Executive Coaching: What Is the Experience Like for Executive Women?

A DISSERTATION

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF THE GRADUATE SCHOOL

OF THE UNIVERSITY OF MINNESