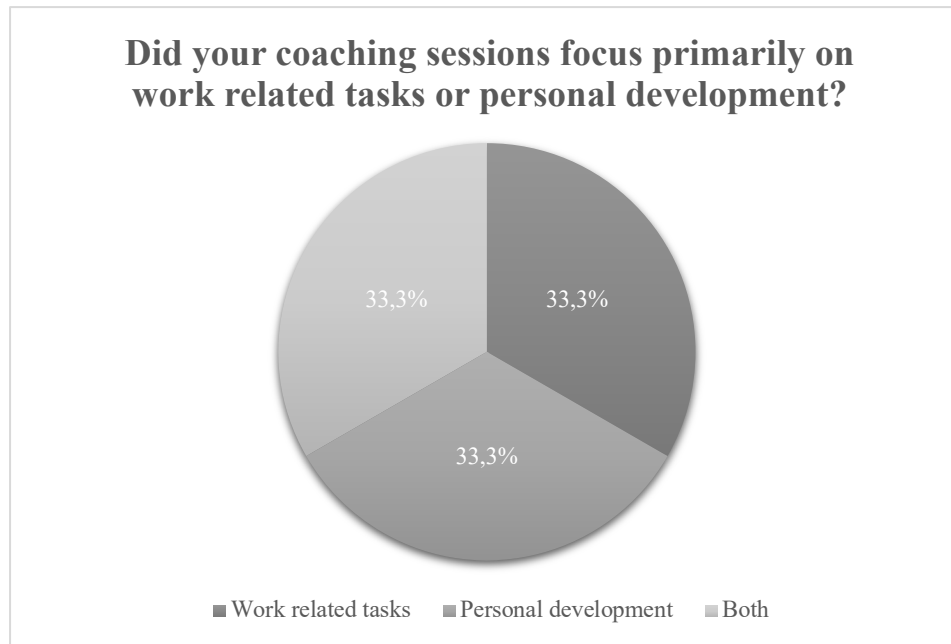


Figure 3.1: Focus of coaching sessions

Figure 3.2 shows all agreed upon coaching goals that were mentioned by the interviewees. The goal that was mentioned the most was enhanced communication followed by better decision making and leading with a vision/target agreement. Better team management, transitioning into a new role/environment, greater self-confidence and to get more structure were also popular goals.

Except for one interviewee who stated to have reached the goals by 95%, namely clear goal formulation for herself and the team as well as communicating negative points in a clear and appreciative way (which is included under the point communication in Figure 3.2), all other interviewees reached their goals with executive coaching. A perceived intrinsic obstacle for 95% goal attainment was to balance being a “sympathetic boss” and delivering negative messages which was outside of the interviewees comfort zone. Extrinsic obstacles were routines and familiar steps that made it complicated to transition to new methods. Another two interviewees stated, that even though they reached the goals personally, they suggested that their team needed coaching as well since a lack of understanding and willingness to implement new methods and routines at some levels occurred.

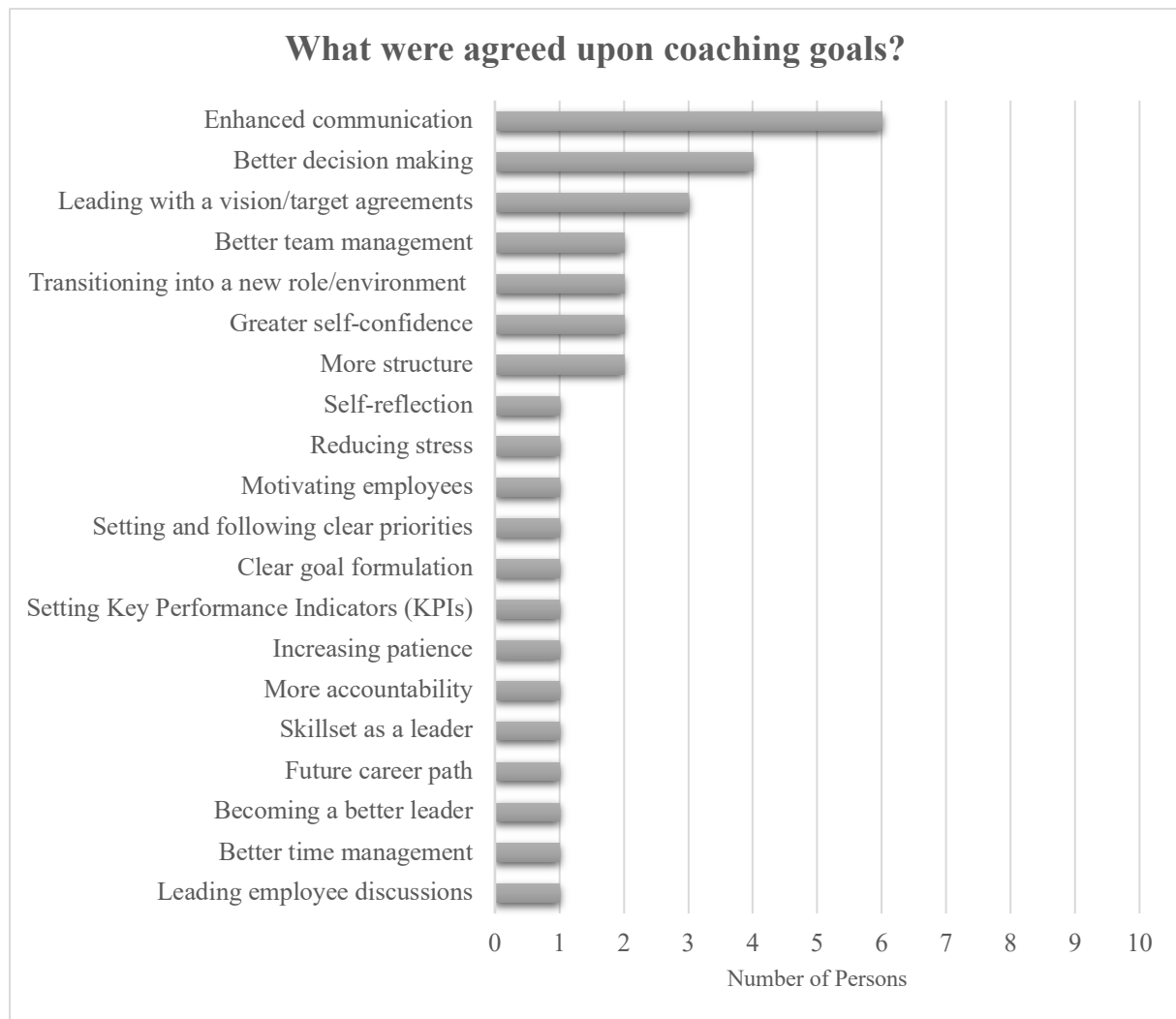


Figure 3.2: Coaching goals

The interviewees were asked whether they could apply what they have learned in coaching sessions immediately in their daily work and whether they have key examples. A majority of interviewees responded “Yes” giving a variety of examples of situations regarding improved communication personal interaction with employees, feedback conversations, time efficiency and clearer personal vision. Two interviewees stated, “Yes and no”. They both mentioned that some things they have learned in coaching were very situational that could only be applied in critical situations that do not happen necessarily on a daily basis. It also took one interviewee 2-3 months until he really felt that he had incorporated the knowledge.

Before detailed questions about the coach, coachee and the coaching relationship were asked, the interviewees were appealed to mention the key contributors that helped them to maximize coaching results. The findings can be grouped as the following:

Table 3.3: Key contributors to maximize coaching results

Coach	Coachee	Coaching Relationship	Coaching Process
Competency	Willingness to open up	Personal	Mixture of methods applied
Empathy	Willingness to work on themselves	One-to-one	Feedback
Analytical coaching skills	Willingness to be open	Trustworthy	Live support and analysis
	Willingness to develop	Clear Communication	Accountability
	Honesty		Clearly defined follow up practices

After engaging into executive coaching, all interviewees continued learning and developing. The interviewees were inspired to read leadership books, engage into other coaching projects or even became a coach themselves because they were fascinated by the coaching role. The interviewees stated that they believe in lifelong learning and that there are always things to develop and to learn so they use the knowledge they gained in coaching sessions wisely.

3.4 Coaching Relationship

All interviewees felt like they were in a trusted relationship with their coach where they could communicate openly. One interviewee stated that he is still in contact with his coach today, even though he is not doing coaching sessions anymore.

The interviewees were asked to describe their relationship with their coach. As seen in Figure 3.3, the relationship was most frequently described as trustworthy followed by professional, open and honest. Similar results are also shown in the outcomes of the question what the interviewee valued the most in the relationship with their coach. The answer that was given here most often was that there was no judgement of the coach in the relationship. Openness, trust, competency of the coach, authenticity and honesty were in second place (Figure 3.4).

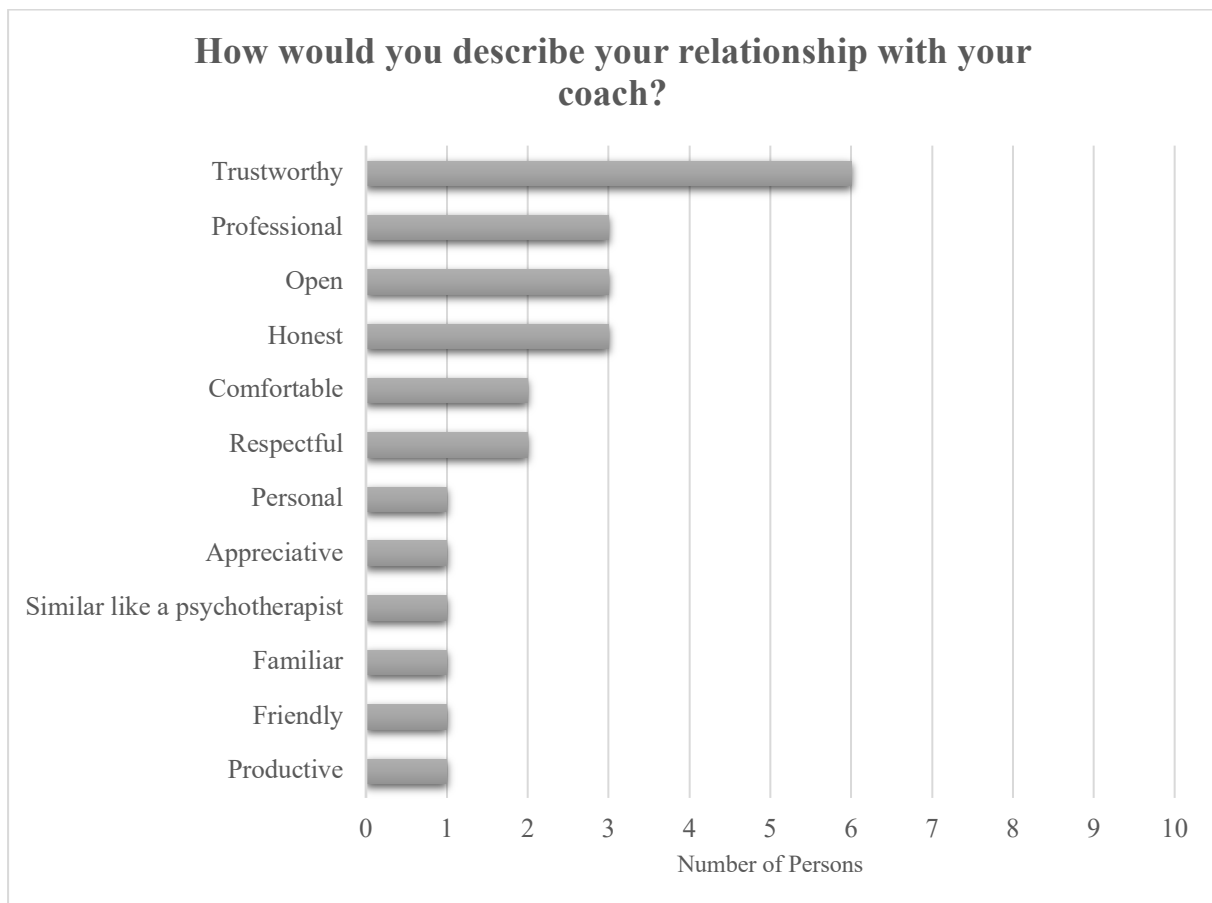


Figure 3.3: Coaching relationship

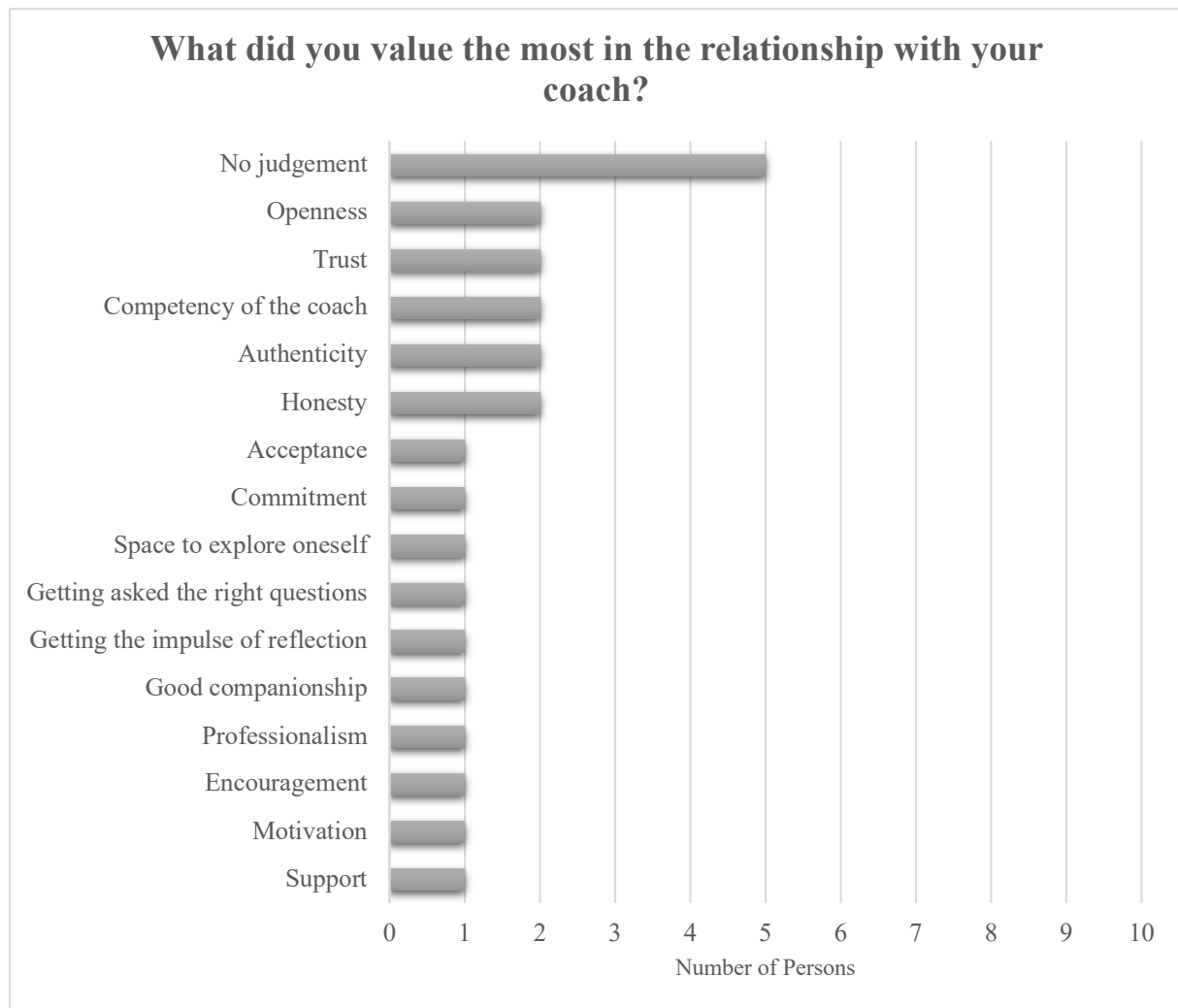


Figure 3.4: Values in a coaching relationship

3.5 Coach

The two most important contributions of the coach for making the coaching experience successful were to be a good listener and to create a trustful environment. Knowledge and experience of the coach as well as a clear communication were also crucial contributions of the coach for making the coaching experience successful followed by the personality, openness and support as can be seen in Figure 3.5.

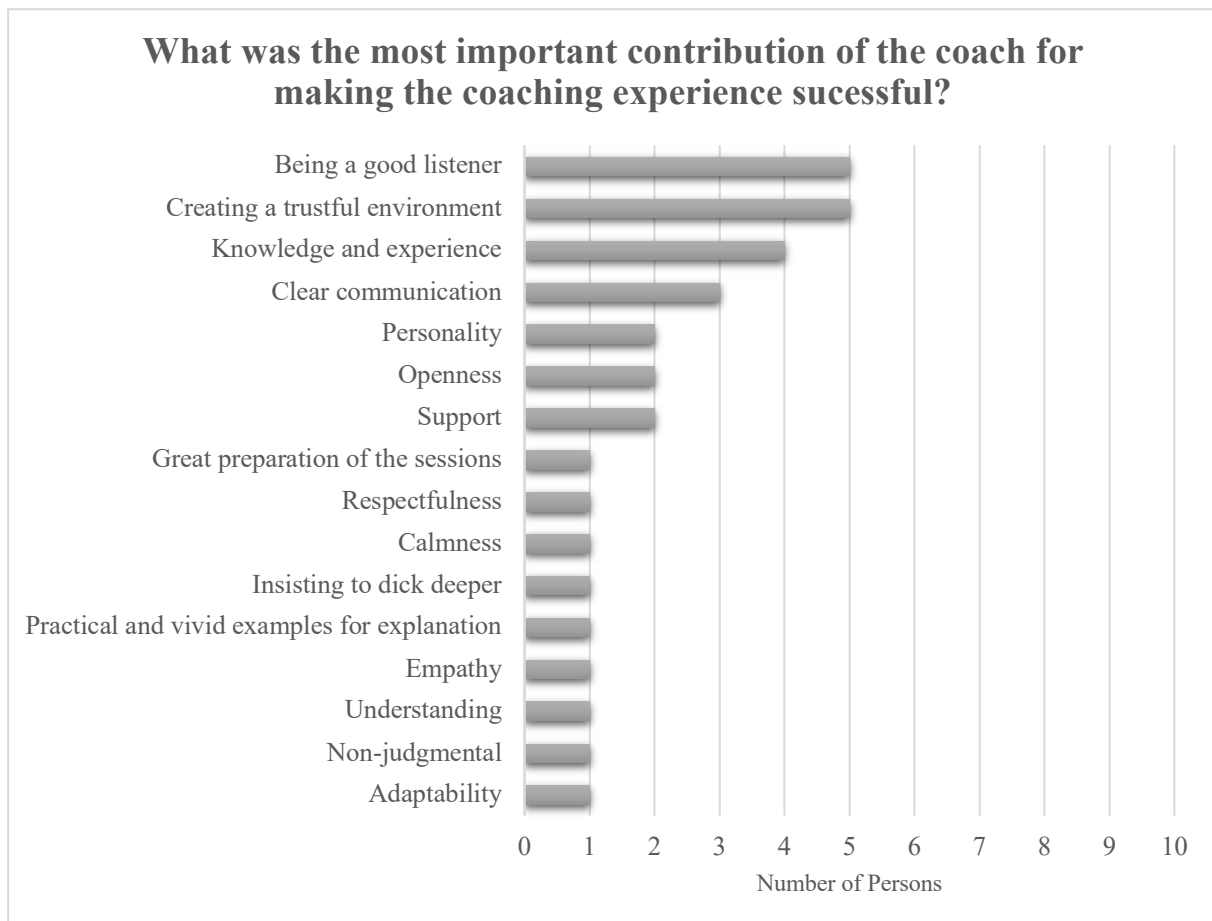


Figure 3.5: Contribution of the coach

Another question asked, addressed what perceived crucial characteristics of the coach for a successful coaching experience were. Here, the characteristic that was named the most was that the coach should be understanding. Other important characteristics were open minded, showing empathy, encouraging, knowledgeable and flexible as shown in Figure 3.6.

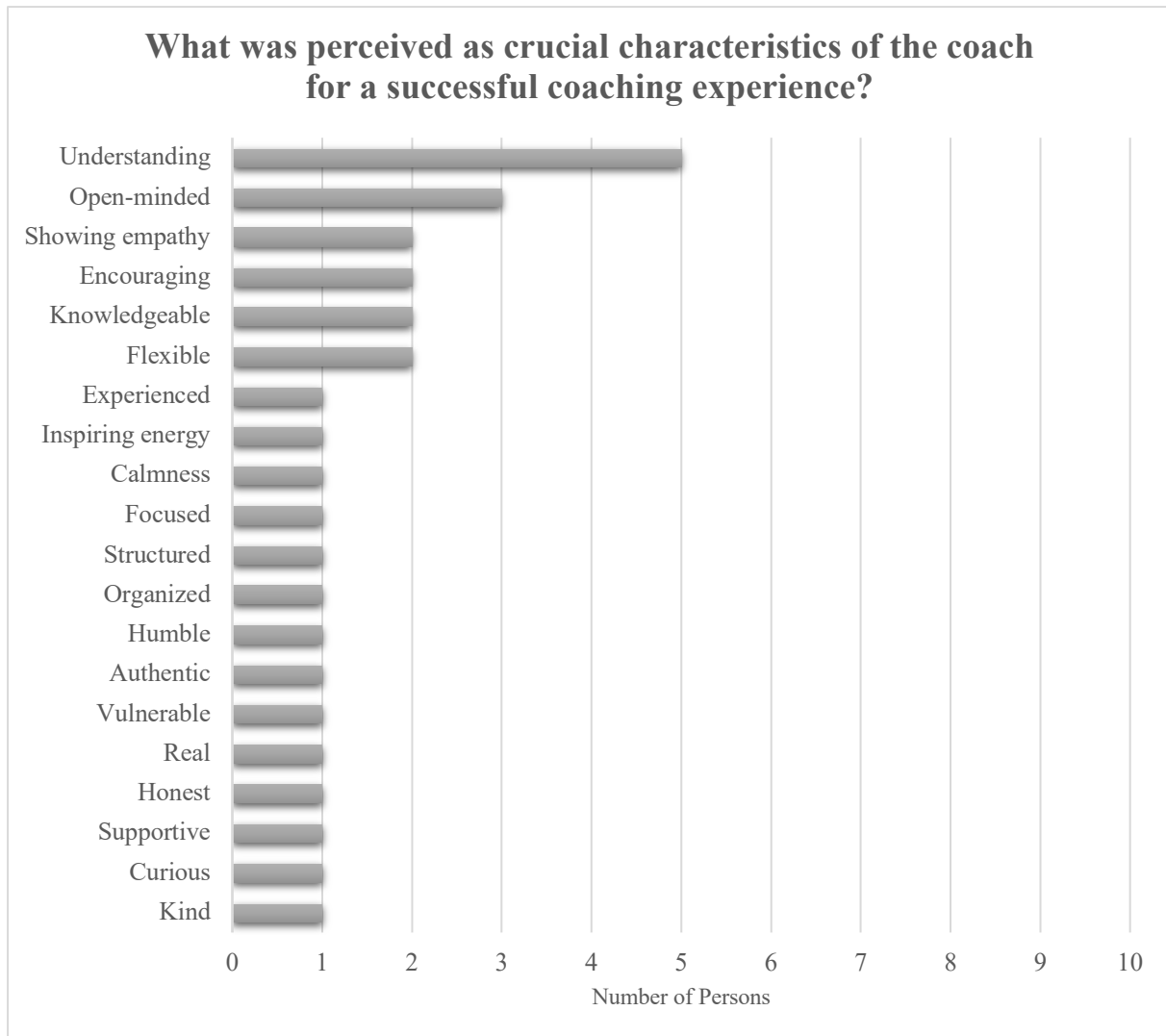


Figure 3.6: Characteristics of the coach

3.6 Coachee

Without exception, all interviewees stated that they were motivated and focused to take part in executive coaching and that they were also very engaged in the process. Only the interviewee who had 4 consecutive days of coaching said that in general his engagement was very high because it was fun but having 4 days of consistent coaching made him sometimes less motivated. Apart from this exception, the other interviewees stated that they were enthusiastic, engaged, excited, looking forward to every session and to never cancel a coaching session and to put it on top of the priority list regardless of the time schedule.

The interviewees were asked whether they perceived executive coaching as developmental or performance fixation. The results show a clear tendency with nine out of twelve interviewees who perceived executive coaching as developmental, one as performance fixation that eventually contributed to personal development and two as both.

3.7 Benefits

A lot of different benefits of executive coaching were perceived by the interviewees. The top four ones were enhanced relationships, also in personal life as stated by one interviewee, clearer and more structured thinking processes, improved self-confidence and resilience, increased motivation and better time management. Other perceived benefits that were named more often were improved work performance and effectiveness, productivity, happiness at work and communication skills. The complete list of perceived benefits and the frequency of occurrence is shown in Figure 3.7.

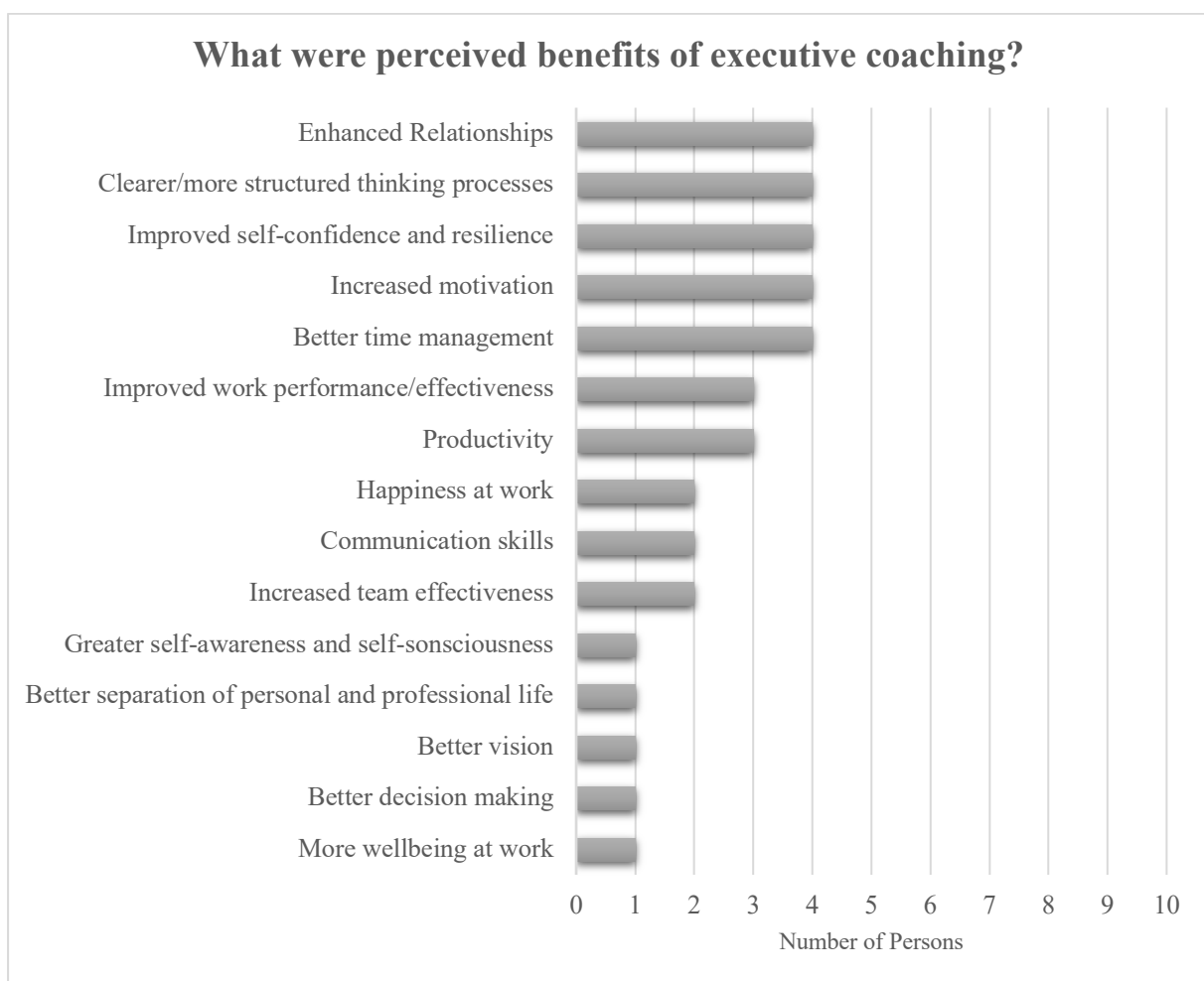


Figure 3.7: Benefits of executive coaching

All interviewees felt that they have learned, grown and changed during their coaching process. Some interviewees gave a more detailed answer mentioning that they became more self-confident, that it made them a better person and more empathetic and compassionate, that they know themselves better, are able to change their perspective and hence are able to act

better and that it has changed them to a substantial extent. One interviewee stated that it made him become the leader he was supposed to be, and that coaching was very supportive during this process.

The interviewees were then asked which skills/behaviors they felt like improved the most with executive coaching? (*intra-personal* like mindfulness and self-awareness; *inter-personal* like engaging with other, assertive communication; *focus* on performance and self-organization, *leadership* like motivating others, team organization and managing team; *career directions* like more conscious professional and career goals; *adaption to work life* like lower stress levels, job satisfaction). The Interviewees could name one or more areas. Figure 3.8 shows the outcome where leadership was the skill/behavior where they felt like they improved the most with executive coaching followed by interpersonal. In general, all categories were named multiple times.

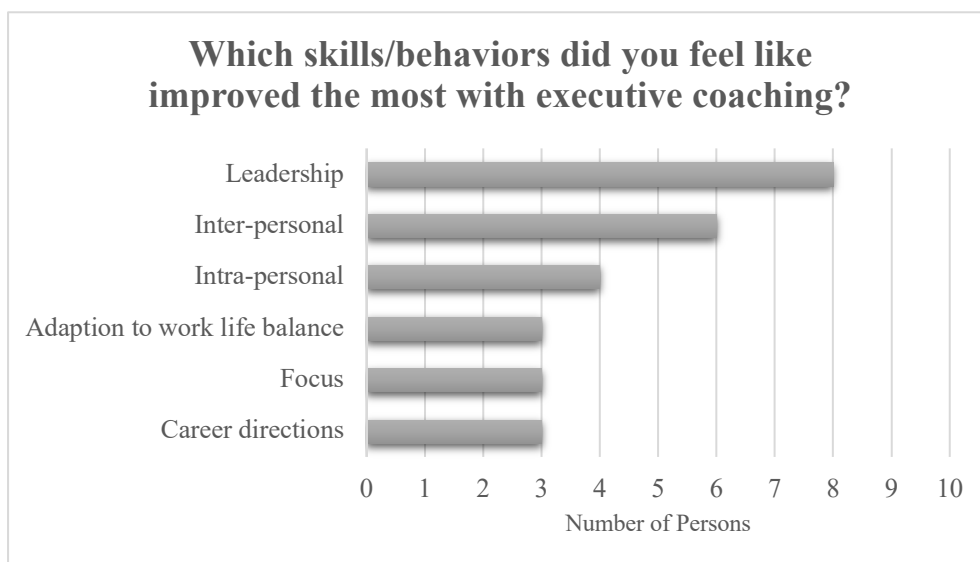


Figure 3.8: Improved skills and behaviors

Ten out of twelve interviewees stated that executive coaching helped them with something they were surprised of or did not expect. Some responses were that they did not expect that a is allowed leader to be vulnerable, were surprised by how well it worked and how big the effect was, how communication improved and that team meetings had better results. One interviewee even stated that she was sure she wanted to quit her job but through executive coaching she changed her way of thinking and adapted a different attitude that made her stay at the company.

3.8 Leadership Development

The interviewees were asked to what extent they were satisfied with the overall experience of executive coaching in terms of leadership. Their answers were ranging from, “very much”, which was stated most often, to 75%, 90%, 98%, 100%. The reason for only 75% satisfaction, was that it was not always as easy to implement theory into practice. Other interviewees answers showed that they were very satisfied. The answers were overly positive. It was stated that it was the perfect tool to become a better leader, that they would recommend it everyone on a leading position and that it changed the way they are approaching leadership. One interviewee said the following:

“It sounds like I’m exaggerating, and I don’t want to say it completely changed my life, but It had profound impact and change in my personal life and in my role as a leader and the skills I am having” (Interviewee 1).

Five out of the twelve interviewees mentioned that they have engaged into other leadership development programs before that were not executive coaching. They were asked, whether they thought it was more or less effective in terms of leadership development than executive coaching. All of the five interviewees said that they preferred executive coaching. Reasons for that were mostly the individual consideration that was given in the coaching sessions like it was mentioned by interviewee 4:

“Yes, I was involved in leadership development programs – in this case I must say, that executive coaching was more effective, because of single, individual treatment, with focus of the individual personality and needs.”

All interviewees stated that they thought executive coaching has been an effective developmental tool based on different evidences like feedback from their teams, more positive attitude, more self-confidence and self-efficacy, as well as better time management and self-organization which were also the perceived benefits that were explored earlier.

With 11 out of 12 interviewees, the majority agreed that their self-efficacy has improved through executive coaching. Only interviewee 8 stated that this is something he doesn’t see since he was always very good at estimating was his strengths and weaknesses were.

The interviewees were asked to what extent they perceived that executive coaching had a fundamental influence of the way they approach work and colleagues. The answers included increased emotional intelligence, clearer communication skills and boundaries, more confidence in the own field of expertise, to not avoid addressing unpleasant points anymore, improved communication, more patience, better team management and team results, more enthusiasm about learning things and to transfer the knowledge gained in coaching sessions to the team.

Except for interviewee 2, who stated that she was motivational before, all interviewees said that their motivational behavior towards their followers has changed in terms of giving more individual consideration, inspirational and intellectual motivation, providing a positive and productive work environment, better teamwork, communicating vision. To the question whether the interviewees have become more flexible (tolerant and open to different views, changing behavior according to different situations) eleven interviewees answered positively. Interviewee 7 denied saying that she was always very tolerant.

All of the interviewees received feedback from colleagues, followers or people in their private life that their behavior has changed. They received positive feedback about better structure in teams, increased openness, enhanced teamwork, that they were “easier” to talk to, and showed more positivity. Furthermore, one interviewee received the feedback that she was very inspiring.

In the last part of the semi-structured interview, the interviewees were asked some closing and summarizing questions. One of those questions was asking that now they have passed this experience, as “zero based thinking”, this is if they were going to start a new coaching project, what was in their eyes the most important factor for the executive coaching experience to be successful is. The results show a brief summary of the questions regarding the coach, the coachee and the relationship. Eight out of 12 interviewees stated, that the most important factor is the willingness to change and work on yourself. The relationship with the coach and to be open (also for criticism), as well as an individualized coaching process were among others perceived as very important factors Figure 3.9.

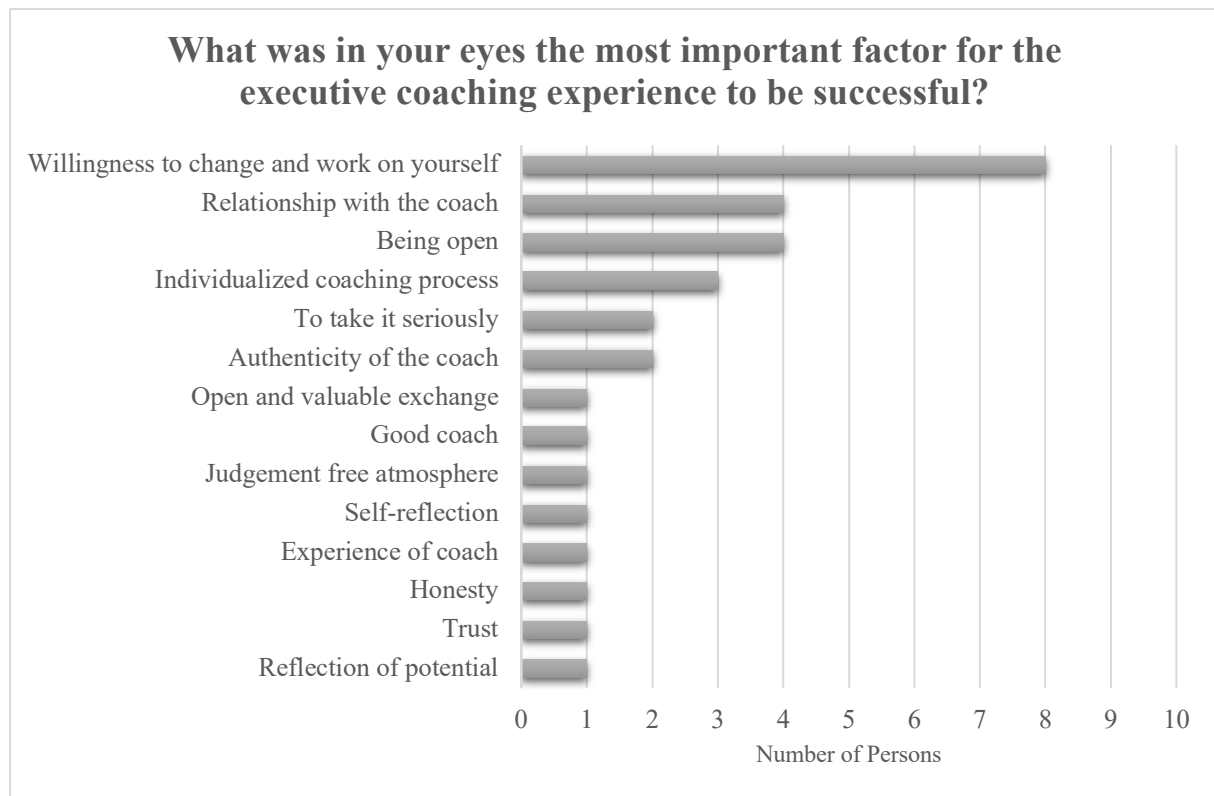


Figure 3.9: Most important factors for successful executive coaching

The interviewees were then asked if there is anything they wished they would have done differently or that they improve for the next time they engage into an executive coaching experience. Five out of the twelve interviewees answered with “No”. The rest stated that they wished for clearer goal setting, that they would have been able to reach their coach immediately when a certain situation occurred without waiting for two weeks or that they would have wished for more flexibility when a session was super interesting to extend it timewise. Two out of the five interviewees stated that they would have wished the coach would accompany them in their daily work and is watching you in specific situation.

In the end of the interview, the interviewees were asked to state their opinion on whether they can say, that based on their experience, that executive coaching is a good developmental tool for managers to be better leaders and if they can justify it with the top areas where they find it most beneficial. All interviewees answered with yes to the first part of the question. The area that was named to be most beneficial was leadership. Self-awareness, communication, self-reflection and team management were also claimed multiple times to be beneficial as well as general happiness in life. The list of all areas can be found in Figure 3.10.

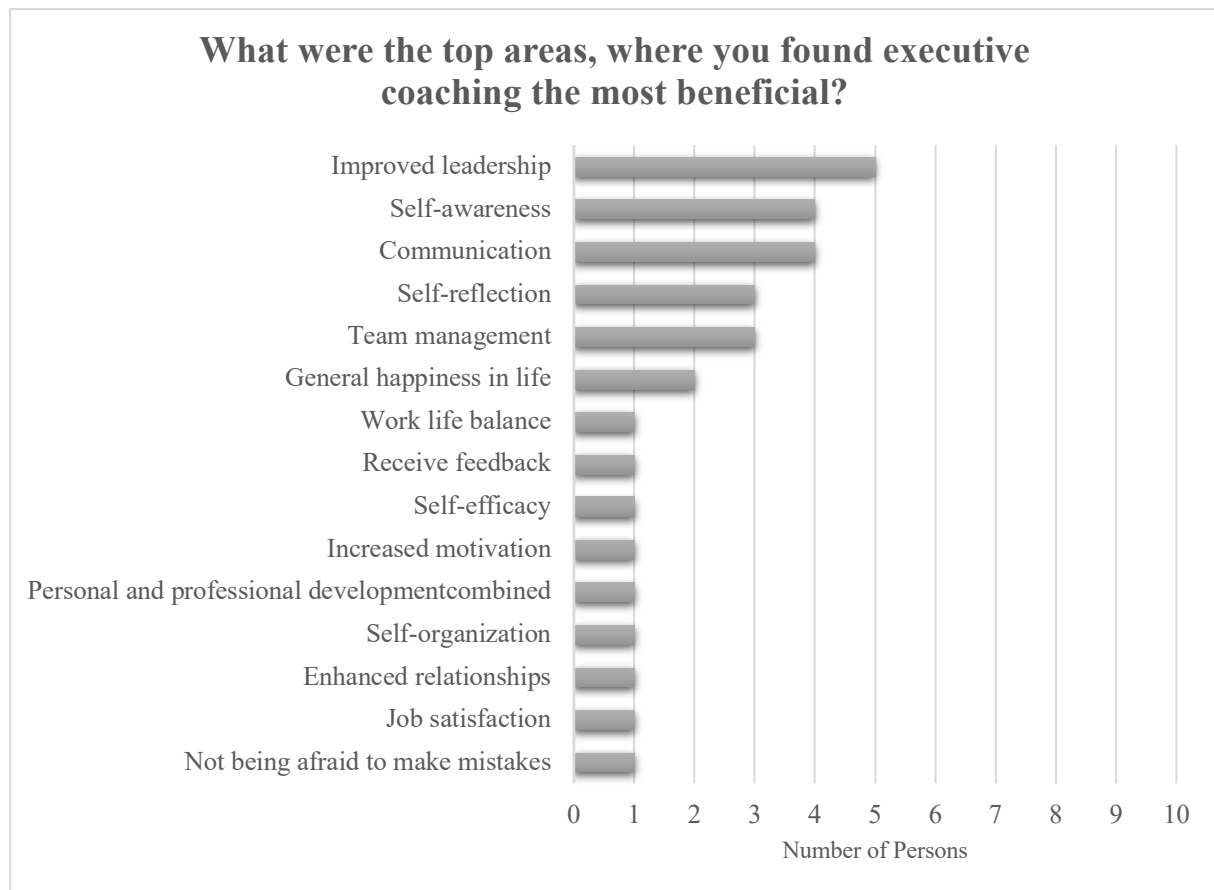


Figure 3.10: Areas where coaching is most beneficial

Last but not least, the interviewees were asked if they feel like sharing something that was not covered with the questions in the interview. Only three interviewees wanted to give additional information that included that there should be more attention on the effects of the team since a leader is only as good as his team, that the success also depends from the experience and personality of the coach and his understanding of the workflow and requirements and that it is always a good investment to do coaching.

Chapter 4

Discussion

According to Grant (2014) and Jones et al. (2016), even short-term coaching interventions of only four coaching sessions can make a difference and have beneficial impact. This statement can be confirmed since all interviewees, even with only five coaching sessions, stated perceived impacts and benefits that are analyzed and discussed more profoundly in this chapter.

Contrary to the statement that usually the Human Resources department selects the coach, the majority of eight interviewees stated that they chose the coach themselves. It was found in the literature that the coach is often selected based on first impressions or referrals (New Age Leadership, n.d.) which can be confirmed since most coaches were selected by the interviewees based on recommendations by friends, colleagues or the company. Other criteria for choosing a coach were: good accessibility, flexibility, charisma of the coach, experience of the coach, “vibe” and relationship between coach and coachee as well as references. This is partly in agreement with the criteria found in the literature namely robust qualifications and personal fit. That coach’s methodology, the coach’s philosophy, the metrics the coach uses and frequency of sessions (New Age Leadership, n.d.) are also criteria when choosing a coach cannot be confirmed or denied with this study. Further research or a greater sample would be needed to confirm or deny the other factors.

Given that coaching is an individualized process (The Executive Coaching Forum, 2015, p. 8) and very situational, it depends on the executive and the situation what the coaching process involves specifically (Witherspoon & White, 2003). This was, also perceived as one of the key contributors for a successful coaching experience. The interviewees stated, that they valued especially the individualized nature of coaching that fit to their needs.

The coaching goals depended on the current situation of the manager who was being coached. However, a pattern could be identified since enhanced communication was the goal that was mentioned the most by half of the interviewees, followed by better decision making and leading with a vision/target agreement. Better team management, transitioning into a new role/environment, greater self-confidence and to get more structure were also popular. This shows, that most goals were linked to inter-personal benefits like communication, to leadership like leading with a vision/target agreement and better team management and better structure as well as to intra-personal benefits like greater self-confidence that touch the specific learning

outcomes of executive coaching according to Armstrong et al., (2007), which will be discussed in more detail later part of this discussion. A typical developmental goal is, when an executive has to get ready for a career move where leadership skills are needed (Witherspoon & White, 2003), which was also mentioned oftentimes by the interviewees as agreed upon coaching goal.

Executive coaching is claimed to be most successful when it is a three-way partnership among the executive's organization, the executive and the coach (The Executive Coaching Forum, 2015, p. 7-8). The level of involvement was different along the interviewees. The organization was only in four cases involved when it came to the selection of a coach. The coaching goals were set in a majority of seven cases by the coachees and in four cases by the company and the coachee, and only in one case the company set the goals alone with the coach. There could be no coherence found between the level of involvement of the organization and the overall coaching effectiveness. Since executive coaching was perceived by all interviewees as beneficial, the intensity of involvement of the organization does not seem to make a difference according to the findings of this study. However, small correlation could be found between the people who chose the coach themselves and the people who set the coaching goals themselves. When the company chose the coach, the company was also more likely to be involved in the goal setting process. However, it did not affect the level of goal attainment, the preference, or the overall satisfaction with the executive coaching experience of the interviewees. It only had a small impact on whether personal and organizational goals were related since in the two cases, where they were not related, the company chose the coach and in one of those cases the company was the one setting the goals. Though, in all organizational goals and personal goals were either related, which was the case for 10 interviewees, or the coaching focused on only organizational goals which confirms the statement that executive coaching should be conducted in coherence with the organization's goals and objectives (The Executive Coaching Forum, 2015, p. 7).

According to the literature, coaching sessions are rich learning environments with the benefit of enabling the coachee to apply the learning to different business situations (Anderson & MetrixGlobal, 2001). In addition, Baron and Morin (2009) stated, that it is ideal when the coachee had the opportunity to apply and practice the newly acquired knowledge of the coaching sessions in between sessions. Except for acquired knowledge that was only applicable in critical situations, which do not happen necessarily on a daily basis, this was the case for the majority of interviewees who could practice personal communication personal interaction with employees, feedback conversations, time efficiency and clearer personal vision. This is proof

that the newly acquired knowledge could be used and practiced immediately to different business situations which lends support to the literature.

The key contributors that helped to maximize the coaching results were addressing matters of the coach, the coachee, the coaching relationship and the coaching process. Except for organizational context, which was not named by the interviewees in this question, the findings are in line with the factors contributing to successful coaching practice by Blackman et al. (2016). It also matches with the statement of Haan et al., (2011), who claimed that general factors that are common to good coaching practice predict helpfulness and make coaching successful. This was again confirmed by the results of the question where now that they have passed this experience, as “zero based thinking”, this is if they were going to start a new coaching project, what was in their eyes the most important factor for the executive coaching experience to be successful. Here, the majority of interviewees claimed willingness to change and work on yourself as most important factor, followed by the relationship with the coach, to be open, the authenticity of the coach and to take it seriously as well as having an individualized process. These findings also provide additional support and evidence to suggest that the most important factors contributing to a successful coaching practice are the coach, the coaching relationship, the coachee and the coaching process. Organizational support seemed to be a rather less important success factor. The next paragraphs will discuss the single success factors more deeply.

Blackman et al., (2016) states that a coaching relationship should be matching between coach and coachee, a one-on-one interaction as well as imply trust, authority, challenge and commitment by both. According to the 11 core competencies of the International Coaching Federation (n.d.c), the coaching relationship should be marked by ongoing mutual trust and respect. The results of the interview indicate that all interviewees were in a trusted relationship with their coach where they could communicate openly. No judgment and trust were rated as the most important factors in the coaching relationship contributing to a successful experience. The coaching relationship was most frequently described as trustworthy, followed by professional, open and honest. No judgment, openness, trust and competency of the coach, authenticity and honest were the factors that the interviewees valued the most in the relationship with their coach. This matches with the above mentioned statements of Blackman et al., (2016) and the International Coaching Federation (n.d.c). It must be taken into account, that given on the interview sample, the relationship was only described by the coachee and not the coach in this thesis.

The coach's most important contributions for making the coaching experience successful were to be a good listener and to create a trustful environment according to the interviewees. Other crucial factors were knowledge and experience of the coach as well as a clear communication, the personality, openness and support. These results build on existing evidence of the International Coaching Federation (n.d.c), where creating a safe, trustful environment, active listening, and direct communication are embedded in the core competencies. In addition, the statement of de Haan et al., (2011), who said that the coaches most appreciated qualities and positive attributes imply understanding, listening and encouragement, kindness, flexibility, openness and availability. All of them were named at least once by the interviewees. The characteristic that was named the most was that the coach should be understanding followed by open minded, showing empathy, encouraging, knowledgeable and flexible which are consistent with the literature.

According to Witherspoon and White (2003) the coachee must be motivated internally and embrace the changes for the coaching experience to be successful. In this study, all interviewees stated that they were motivated and focused to take part in executive coaching. The coachees willingness to change and work on themselves, was amongst other factors claimed by the interviewees to be one of the most important contributions for making the coaching experience successful.

An essential part for a successful coaching practice according to the literature is the organizational context. Organizational support, goal alignment (Blackman et al., 2016) and a climate and culture within the organization that creates good conditions and supports learning and development is an essential part (CIPD, 2008, p. 22) according to literature. All interviewees felt supported by their organization and except for one interviewee's organization, all organizations created a good environment for learning and development. Support was especially felt through the fact that the organization paid for executive coaching which is according to literature mostly the case (The Executive Coaching Forum, 2015, p. 15). In this study, all interviewees stated that the organization paid for their executive coaching which confirms this statement. In addition, personal and organizational goals were aligned in 10 out of 12 cases and in two cases it was purely organizational goals. However, except for the questions that were asked, organizational support was not mentioned again by any interviewee throughout the rest of the interview as key contributor or success factor for executive coaching. There could be a correlation between companies that have a culture that supports learning and development and the fact that they implement executive coaching more likely than other

organizations, but this study has not collected data that proves the opposite to make this statement valid. Further research would be needed to proof a correlation.

By implementing coaching and having the organization pay for it, one interviewee stated it made him feel appreciated and hence supported which is according to Underhill et al. (2008, p. 11-12) seen by most leaders' investment in their success. This also shows that their employer values them which is according to Jacobs (2020) what implementing executive coaching indicates nowadays. Furthermore, this view is also supported by the fact that executive coaching was viewed by most of the interviewees as developmental and not as performance fixation which is as stated by Hilton (2003) most effective. According to Underhill et al. (2008, p. 11-12) many leaders credit coaching as the reason for staying at their firms. This statement was not specifically researched in this study, however one interviewee stated that she stayed at her company because of executive coaching even though she was convinced before that she would quit.

According to the ICF Global Coaching Client Study, most coachees reported, that they noticed coaching benefits like better business management, improved work performance, increased team effectiveness, more efficient time management, and more opportunities and growth. Furthermore, they said that they perceived more effective communication skills, enhanced relationships, greater self-confidence, an improvement in wellness and better work-life balance (International Coaching Federation, n.d.b). All of these benefits were also mentioned at least once by the interviewees in this study. The top four benefits here, were enhanced relationships (also in personal life), clearer and more structured thinking processes, improved self-confidence and resilience, and better time management. These results build on existing evidence that executive coaching is benefiting both, the organization and the employee (Grant et al., 2009). Though, this study only researched the benefits perceived by the coachee, not by the organization, therefore it is not known what benefits were perceived by the organization.

Hilton (2003) stated that executive coaching is most effective when it is focused on sustainable and in general long-term development rather than a short-term performance fixation. The fact that all interviewees continued learning and developing after engaging into executive coaching is proof that it was not treated as short-term performance fixation. To evaluate whether it is more effective, further research has to be conducted where executive coaching was treated as short-term performance fixation.

According to the ICF Global Coaching Client Study, 99 percent of the people who were surveyed, stated that they were somewhat or very satisfied with their experience of coaching

(International Coaching Federation, n.d.b). This study had almost the same outcome with the answers were ranging from, “very much”, which was stated most often, to 75%, 90%, 98%, 100%. These findings indicate that the overall satisfaction with executive coaching as leadership developmental tool was very high. Seven out of 12 interviewees wished for some minor improvements like clearer goal setting, more flexibility of the coach or that the coach would accompany them in their daily work to watch them in specific situations.

According to Rosha and Lace. (2016), development was the word most frequently used when defining the sense of coaching. Nine out of twelve interviewees in this study perceived executive coaching as developmental, one as performance fixation that eventually contributed to personal development and two as both. In addition, interviewees stated that they thought executive coaching has been an effective developmental tool based on different evidences like feedback from their teams, more positive attitude, more self-confidence and self-efficacy, as well as better time management and self-organization which were also the perceived benefits that were explored earlier. This also confirms Albizu et al. (2019), who stated that executive coaching is an effective tool for learning, behavioral change and development purposes in general. Furthermore, the fact that goal attainment through executive coaching was in this study 95% by one interviewee and 100% by all other interviewees proofs effectiveness. In addition, executive coaching is helping executives to learn, grow and change as stated by Witherspoon and White (2003) which was without exemption felt by all interviewees and can be therefore confirmed.

In the course of leadership development, it is deemed that self-efficacy is a pre-condition and key component for leadership according to Armtstrong et al. (2007), Dwyer (2019) and Finn (2007). Dwyer (2019) also states that executive coaching is suggested for improving leader self-efficacy during leadership development. The interview results show that almost all interviewees noticed improved self-efficacy through executive coaching which corroborates the literature and hence shows that executive coaching builds the pre-condition for leadership and is from great value in the leadership development process.

Horner (2002) states that the competence to act flexibly as needed by different situations is an important leadership ability that can be developed through executive coaching. This research confirms with a total of 11 out of 12 interviewees, that flexibility was increased through executive coaching. In addition, the research of Horner (2002) confirms that leaders gain accurate self-assessment and greater self-awareness which help to develop flexibility.

Except for interviewee 2, who stated that she was motivational before, all interviewees agreed that their motivational behavior towards their followers has changed in terms of giving

more individual consideration, inspirational and intellectual motivation, providing a positive and productive work environment, better teamwork and communicating vision. This confirms previous findings of Anthony (2017) who states that leaders who have undergone coaching are providing followers more likely with individualized consideration as well as findings of Finn (2007) who claims that executive coaching is a powerful approach for developing leaders in the areas of communication, individualized consideration, inspirational motivation and intellectual motivation. Armstrong et al. (2007) also found in his study that executive coaching had a fundamental influence on the way leaders approach work and colleagues. Examples of the interviewees like improved communication, more patience, better team management and enthusiasm to transfer the knowledge gained in coaching sessions to the team support this statement. It also gives evidence that executive coaching does not only benefit the leader and the organization but also its followers as stated by Anthony (2017), since the followers benefit from a leader who incorporates these behaviors.

The learning outcomes of executive coaching identified by Armstrong et al. (2007) were put into six groups namely intra-personal benefits, inter-personal benefits, instrumental focus, leadership, career direction and adaption to work life. In his study, especially inter-personal and intra-personal domains received a high score of extent and significance. The skills/behaviors that improved the most with executive coaching according to the study in this thesis were similar, except for the fact that especially leadership received the highest score, followed by inter-personal and intra-personal. Adaption to work life, focus and career directions were also named multiple times. This also matches with the earlier mentioned agreed upon goals where leadership, inter-personal and intra-personal goals were also the top three.

Leadership was not only ranked as the number one learning outcome but also as the number one area where executive coaching was most beneficial, followed by self-awareness and communication. These results support the study by Underhill et al., (2008, p. 9) in which coaches, leaders and organizations agreed that leadership development is the primary purpose of most coaching engagements and by Horner (2002) who states that coaching is proven to be very effective in helping executives to develop sustainable leadership competencies. One interviewee stated that it made him become the leader he was supposed to be, and that coaching was very supportive during this process. Horner (2002) also claims that in his study the majority of participants felt that no other developmental tool was able to offer similar benefits as executive coaching. This can be supported by the five interviewees who engaged into other leadership development programs and chose executive coaching as preferred leadership development methods because of the given individual consideration.

Given, that all interviewees received positive feedback from colleagues, followers or people in their private life that their behavior has changed shows that this is not only self-perception but also recognized by others. All these factors give valuable evidence and support that executive coaching is a good leadership developmental tool for managers to improve their performance in their role as leaders. With the overall perception of executive coaching was being that is developmental and most beneficial in the area of leadership. There have been no negative or surprising outcomes, that contradict this statement. Rather, most of the findings in the literature review could be confirmed and key findings of the interviews were added.

Chapter 5

Limitations and Suggestions for Future Research

This thesis has provided valuable contribution to the field of leadership development through executive coaching. There are, nonetheless, some limitations which must be taken into consideration.

One limitation is the exiguity of the sample. With a sample size of 12 interviewees the results are based on a relatively small sample. Moreover, the sample consisted of only managers and hence coachees. Since the organization and the coach are also part of the coaching process, it would be interesting to include their perspectives. The organizational perspective would be especially interesting with regard to perceived benefits and the coaching process including selecting the coach and goal setting. From the coach's side, their detailed viewpoint with regard to the factors contributing to a successful coaching practice and the overall coaching process would benefit this field of research. Furthermore, the research could be extended by including the leaders' followers and their perceived benefits. Another limitation regarding the sample is also its single geographical and cultural context. The outcome of leadership development through executive coaching can vary across cultures and countries and might therefore not be transferable globally.

Another limitation that has to be considered is, the lack of negative experiences or outcomes, which would be required to make necessary contrasts in some points. Therefore, it was not possible to draw certain correlations since another view that was proving the opposite was missing. Examples would be including a result where the executive coaching was not perceived as beneficial or satisfactory.

Lastly, it has to be considered that this thesis is based on literature prior to Covid-19. In addition, the qualitative research did also not address any issues related to Covid-19 and its effect on the executive coaching process, leadership and leadership development.

This thesis serves as a base for future studies. Further research is needed to address the above mentioned limitations. It is suggested, that future research incorporates a bigger research sample that also takes into account the experiences of the coach, the organization and the leaders' followers. Preferably, this research sample would include contradictive viewpoints and negative experiences with executive coaching in terms of leadership development. On a wider level, research is also needed in further geographical and cultural context, to point out

differences and similarities. An important issue for future studies is also to address how Covid-19 has affected the industry of executive coaching with regard to leadership development.

Conclusion

In this master thesis the two research questions “Can executive coaching be a good leadership developmental tool?” and “How can executive coaching help managers improve their role as leaders?” were analyzed. Firstly, an extensive literature review was conducted and secondly compared with the results of a qualitative study, where semi-structured interviews were executed.

Executive coaching has become a popular developmental tool in organizations within the past years. Since empirical data to proof the effectiveness of executive coaching is still limited, this thesis gives value by delivering empirical data to the research field of executive coaching and its use as developmental tool for leadership. It is contributing to existing literature by highlighting key contributors for a successful coaching experience, showing benefits of executive coaching and building a crossline of executive coaching and leadership development for managers. The comprehensive results are useful for managers and organizations who are considering implementing executive coaching as leadership developmental tool. By giving insights, with special regard to former coachees’ experiences, managers and organizations are given the chance to maximize their coaching results by taking into account the success factors and whether the coaching process, benefits and areas where executive coaching was perceived as most beneficial fits to their needs. In addition, coaches may use this thesis to enhance their knowledge and improve their coaching practice by gaining insights and obtaining a better understanding of the coachees’ perspective on executive coaching experiences.

The semi-structured interviews were conducted with a research sample of 12 German managers in leading positions who have undergone an executive coaching process with a focus on leadership development within the past five years consisting of a minimum of five executive coaching sessions. The interviewed managers’ positions included General Manager, Project Manager, Global Marketing Manager, Marketing Manager, Supply Chain Manager and Network & Business Development Manager. The average number of coaching sessions was 8,3 with a time frame of several weeks and up to 15 months where the coaching sessions took place. In each case, the executive coaching process was paid for by the organization and conducted with a coach external to the organization. The evidence from this study points out that organizations were only partly involved in the coaching processes. Only in a minority of cases, the organization was involved in the process of finding a coach and setting goals. Even though, organizational support was perceived by all managers, the organizational context seemed to be a rather less important success factor for executive coaching. Thus, organizational and personal

goals were in almost all cases related and included especially leadership, inter-personal and intra-personal goals. The most popular coaching goal was found to be enhanced communication followed by better decision making and leading with a vision. Based on the literature review and research results, coaches are often chosen based on recommendations or criteria like personal fit and robust qualification.

For executive coaching to be successful, the most important factors contributing to it are the coach, the coachee, the coaching relationship and the coaching process. A closer look to each of those factors separately, shows that the individual nature of coaching processes, which is tailored to the special needs of the coachee, is what is separating coaching from other leadership training forms and also a key contributor for coaching to be beneficial. During the coaching process, a matching one-on-one relationship where open communication takes part is built. Trust, no judgement and honesty are crucial for establishing a good coaching relationship. It is important for the coach to be a good listener and to create a trustful environment. Further characteristics and behaviors of the coach that are favored include, to be open minded, showing empathy, be encouraging, flexible and knowledgeable. The coachee however, maximizes coaching results by being internally motivated, focused, and most importantly by their willingness to change and work on themselves. The results of the qualitative research even suggest that the coachee's willingness to change and work on themselves is the most crucial factor for making a coaching experience successful as perceived by the coachee.

Benefits of executive coaching are especially improved self-confidence and resilience as well as better time management. It helps managers to learn, grow and change and is proven to improve self-efficacy, which was found to be in the literature review a precondition for leadership development. Moreover, leadership abilities like flexibility and motivational behavior can be increased with the implementation of executive coaching according to previous conducted studies and the results of the qualitative research that was undertaken in this thesis. The fact, that executive coaching is seen as rather developmental than performance fixation as well as the high overall satisfaction rate of coaching as developmental tool according to the results of both, the literature and the qualitative research results, gives evidence that executive coaching is a good developmental tool for managers. It was even rated as preferred leadership development approach by coachees in this research who have taken part in other leadership programs in their past. The interview results showed that executive coaching was found to be mostly leadership skills and leadership behavior followed by inter-personal skills and intra-personal skills. In addition, all managers in the interview stated that executive coaching is a good developmental tool for managers to be better leaders and also rated leadership as number

one area, where they felt that executive coaching had the biggest impact which was in line with the findings of the literature review.

Taken together, the discussion of these factors found in the interviews confirmed existing literature and strengthened some key factors by giving evidence that executive coaching is a good leadership developmental tool for managers. It is achieved mainly through an individualized process, a matching coaching relationship with open communication, a coach who builds a trustful environment and is a good listener as well a coach who is motivated, focused and willing to change and work on themselves. This way, leadership as well as interpersonal and intrapersonal-skills can be enhanced. Moreover, self-efficacy, flexibility and motivational behavior are increased.

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Annexes

Annex A: Interview Outline

Introductory Questions

1. What is your current position in the company you are working in?
2. For how long have you been working in this position/company?

Organizational support

3. Does your companies culture create good conditions for learning and development?
4. Did the organization pay for the executive coaching process?
5. Did you feel supported by your organization?
6. To what extent was the organization supporting you?

Coaching Process

7. How many coaching sessions did you have? (Regularity, frequency, time span in between)
8. Was the coach chosen by you or the company? If by you: Based on which criteria was the coach chosen?
9. Who was setting the coaching goals? You, the organization or both?
10. What were agreed upon as coaching goals? Please name the top 3 ones.
 - a. And to what extent did you reach them?
 - b. If not: why not? What were the major obstacles that prevented in achieving them...?

11. Were personal and organization goals related?
12. Did your executive coaching sessions focus primarily on personal development or rather on work-related tasks? Did you prefer it that way?
13. Could you apply what you learned in coaching sessions immediately in your daily work? Can you give the one or two key examples?
14. What were the key contributors that helped you to maximize coaching results? (Name 3)
15. Did you continue learning and developing even after engaging into executive coaching?

Coaching Relationship

16. How would you describe your relationship with your coach?
17. What did you value the most in the relationship with your coach?
18. Were you able to communicate openly with your coach and did you feel like you were in a trusted relationship?

Coach

19. What was the most important contribution of the coach for making the experience successful? (good listener, clear communication of the coach, giving a trustful feeling, maintains confidentiality, knowledge and experience of coach in that industry or position, personality of the coach...)
20. Which characteristics of your coach did you perceive as crucial for a successful coaching experience? (honest, understanding, encouraging, kindness, flexibility, openness, availability, empathetic, organized...)

Coachee

21. Were you motivated and focused to take part in executive coaching?
22. How would you describe your own engagement in the coaching process? Were there any different levels of engagement along the process?
23. Did you perceive executive coaching as developmental or did you perceive it as a performance fixation?

Benefits

24. What were perceived benefits of executive coaching? (Name top 3) (improved work performance, increased team effectiveness, more efficient time management, enhanced relationships, communication skills, greater self-confidence, greater work-life balance, well-being at work, resilience and self-confidence, productivity, more structural and clear thinking process, reduced stress, increased motivation...)
25. Do you have the feeling that you have learned, grown and changed during the coaching process? To what extend?
26. Which skills/behaviors did you feel like you improved the most with executive coaching? Name 3 (*intra-personal* like mindfulness and self-awareness; *inter-personal* like engaging with other, assertive communication; *focus* on performance and self-organization, *leadership* like motivating others, team organization and managing team; *career directions* like more conscious professional and career goals; *adaption to work life* like lower stress levels, job satisfaction)
27. Did executive coaching help you with something you were surprised of or did not expect?

Leadership Development

28. To what extent were you satisfied with the overall experience of executive coaching in terms of leadership development?

29. Have you engaged into other leadership development programs before, that were not executive coaching? If yes, would you say it was more or less effective in terms of leadership development than executive coaching? Please justify.
30. Would you say executive coaching has been an effective developmental tool? If yes based on which evidence? (e.g. confidence, stress level, feedback, self-efficacy etc.)
31. How has your leadership behavior changed after experiencing executive coaching? Can you give two or three views on that?
32. Has executive coaching improved your self-efficacy? (The believe/perception regarding your capability to take action and achieve goals) Please justify.
33. To what extend did you perceive that executive coaching had a fundamental influence of the way you approach work and colleagues?
34. Has your motivational behavior towards you followers changed? (e.g. are you giving more individual consideration, inspirational and intellectual motivation, providing a positive and productive work environment, better teamwork, communicating vision...?)
35. Have you become more flexible? (tolerant and open to different views, changing behavior according to different situations)
36. Did you get a feedback from colleagues/ followers or the organization that your behavior has changed? In case yes, what was viewed as most noticeable from their end?

Closing Questions

37. Now that you have passed this experience, as “zero based thinking”, this is if you were going to start a new coaching project... What was in your eyes the most important factor for the executive coaching experience to be successful?

38. Is there anything you wished you would do differently or that you would improve for the next time you engage into an executive coaching experience?
39. Would you say, based on your experience, that executive coaching is a good developmental tool for managers to be better leaders? Please justify your answer and name the 3 top areas you find it to be mostly beneficial.
40. Is there something you feel like sharing with me about your executive coaching experience that I haven't covered with my questions?

Annex B: Interview Outcome Summary

Introductory Questions

1. What is your current position in the company you are working in?

Interviewee 1: General Manager for Communication, Fundraising and Corporate Relations

Interviewee 2: Project Manager

Interviewee 3: Financial Manager

Interviewee 4: Project-manager

Interviewee 5: Global Marketing Manager

Interviewee 6: Marketing Manager

Interviewee 7: Supply Chain Manager

Interviewee 8: Network & Business Development Manager

Interviewee 9: Project Manager

Interviewee 10: Marketing Manager

Interviewee 11: Project Manager

Interviewee 12: General Manager

2. For how long have you been working in this position/company?

Interviewee 1: 7 years

Interviewee 2: 3 months in the position, 3,5 years in the company

Interviewee 3: 28 years

Interviewee 4: 2 years

Interviewee 5: 2 years

Interviewee 6: 5 years

Interviewee 7: 1 year in the position, 5 years in the company

Interviewee 8: 2,5 years

Interviewee 9: 4 years

Interviewee 10: 3,5 years

Interviewee 11: 3 years

Interviewee 12: 4,5 years

Organizational support

3. Does your companies culture create good conditions for learning and development?

Interviewee 1: Yes

Interviewee 2: Yes

Interviewee 3: Yes, in our company it is very important to be always up to date and take part in seminars etc.

Interviewee 4: Yes

Interviewee 5: Yes

Interviewee 6: Yes

Interviewee 7: Yes

Interviewee 8: My current and probable last employer rather not. Since changes are not a priority or only partly desirable

Interviewee 9: Yes

Interviewee 10: Yes, there are a lot of tools provided by the company. Like a form to fill in by every employee the end of every week about their personal development. Moreover, there are e-learning trainings provided employees have to finish every month related to their job/career.

Interviewee 11: Yes

Interviewee 12: Yes

4. Did the organization pay for the executive coaching process?

Interviewee 1: Yes

Interviewee 2: Yes

Interviewee 3: Yes

Interviewee 4: Yes

Interviewee 5: Yes

Interviewee 6: Yes

Interviewee 7: Yes

Interviewee 8: The organization I am currently working in did not pay for it, but the former organization did

Interviewee 9: Yes

Interviewee 10: Yes

Interviewee 11: Yes

Interviewee 12: Yes

5. Did you feel supported by your organization?

Interviewee 1: Yes

Interviewee 2: Yes

Interviewee 3: Yes

Interviewee 4: Yes

Interviewee 5: Yes

Interviewee 6: Yes

Interviewee 7: Yes

Interviewee 8: Yes

Interviewee 9: Yes

Interviewee 10: Yes

Interviewee 11: Yes

Interviewee 12: Yes

6. To what extent was the organization supporting you?

Interviewee 1: They supported me with three factors: paid 75% of my master's study costs, they gave me time and also paid for the executive coaching and for the traveling I had to do to Austria and all study books and printing the thesis.

Interviewee 2: Yes, because they provided the payment and I can apply the knowledge.

Interviewee 3: Yes

Interviewee 4: I am the one who decides which of my colleagues and also myself should be trained.

Interviewee 5: Paying for the executive coaching program I enrolled for.

Interviewee 6: By paying for the coaching sessions. Letting me choose how intense the course should be.

Interviewee 7: Provides classroom, virtual & individual training session for leadership skills

Interviewee 8: I felt supported because the coaching was conducted consistently with different content for everyone in the company, including the owner. The content was therefore consistently conveyed at all management levels with different specification.

Interviewee 9: I approached them saying that I think executive coaching would be very beneficial and they agreed.

Interviewee 10: The company is very supportive in explaining the available tools and keeping me up to date about changes or new tools.

Interviewee 11: They are very focused on creating a positive company culture by investing in their employees for example through coaching.

Interviewee 12: Yes, the fact that they pay for my executive coaching experience showed that they care about me and my growth. It made me feel appreciated and hence supported.

Coaching Process

7. How many coaching sessions did you have? (Regularity, frequency, time span in between)

Interviewee 1: I had two different levels of coaching: executive coaching focusing on leadership that focusses on personality and team leading development where I had seven sessions in 12 – 15 months, also had practical leadership coaching in my MBA studies where we could talk to a coach about our experiences at work.

Interviewee 2: I had 10 coaching sessions and the time in between was mostly about 4-6 weeks.

Interviewee 3: I had 10 coaching sessions in total. The first six sessions were every 2 weeks and the last four sessions were once a month.

Interviewee 4: First an introduction session with me, then we agreed all 14 days to meet. Six sessions in total.

Interviewee 5: Five coaching sessions every 2 weeks.

Interviewee 6: 10 coaching sessions. Every 1-2 weeks.

Interviewee 7: Six sessions every 2 months.

Interviewee 8: It were 3 coaching segments with 2x3 and 1x4 days that were conducted within 12 months.

Interviewee 9: 10 sessions every 2 weeks.

Interviewee 10: Six sessions once or twice a month.

Interviewee 11: 10 coaching sessions weekly.

Interviewee 12: Seven sessions every 2-4 weeks.

8. Was the coach chosen by you or the company? If by you: Based on which criteria was the coach chosen?

Interviewee 1: I chose the coach. Criteria were good accessibility, charisma of the coach and how the vibe between me and the coach was as well as our relationship level, experience of the coach (as executive coach) not in the field of work of myself, and how the coach would approach the whole thing and how he would work with me.

Interviewee 2: He was chosen by me and recommended by a colleague of mine.

Interviewee 3: The coach was recommended by a friend who works in a similar position as I do.

Interviewee 4: The coach was chosen from myself, based on references, and after our first appointment which convinced me that this is the right person for this training and the goal.

Interviewee 5: My company chose the coach.

Interviewee 6: The coach was chosen by me. I chose him based on accessibility, flexibility and experience with coaching.

Interviewee 7: By the company.

Interviewee 8: The company chose the coach.

Interviewee 9: The coach was recommended by a colleague and chosen by me.

Interviewee 10: The coach was chosen by the company.

Interviewee 11: The coach was suggested by the company, but I could make the ultimate decision whether it is a good fit or not. It was.

Interviewee 12: I chose the coach, recommended by a colleague in the company.

9. Who was setting the coaching goals? You, the organization or both?

Interviewee 1: I set the coaching goals.

Interviewee 2: I set the coaching goals, and I started it because I was interested in finding out what coaching is.

Interviewee 3: It was me.

Interviewee 4: Both.

Interviewee 5: I set the goals with the coach.

Interviewee 6: I was setting the goals but with the organizational interests in mind. Also, some goals were set together with the coach based on some feedback he got while getting to know me.

Interviewee 7: Jointly.

Interviewee 8: The company and the coach set the goals.

Interviewee 9: I set the goals.

Interviewee 10: The organization gave a guideline and together with the coach I specified them.

Interviewee 11: Both.

Interviewee 12: Mostly I did.

10. What were agreed upon as coaching goals? Please name the top 3 ones.

- a. And to what extent did you reach them?
- b. If not: why not? What were the major obstacles that prevented in achieving them?

Interviewee 1: Guiding principle: “If you want to be a great leader, first you have to know yourself”. That means strengths, weaknesses, what triggers you, how you motivate yourself, and where do you want to stand so in general self-reflection. I reached it to 100%. I only had difficulties to apply everything to my team because they were very old, had their routines and did not want to go out of their comfort zone for new methods they were just waiting to retire.

Interviewee 2: My main goals were to get support for transitioning into my new role and to become more confident and superior. I came from academia when I changed to consulting and that was a quiet different game. So, I could use that support to adjust to my new environment and also to speak up more confidently to my partners etc. I definitely reached those goals

Interviewee 3: Most important goal was to get more structure and to learn how to motivate my employees and also to reduce stress. Also, to set and follow clear priorities. Yes, I reached it.

Interviewee 4: To formulate goals clearly for myself and the team, to communicate with the employees, also negative points to be spoken out in an absolute clear and also appreciative way. I reached my goals with around 95%. The intrinsic reason was, I think – to deliver and then

control negative messages and still want to be the “sympathetic boss” needs a lot of overcoming, and to go out the comfort zone. Extrinsic reason I guess the already accustomed routine, the familiar steps complicate the transition to new methods.

Interviewee 5: Setting KPIs, creating a structured mind map and implementing the changes -> Creating the mindset and implementing the changes. I reached them.

Interviewee 6: To create a vision for myself and what kind of leader I want to be, to get more empathetic and patient and to strengthen my self-confidence. I reached all of them. An example would be that I am considering more what my employees want and try to understand them before I judge their behavior. I used to get really annoyed when someone was too slow, or unclear or did not manage to get the task done as I wanted to, and I learned to communicate it better and practice empathy and compassion.

Interviewee 7: Better decision making, more accountability & clear communication. 100% reached.

Interviewee 8: Leading with target agreements, leading employee discussions (e.g. conflict- and criticism discussions), identifying potential improvement on becoming a leader and conducting suitable trainings to achieve this potential. Personally, I would say that these goals were reached in most instances, otherwise I would have not been able/allowed to practice my position. The biggest obstacles were that current topics made it sometimes hard to implement things. The same applies, as in my case, when coaching has not been carried out across all levels. In this case I encountered a lack of understanding at some levels.

Interviewee 9: Better management of my teams, better communication and decision making. I reached all of them I would say.

Interviewee 10: My skillset as a leader, future career path and leading with a vision. I reached them, yes.

Interviewee 11: To help me transition into my new role as project manager, to learn how to lead a team effectively, better and faster decision making. Yes, I reached them.

Interviewee 12: Better decision making, more powerful meetings (better discussions etc.), better time management. Reached them mostly.

11. Were personal and organization goals related?

Interviewee 1: Yes and no so both

Interviewee 2: Yes

Interviewee 3: Yes

Interviewee 4: Yes

Interviewee 5: Only organizational

Interviewee 6: Yes

Interviewee 7: Yes

Interviewee 8: No, because the goals were set only by the company and the coach

Interviewee 9: Yes

Interviewee 10: Yes, the organizations goals were the standard norm to use. But there was some flexibility to relate personal goals as long as it is not too different from the norm.

Interviewee 11: Yes

Interviewee 12: Yes. Which I especially noticed later on because I could apply what I learned for the job also in my personal life.

12. Did your executive coaching sessions focus primarily on personal development or rather on work-related tasks? Did you prefer it that way?

Interviewee 1: Focused more on work-related tasks and I preferred it that way.

Interviewee 2: I think it is always interrelated. We worked on my personal development but that was related to my work. So, the content was always related to work. So, it was closely linked. I liked it.

Interviewee 3: I think you cannot really separate it. I think it was very even. The focus was on work-related task, but I could not improve them without developing personally.

Interviewee 4: Personal development, which in my believe also will reflect on work-related tasks. I preferred it.

Interviewee 5: Rather on work related tasks. Yes, I liked it.

Interviewee 6: I think it was interrelated, but I perceived it to be more personal development which I liked.

Interviewee 7: Both, and yes, I preferred it that way.

Interviewee 8: Primarily on work-related tasks which ultimately always impacts personal development too. I liked it the way it was.

Interviewee 9: Development as a leader so it consisted of personal development and work related tasks which I preferred.

Interviewee 10: Mostly work-related, would be nice to have more personal development tasks as well in my opinion.

Interviewee 11: Both but the focus was on me! I preferred it that way because it had the most impact.

Interviewee 12: Personal development with reference to work related tasks which I preferred; I think.

13. Could you apply what you learned in coaching sessions immediately in your daily work?
Can you give the one or two key examples?

Interviewee 1: Yes, I could apply it but not immediately. It took me 2-3 month until I really memorized the knowledge and where a situation occurred where I got a flashback and thought: ahh I know in theory how I could do it better and I think the themes that we developed you could especially use the knowledge in critical situations and they don't necessarily happen daily. A lot is daily business but until it internalized, I could apply it yes.

Example 1: I had one employee who was relatively young (mid 30) and my coach showed me that a lot of things are intuitive and you don't always have to have everything 100% planned, sometimes only 90% or 85% are enough and you have to trust In the team that everyone finds their space. I would call it intuitive team feeling

Example 2: I had an employee that always reacted very emotional and started to cry in critical situations when she was criticized and she got impulsive, got stress spots and became louder and with her I had to learn how to deal with her and I learned quickly to bring things on a good subject level and to create a common goal and ways how to work together on things without taking thing too personal on both sides

Interviewee 2: Yes, in one coaching session for example I specifically prepared for a feedback talk that I had with my supervisor and worked on a story line and very focused communication and I could apply that immediately.

Another coaching topic was more about what my personal topic should be about in this firm. Finding out what I am passionate about and developing kind of a profile and this is also what I communicated to my mentor and persuade afterwards.

Interviewee 3: Yes and no. It really depended on the situation and it took me a while to really incorporate what I learned so that I was applying it on a natural basis without thinking about it too much.

Interviewee 4: How to communicate to the team and also let them "feel" the goal and the need of clear, also negative feedback, in sight to the process.

Interviewee 5: Yes. I created a more time efficient schedule for my employees that helped us to achieve the goals as a team.

Interviewee 6: Yes and no. Personal interaction with your employees is something that I could practice on a daily level, but some things only applied to special situations.

Interviewee 7: Yes, in feedback conversations with my team & creating a feeling of belonging even though everyone is in home office right now.

Interviewee 8: A key example was when my management team and I defined which result we want to achieve in five years and what actions steps we have to take to reach this. Since everyone else in their team also had experienced coaching, from my point of view, an outstanding result could be achieved for the company because it was a jointly compiled goal where everyone was standing behind which in terms improved the implementation.

Interviewee 9: Yes. I am a very quick learner and I had a new project coming up and it helped me a lot in managing my team. Because my vision was clearer, I was also able to communicate more clearly the vision and why we had to take certain steps to get there. I felt like my team was more motivated.

Interviewee 10: Yes, my communication skills have improved a lot and I use it also in my daily life.

Interviewee 11: Yes. It is hard to pin down on examples, but it is a general feeling.

Interviewee 12: Yes, I would say so. It changes your mindset and that has an impact on daily actions how you view things.

14. What were the key contributors that helped you to maximize coaching results? (Name 3)

Interviewee 1: The coach was very good and empathetic and also professionally competent. Willingness from both sides to openly work on all issues and to be completely honest and vulnerable. Feedback from peers.

Interviewee 2: It was a good mixture of different methods that he applied and just going through this process of self-reflection, but I cannot really pin it down. There was one session where we worked on my values and kind of prioritizing them and that was a big “aha” moment for me and all of a sudden I understood why I had such trouble adjusting to my new environment

because it was kind of conflicting with some of the values that I had and that was really helpful for me to understand where my issues came from in the first place.

Interviewee 3: My own willingness to develop.

Interviewee 4: Live-Support, means directly, then analysis. Checklist and communication-tools. Feedback.

Interviewee 5: Accountability, time-frame and mindset coaching.

Interviewee 6: Being honest and vulnerable and really open up, the coach, that it was very personal and a one to one relationship.

Interviewee 7: Effective training methodology, analytical coaching skills & clearly defined follow-up practices.

Interviewee 8: The most important key contributor is always the success of the team and when all employees contribute to it.

Interviewee 9: Relationship with my coach, clear communication, confidence/trust to open up.

Interviewee 10: I had a really good coach.

Interviewee 11: Good sessions by the coach, he never wasted time.

15. Did you continue learning and developing even after engaging into executive coaching?

Interviewee 1: Definitely, I truly believe in lifelong learning and self-reflection going with sciences and you have to keep that knowledge up to date and I never want to get professionally fatigue and tired of my job and that was triggered especially by my coaching experience.

Interviewee 2: Yes, I decided to become a certified coach myself because I enjoyed the coaching so much that I wanted to learn more about it and now I am actually working as a coach in the context of my consulting job. I was fascinated by the coaching role and process and I could imagine that I would like it very much, so I decided to look for a certification program which I really liked, and I finished It this summer.

Interviewee 3: Yes, it has inspired me to also read books about this topic that the coach recommended me.

Interviewee 4: Yes, still have monthly coaching, now online.

Interviewee 5: Yes, it sparked my interest.

Interviewee 6: Yes! Through executive coaching I became really interested into leadership.

Interviewee 7: Yes.

Interviewee 8: You should always work on yourself and look for possibilities to develop and respectively to find out what existing weaknesses are. Here, it is nice when you have people around, professionally and privately, who communicate their opinion openly and honestly. It is crucial to combine the self-image with the external-image.

Interviewee 9: Yes.

Interviewee 10: Yes, I think there are always things to develop and to learn so I keep setting goals and use the knowledge I gained in the coaching sessions wisely.

Interviewee 11: Yes. It actually happened that I consulted my coach again for a question.

Interviewee 12: Yes. It is very important if you want to grow.

Coaching Relationship

16. How would you describe your relationship with your coach?

Interviewee 1: Personal, honest, appreciative and trustworthy.

Interviewee 2: Very professional. He knew a lot about me I did not know a lot about him but that was fine. It was the normal coaching relationship I would say.

Interviewee 3: A lot of trust was needed so that I could open up. In the beginning was less open but when I noticed how beneficial it was for me to really open up and that I could trust my coach the relationship became really good and open.

Interviewee 4: Similar like a psychotherapist, familiar and open.

Interviewee 5: Rather professional than personal.

Interviewee 6: Trustworthy, honest, respectful.

Interviewee 7: Friendly and trusted.

Interviewee 8: Productive.

Interviewee 9: I felt very comfortable telling my coach everything. Trust was very important. I think knowing that he was outside of the company had a big impact on my trust.

Interviewee 10: Great, he made me feel comfortable since day one.

Interviewee 11: Very good and open. We treated each other as equals with a lot of respect. Even though the focus was on me. I also felt like I could be very honest.

Interviewee 12: Professionally and very trusted.

17. What did you value the most in the relationship with your coach?

Interviewee 1: My coach was never judgmental and accepted me how I was and tried to get the best out of me.

Interviewee 2: That coach gave me the space to explore myself and to ask the right questions. He got me to think in a different way and he gave me a lot of impulse for reflection and was a good companion in that journey.

Interviewee 3: That my coach was very competent and that he had an answer to every question especially with things that are clear, but he managed to clarify them more detailed. Some things are common sense, but my coach had a good way of showing me how to internalize certain things. Sometimes it is just important that a third person is telling you something that comes from the outside and has no relation to you or the office and you receive feedback better.

Interviewee 4: Authenticity, honesty and professionalism.

Interviewee 5: Authenticity.

Interviewee 6: No judgement, that he was encouraging and motivating me and really supported me.

Interviewee 7: An open, honest & no-judgement exchange.

Interviewee 8: Openness.

Interviewee 9: Trust.

Interviewee 10: That he knows a lot about the developments possible. I thought it was difficult in a company to find out yourself all directions that is possible, with a coach there it is a nice way to find out what is helpful in a shorter amount of time.

Interviewee 11: That he would never judge me when I made mistakes or was unable to do something. That I could trust him to tell everything.

Interviewee 12: He did not judge me for things where I judged myself.

18. Were you able to communicate openly with your coach and did you feel like you were in a trusted relationship?

Interviewee 1: Yes, from the beginning to the end. We are still in touch today even though I am not doing sessions anymore with her.

Interviewee 2: Yes

Interviewee 3: Yes, very. And I think it was very important.

Interviewee 4: Yes, 100%.

Interviewee 5: Yes, I felt like I could truly open up about my challenges.

Interviewee 6: Yes.

Interviewee 7: Yes.

Interviewee 8: Definitely.

Interviewee 9: Yes. That was very important.

Interviewee 10: Yes.

Interviewee 11: Yes.

Interviewee 12: Yes.

Coach

19. What was the most important contribution of the coach for making the experience successful? (good listener, clear communication of the coach, giving a trustful feeling, maintains confidentiality, knowledge and experience of coach in that industry or position, personality of the coach...)

Interviewee 1: Great preparation for the sessions, personality, trustful environment, she created an intimate atmosphere with me, where I was able to let myself go and open up, and she was really respectful and a good listener.

Interviewee 2: He was a very good listener and very calm and still insisting to dig deeper than I would normally do. It was a very good personal fit, I think.

Interviewee 3: Yes, it was a very well fit of everything.

Interviewee 4: Open and trustful personality of the coach, the really practical and vivid examples for explanation, absolute empathy and listening and understanding.

Interviewee 5: Clear communication, open-minded and non-judgmental as well as his experience in the industry.

Interviewee 6: Good listener and knowledge and experience of the coach.

Interviewee 7: Giving a trustful feeling.

Interviewee 8: Support and adaptability.

Interviewee 9: That he was supporting me. Good listener.

Interviewee 10: Clear communication and knowledge.

Interviewee 11: Good listener and had a solution/approach for everything.

Interviewee 12: Good listener and giving trustful feeling.

20. Which characteristics of your coach did you perceive as crucial for a successful coaching experience? (honest, understanding, encouraging, kindness, flexibility, openness, availability, empathetic, organized...)

Interviewee 1: For me it was most important that the coach has a lot of empathy and also a great knowhow in theories and my coach had a really inspiring energy.

Interviewee 2: He was very calm, so he was a good opposite to me because I'm very bubbly and talking a lot and he was just very calm and taken back but also very clear and focused. And always seemed like he had a good plan and was able to organize my wild thoughts. I think that was the biggest contribution to help me get organized in my mind.

Interviewee 3: It was important that he was talking on the same level to me! He had a lot of knowledge and knew what he was talking about.

Interviewee 4: Fully structured personality with an open mind, encouraging, recognition, no general praise, understood the workflow and requirements.

Interviewee 5: Organized, humble, understanding, authentic, vulnerable and real.

Interviewee 6: Understanding, flexibility and empathetic.

Interviewee 7: Honest and open.

Interviewee 8: Open and honest.

Interviewee 9: Flexible and understanding.

Interviewee 10: Encouraging and his openness.

Interviewee 11: Supportive, curious and kind.

Interviewee 12: Understanding.

Coachee

21. Were you motivated and focused to take part in executive coaching?

Interviewee 1: Yes.

Interviewee 2: Yes.

Interviewee 3: Yes.

Interviewee 4: Yes.

Interviewee 5: Yes.

Interviewee 6: Yes.

Interviewee 7: Yes.

Interviewee 8: Definitely. Not only because it's a convenient Investment into me as a person by the company, but also because I am always open to learn.

Interviewee 9: Yes.

Interviewee 10: Yes, I think it is from great value to a company.

Interviewee 11: Yes.

Interviewee 12: Yes.

22. How would you describe your own engagement in the coaching process? Were there any different levels of engagement along the process?

Interviewee 1: Definitely good engagement.

Interviewee 2: I really made sure to really use every session. Normally in my job it is not so easy to keep regular appointments because clients crush your planning and you have to be super flexible and work longer hours. I had to do some effort to really make it to every session, but I did. I never canceled a session and I made sure to put this on top of my priority list.

Interviewee 3: My motivation was very high, but I also noticed that I have to work a lot on myself and its nothing where you can sit back and sometimes, I was not very motivated to do some exercises because I had so much work to do.

Interviewee 4: Engaged, sometimes in the beginning not so motivated, stressed, because also should have finalized a job.

Interviewee 5: Engaged, enthusiastic and excited. The whole time.

Interviewee 6: I was very engaged the whole time.

Interviewee 7: Maybe a little less motivated before and more motivation once I was involved.

Interviewee 8: In general, very high because it made fun. Having 4 days of consistent coaching, I sometimes got less motivated.

Interviewee 9: For me there were no different stages of engagement! I was looking forward to every session. The more I noticed how big the impact is the more engaged I was. so maybe yes, my engagement increased.

Interviewee 10: Yes, I did not know what to expect about the process in the beginning, but when you see development and gain more knowledge about all the possibilities made me more engaged.

Interviewee 11: I was very engaged because I liked that my company gave me the opportunity and I did not want to disappoint them or myself.

Interviewee 12: I was always eager to learn and very engaged. I almost wished it was weekly, but my time schedule did not allow it

23. Did you perceive executive coaching as developmental or did you perceive it as a performance fixation?

Interviewee 1: Both but more on the developing side.

Interviewee 2: Developmental.

Interviewee 3: As both.

Interviewee 4: Clearly as developmental.

Interviewee 5: More as performance fixation that eventually contributed to my own personal development.

Interviewee 6: As developmental. It also touched some performance fixation.

Interviewee 7: Developmental.

Interviewee 8: Definitely as developmental tool.

Interviewee 9: Developmental.

Interviewee 10: Developmental.

Interviewee 11: Developmental.

Interviewee 12: Developmental.

Benefits

24. What were perceived benefits of executive coaching? (Name top 3) (improved work performance, increased team effectiveness, more efficient time management, enhanced relationships, communication skills, greater self-confidence, greater work-life balance, well-being at work, resilience and self-confidence, productivity, more structural and clear thinking process, reduced stress, increased motivation...)

Interviewee 1: Clearer thinking processes, more wellbeing at work, more self-confidence and resilience.

Interviewee 2: Self-exploration, improved clarity and self-awareness and self-consciousness related to that.

Interviewee 3: Better time management, I got more self-confident and learned how to draw a line between my personal life and work. I am also happier at work.

Interviewee 4: Improved work performance, more efficient time management, more structural and clear thinking processes.

Interviewee 5: Communication skills, resilience and self-confidence and increased motivation.

Interviewee 6: Enhanced relationships, increased motivation and increased team effectiveness.

Interviewee 7: Increased work performance

Interviewee 8: Team effectiveness, productivity and better time management.

Interviewee 9: Better relationships (also in my personal life because a lot of things are basic human interactions that I could use there too), more self-confidence and more structured thinking process.

Interviewee 10: Increased motivation, improved work performance and productivity.

Interviewee 11: Better relationships, better vision, more happiness at work and communication skills.

Interviewee 12: Better decision making, better time management and productivity, better relationships

25. Do you have the feeling that you have learned, grown and changed during the coaching process? To what extent?

Interviewee 1: Yes definitely. Overall, I think I became the leader I was supposed to be at this age and when I look back to the mistakes I made in the beginning of my career I wouldn't make

them twice but I think you have to learn and coaching was very supportive during this process. It is very valuable, and I think it is still very underrated.

Interviewee 2: Yes, very much.

Interviewee 3: Yes. I became a lot more self-confident.

Interviewee 4: Yes, convinced in my strength sides and also motivated to “jump over my shadow” and also criticize and talk directly if the performance is not as needed.

Interviewee 5: YES! Stretched my comfort zone a lot.

Interviewee 6: Yes. Executive coaching has taught me to change my perspective on some things and to become more self-confident. Because I better know myself, I can also act better.

Interviewee 7: Yes, to a substantial extent.

Interviewee 8: I have definitely learned and grown. I noticed that on my daily contact with colleagues and what I got more or less as feedback.

Interviewee 9: Yes. It has made me a better person. I am more empathetic and compassionate.

Interviewee 10: Yes, I have grown my skillset and noticed that I am more comfortable in the coaching sessions.

Interviewee 11: Yes. I feel very confident leading people now.

Interviewee 12: Yes. I gained new perspectives on many things.

26. Which skills/behaviors did you feel like you improved the most with executive coaching? Name 3 (**intra-personal** like mindfulness and self-awareness; **inter-personal** like engaging with other, assertive communication; **focus** on performance and self-organization, **leadership** like motivating others, team organization and managing team; **career directions** like more conscious professional and career goals; **adaption to work life** like lower stress levels, job satisfaction)

Interviewee 1: I think I really learned almost 100% personally and professionally to reflect myself and that has something to do with emotional intelligence and that is something we have worked on a lot like on relationships and I believe there is no successful relationship on a personal as well as professional level for example with your employees without mutual respect. That became a really big thing for me. There are also a lot of studies over this subject that show how important emotional intelligence in business is and that you need it to move forward and that is the foundation for everything. Another big topic for me was to actually learn with a big and diverse team so team managing and there my thing was that I always wanted to change the people before because I always thought: if you would change this side or attribute of you a bit, and work on another thing then you could be a really good employee and colleague and wouldn't be so unpopular and go into conflicts with others. And I have learned that this is not how it works. I think as a good leader you should accept everyone how he or she is without criticizing them personally but what you can criticize someone in what he is doing and I think I learned to get more selective in who fits to our company, the team and me but I support to have a very diverse team on all levels, both, professionally as well as personally. I think this is something you have to learn and that is not very easy in practice to have acceptance of true diversity. I think some leaders are making it intuitively correct, but I believe you can coach yourself to it. I think it is very important to have a clear structure, open communication and I wanted to make decisions relatable and understandable for my peers because I believe it is important to see the big picture. Another big outcome for me was that you have to plan and structure your own career. That is something where you have to have a long-term view and I believe it is very valuable to invest into oneself and into coaching.

Interviewee 2: Self-awareness and mindfulness because of that and standing up to others and standing my ground. Being much clearer about what I want and what I don't want and related to that a more focused communication

Interviewee 3: Definitely on an intrapersonal level and adaption to work life balance.

Interviewee 4: Leadership

Interviewee 5: Interpersonal and leadership.

Interviewee 6: Leadership, focus and accountability.

Interviewee 7: For me, especially the team organization as well as leading and motivation has improved. Secondly, I would put self-organization.

Interviewee 8: Intrapersonal, career directions, adaption to work life and leadership.

Interviewee 9: Leadership and interpersonal.

Interviewee 10: All of them but mostly leadership.

27. Did executive coaching help you with something you were surprised of or did not expect?

Interviewee 1: Yes, I remember a situation in the US where we spent 3 weeks for a leadership training and the coach told us to truly be vulnerable during the coaching process but also later in the relationship with your collaborators. And that was something I did not expect because I thought as a leader you have to be strong and you are not allowed to show weaknesses. And I took from it to be honest in a respectful way with my collaborators.

Interviewee 2: Yes, when I started it I was pretty sure that I wanted to quit my job because I was really unhappy in the environment and during the process I kind of changed my perspective to it and managed to consider the environment I was in as a challenge that would help me also to just grow and develop in a way that I found attractive. So, I changed my thinking of wanting to get out and do something else to going in with full speed and a different attitude.

Interviewee 3: Yes. I had no expectations really and was very surprised how well it would work and help me. I was positively surprised how big the effect was.

Interviewee 4: Yes, with always appreciative communication, even if negative things have to be talked about or also when you get unpolite and negative replies, and with a truthful full acceptance of the person in the opposite.

Interviewee 5: No, I was not surprised by anything.

Interviewee 6: Yes. I did not expect that it had such long-term impacts. It really changed me.

Interviewee 7: Yes.

Interviewee 8: Yes, through the coaching I could for example lead team meetings in the way that the team would reach the results I set before. The benefit here was that the team achieved the result and therefore identified themselves with it.

Interviewee 9: Yes, especially leadership and inter-personal.

Interviewee 10: Yes, I did not expect it would make me more enthusiastic and more curious about learning even more.

Interviewee 11: No not really.

Interviewee 12: Yes, I became a lot more self-aware. I did not expect that it has a fundamental impact also on how I am in my personal life.

Leadership Development

28. To what extent were you satisfied with the overall experience of executive coaching in terms of leadership development?

Interviewee 1: It sounds like I'm exaggerating, and I don't want to say it completely changed my life, but It had profound impact and change in my personal life and in my role as a leader and the skills I am having. I learned to see things from a meta level and to put myself above things. For example, I learned time management, or to say no to things. Also, when I have a private project. And also, my communication skills have changed a lot.

Interviewee 2: Very much. I think self-leadership is the prerequisite for leadership. Someone who is leading someone else should first clean up his own mess and that helped me to get much more reflected on my priorities, my values and my vision and vision for life and that was the first step to towards being able to take on responsibilities for someone else.

Interviewee 3: I learned how to lead my team more effectively and to listen better.

Interviewee 4: 98%.

Interviewee 5: 75% satisfied - as theory wasn't as easy to implement into practice.

Interviewee 6: I was very satisfied. For me it was the perfect tool to become a better leader.

Interviewee 7: 90%.

Interviewee 8: Very satisfied.

Interviewee 9: 100%. It definitely helped me in my leadership development.

Interviewee 10: Very.

Interviewee 11: I would recommend it everyone in a leading position. It was very helpful.

Interviewee 12: Very. It changed the way I am approaching leadership.

29. Have you engaged into other leadership development programs before, that were not executive coaching? If yes, would you say it was more or less effective in terms of leadership development than executive coaching? Please justify.

Interviewee 1: No.

Interviewee 2: Not specifically. We had some skill trainings.

Interviewee 3: Yes. I took part in a seminar about leadership that took place on two days on a weekend. It was very interesting, but I liked executive coaching better because I could open up more and it was more private. I feel like it was more focused on me personally and not leadership in general.

Interviewee 4: Yes, I was involved in leadership developments programs – in this case I must say, that executive coaching was more effective, because of single, individual treatment, with focus of the individual personality and needs.

Interviewee 5: Not yet.

Interviewee 6: Yes. I took part in other leadership programs. But I have to say that I liked executive coaching better. I feel like it really helped me with my personal way to become a better leader.

Interviewee 7: No.

Interviewee 8: No.

Interviewee 9: No.

Interviewee 10: Yes, it was less effective. The person training us was not focused at all and that made me less comfortable. Moreover, the standard norms from the company were very strict which made it difficult to work with.

Interviewee 11: No.

Interviewee 12: Yes. It was also very interesting. But it was years ago and if I would have to decide again, I would choose executive coaching.

30. Would you say executive coaching has been an effective developmental tool? If yes based on which evidence? (e.g. confidence, stress level, feedback, self-efficacy etc.)

Interviewee 1: Yes, I think in all terms.

Interviewee 2: Yes.

Interviewee 3: Yes.

Interviewee 4: Yes, because of focusing on individual requests, based on the company-environment. in my case deliver not so popular messages to your team, regarding their performance or other issues.

Interviewee 5: YES! In terms of self-efficacy & time management.

Interviewee 6: Yes. More self-efficacy and self-confidence.

Interviewee 7: Yes, feedback from my teams.

Interviewee 8: Yes, especially in terms of feedback and self-organization.

Interviewee 9: Yes. Increased self-confidence.

Interviewee 10: Yes, in my experience it has great outcomes! It increased a lot of factors like confidence, engagement in the company, positive attitude towards the company and future.

Interviewee 11: Yes. Better self-confidence and knowing myself better.

Interviewee 12: Yes. Better self-confidence and awareness.

31. How has your leadership behavior changed after experiencing executive coaching? Can you give two or three views on that?

Interviewee 1: Already answered.

Interviewee 2: I don't think it changed necessarily but what I think I realized is that you cannot conclude from yourself to others. You need to see that everybody has a different value set or set of priorities so it is really important to kind of talk openly what a good approach is to everyone to do a good job and then meet in the middle and to not assume what's working for me is working for others. I became very aware of that. And that's what I'm applying now also.

Interviewee 3: I learned to be more empathetic.

Interviewee 4: To step back and let someone handle a project, not to interact – just if I will be asked for and that I no longer postpone unpleasant conversations (with employees).

Interviewee 5: More confidence, more clear-mindedness and better time structure.

Interviewee 6: Yes. But also, because it really opened my eyes to become better and that I constantly have to work on myself to be a better leader. I am more open-minded now, more empathetic and try to make everyone in the company work together as a team.

Interviewee 7: Yes.

Interviewee 8: The main change for me was that prior to team discussions or meetings I organized my thoughts. What is the goal, what do I want to achieve and subsequently asked myself: have I reached all my goals, if no, why not?

Interviewee 9: Yes. I managed to build a better relationship with my followers.

Interviewee 10: Communication is very important from every view, and also knowledge about what you offer as a leader.

Interviewee 11: I just started in this position, so I had not much leadership experience before. But I would say the way I approach difficult situations, meetings, discussions etc.

Interviewee 12: I am calmer, understanding and reflect a lot more.

32. Has executive coaching improved your self-efficacy? (The believe/perception regarding your capability to take action and achieve goals) Please justify.

Interviewee 1: Yes, I learned how to deal with outside distractions and how to focus on my goals on a personal or team level. I am thinking a lot about it. For example, corona is an outside distraction, and no one can't deny building now a certain agility and flexibility considering digitalization, and team spirit in home office. I really learned to cope with outside distractions and not to get affected by them so much.

Interviewee 2: Yes definitely.

Interviewee 3: Yes. By learning new methods, I also improved my self-efficacy.

Interviewee 4: It has sharpened my self-awareness: My self-efficacy Guess I know that I take action and that I work and also achieve goals and targets. I am always fighting to get best results.

Interviewee 5: Yes, it facilitated my action-taking process a lot.

Interviewee 6: Yes. I am more confident and structured.

Interviewee 7: Yes, I feel more confident managing my teams now.

Interviewee 8: That is something I don't see because I think that I was always very good at estimating what my strengths and weaknesses were.

Interviewee 9: Yes. I think you have to believe in yourself first. Your followers will see that and do the same.

Interviewee 10: Yes, it made me more comfortable to talk about what I would like to improve or when I am interested in another field in the company for example. It's important to feel comfortable to express yourself as in the end both the company and you benefit from coaching sessions!

Interviewee 11: Yes, I really believe in myself now.

Interviewee 12: Yes.

33. To what extent did you perceive that executive coaching had a fundamental influence of the way you approach work and colleagues?

Interviewee 1: Already answered.

Interviewee 2: Already answered.

Interviewee 3: Already answered.

Interviewee 4: Maybe around 50%, major point is that I don't avoid addressing unpleasant points anymore.

Interviewee 5: More confidence in my field of expertise, increased emotional intelligence and clearer communication skills/ boundaries.

Interviewee 6: Very. I used to get annoyed easily and maybe you could see that, and I let someone feel it. Now I always reflect and show empathy. I communicate also a lot more with my colleagues.

Interviewee 7: To a substantial extent as I am now able to better manage my team and achieve better results together with them.

Interviewee 8: Through the feedback I got and the perceived results.

Interviewee 9: I really identified with the role I was in.

Interviewee 10: I am more enthusiastic about learning things and about helping others around me.

Interviewee 11: It really changed the view on many things, and I am actually using some techniques that the coach used with me with my team members. It had a great impact on me, so I am trying to transfer that knowledge in my team.

Interviewee 12: Yes.

34. Has your motivational behavior towards you followers changed? (e.g. are you giving more individual consideration, inspirational and intellectual motivation, providing a positive and productive work environment, better teamwork, communicating vision...?)

Interviewee 1: Yes, all of them. Especially on motivational communication.

Interviewee 2: I think I'm just clearer. I think I was motivational before also. But I have more clarity in my thoughts, and I think that is a good prerequisite for providing a good environment. Being non-judgmental.

Interviewee 3: Yes.

Interviewee 4: Yes, it has changed – share the vision with them and also formulate clearer their participation part and goals, also motivate them.

Interviewee 5: YES - improved inspirational and intellectual motivation, providing a positive and productive work environment.

Interviewee 6: Yes. I think as I became more motivational myself It has an impact on my followers too.

Interviewee 7: Yes.

Interviewee 8: Of course, it has improved, because better is always possible but I also think that this point has always been one of my strengths.

Interviewee 9: Yes. But I think I'm also a naturally motivating person.

Interviewee 10: Yes, I'm giving more individual consideration and seeing the progress around me gives me more motivation.

Interviewee 11: Yes. One thing I really learned is that individual consideration is very important. People feel more valued when they feel heard and seen and hence are more productive.

Interviewee 12: Yes. I am more motivated in my job which also motivates my employees.

35. Have you become more flexible? (tolerant and open to different views, changing behavior according to different situations)

Interviewee 1: Yes.

Interviewee 2: Yes.

Interviewee 3: Yes. If I learned something that there is not only one solution but rather 2-3 ways. and that the first impression is not always the first way. Sometimes it is more important to reflect for 1-2 days and get an overview over the situation before intervening impulsively. And give your employees more time to and showing confidence into them.

Interviewee 4: Yes.

Interviewee 5: Yes, due to successful executive coaching I learned how to better set my priorities which allowed me much more free time.

Interviewee 6: Yes. I am more open-minded.

Interviewee 7: No, as I was always very tolerant.

Interviewee 8: Yes, but not extremely. But I believe that if a person is being coached accordingly it is possible to increase flexibility.

Interviewee 9: Yes. I learned that everyone is different and needs a different teamwork. Everyone has a different story and you can learn something from everyone. Also, everyone has different reasons to act in a certain way. A good leader has to be flexible for different situations.

Interviewee 10: Yes, different views and adapting to different persons/situations is important and add value to be a better leader in my opinion.

Interviewee 11: Yes.

Interviewee 12: Definitely.

36. Did you get a feedback from colleagues/ followers or the organization that your behavior has changed? In case yes, what was viewed as most noticeable from their end?

Interviewee 1: Yes. One colleague came to me and said: you have really changed in a positive way and I feel like she meant my leadership qualities and that I showed more personality, my appearance and showing confidence. With your personal appearance you can already have a big impact.

Interviewee 2: I think I have grown much over the process and that was also seen by others.

Interviewee 3: Yes, one employee said to me I have really changed in a positive way. That I became more open.

Interviewee 4: Yes, I received feedback – that I am much more open in sharing ideas / visions and that I listen more to their opinion, as well as I active ask them.

Interviewee 5: Yes, that I became more focused on one thing and by simplifying and systemizing some processes, I actually got more creative work done.

Interviewee 6: Yes. Even from my friends and family that said I talk more enthusiastic about work. One of my colleagues also said that I am spreading a nice positive energy lately. Getting this feedback and seeing that people actually see a difference motivated me even more.

Interviewee 7: Yes, positive feedback about better structure in my teams.

Interviewee 8: I perceived it as feedback that there were controversial discussions, but the team result was always carried by everyone.

Interviewee 9: Yes, because I was spreading more positivity and 2 team members said that they like the positivity I'm spreading.

Interviewee 10: Yes, I have heard I am more confident and easier to talk to than in the beginning.

Interviewee 11: Yes. After one meeting one of my team members came to me and said he feels really inspired because of me lately and that he likes working in my team because of that.

Interviewee 12: Yes. A colleague came to me with a problem and I helped him out and he said he really likes how I view things. And I have learned that in executive coaching.

Closing Questions

37. Now that you have passed this experience, as “zero based thinking”, this is if you were going to start a new coaching project... What was in your eyes the most important factor for the executive coaching experience to be successful?

Interviewee 1: The willingness to work on yourself as a leader, to have the reflection of yourself that there is more potential than you use but also the willingness at the beginning of the process to be criticized in a completely honest way.

Interviewee 2: Openness to self-exploration and change which is the first step and then finding a coach where you feel you can open up.

Interviewee 3: You have to really take it seriously and get involved and be open for it. There must be a willingness to change otherwise it does not work. If you're blocking it or don't want to do it is not so beneficial. I also liked that it was tailored exactly to my needs and not generalized.

Interviewee 4: The authenticity of the coach and also the open and valuable exchange of opinions and ways.

Interviewee 5: The relationship with my coach and methods in the process that really fit to my needs.

Interviewee 6: To be open to work on yourself, a good coach and the relationship with the coach.

Interviewee 7: 100% judgement free atmosphere and a universal intention (for all participants, including coach) to become a better version of themselves.

Interviewee 8: To engage into coaching openly and to try to take as much out of it for oneself as possible. Self-reflection is very important to achieve that.

Interviewee 9: To have a coach you can really open up to and that has good experience. To be willing and open to engage fully into the process and go out of your comfort zone.

Interviewee 10: To have guidelines but with enough flexibility to adapt to every person.

Interviewee 11: To be honest and open for change and that the process was individualized.

Interviewee 12: That the coach is confident in his job and has a lot of knowledge, feeling I can trust my coach and my own willingness to work on myself and take the coaching seriously.

38. Is there anything you wished you would do differently or that you would improve for the next time you engage into an executive coaching experience?

Interviewee 1: At the moment no. but what we did was a lot of basic work. But in the future, I would like to specify the aims and targets on what I want to work more concrete and deeper.

Interviewee 2: No.

Interviewee 3: Yes. One session was always one hour and sometimes It was super interesting, and I would have wished I could have extended the lesson on some days. So, to have more flexibility especially of my coach because he was always very strict to one hour sessions.

Interviewee 4: Maybe that the coach is watching you in a specific situation and you don't know that, because than you are much more natural yourself. (Of course, with your agreement in advance).

Interviewee 5: Clearer goal-setting from the very beginning to know what I can expect and need to prepare myself for.

Interviewee 6: No not really.

Interviewee 7: No.

Interviewee 8: Yes. What I could not experience was that the coach would accompany me in my daily work. I think that would help personally.

Interviewee 9: No. I would definitely do it again.

Interviewee 10: To ask previous coaches about their experience and see if there is something to improve before just starting yourself and find out.

Interviewee 11: No.

Interviewee 12: Yes. I sometimes would have loved to call my coach immediately when a certain situation occurred and not wait for 2 weeks until I can work with him on that.

39. Would you say, based on your experience, that executive coaching is a good developmental tool for managers to be better leaders? Please justify your answer and name the 3 top areas you find it to be mostly beneficial.

Interviewee 1: Definitely yes. I would say again self-reflection because I think this is what leads you to true greatness as a leader and your whole path. Getting the best out of your team and not being afraid to make mistakes.

Interviewee 2: Yes, definitely. I think it is really good for improving leadership but also self-awareness and work-life balance through that and in general happiness in life.

Interviewee 3: I can definitely recommend it to everyone who is in a leading or management position. I think it also depends of your personality but in general I believe that It can help everyone. It was a great experience and I learned a lot.

Interviewee 4: Yes, because it is proven that as a leader you never get real, true feedback and there is less chance to work on your “blind spot”. – area of self-awareness. Area of self-efficacy combined with communication – to find the “right words” in any situation. Communication – as a wave-game from active listening and communicating. To focus on the listening part.

Interviewee 5: Yes! It’s a powerful cross-section of personal and professional development.

Interviewee 6: Yes! I think the 3 top areas are leadership in general, general increased motivation and happiness and communication.

Interviewee 7: Yes, most beneficial to effectively form teams, create a sense of belonging and make your team feel heard in order to bring out each member's strengths in the best way possible.

Interviewee 8: Definitely. Self-reflection, self-organization and team organization.

Interviewee 9: Yes. Self-awareness and reflection, better leadership in general, communication.

Interviewee 10: Yes, I think it is important to build a relationship with the employees and to know where they would like to go/improve. Moreover, with clear communication and making the employees feel comfortable the productivity and team bond will improve.

Interviewee 11: Yes! More self-awareness, better vision for myself and communicating vision to others, becoming more open-minded.

Interviewee 12: Definitely. You get to know yourself better which is always good to know where you have to improve. It increased overall job satisfaction and getting a better feeling for people.

40. Is there something you feel like sharing with me about your executive coaching experience that I haven't covered with my questions?

Interviewee 1: It's a true and great investigation into corporate performance because the leaders are the people that bring the teams and themselves to a whole other level through coaching and I think it is also important to say that not just the results but also the way you get those become better. And I have noticed that work is more fun, the relations to your team get better, everything goes more at ease it is more fun and at the same time the results get better. And with respect to these factors it is always a good investigation to do coaching.

Interviewee 2: No

Interviewee 3: No

Interviewee 4: In my eyes depends the success also form the experience and personality of the coach and his understanding the workflow and requirements.

Interviewee 5: No

Interviewee 6: No

Interviewee 7: No

Interviewee 8: I would put more attention on the effects of the team because a leader is only as good as his team. If I strengthen the team, I strengthen myself. There is a saying that says: Always hire people that are stronger than yourself.

Interviewee 9: No

Interviewee 10: No

Interviewee 11: No

Interviewee 12: No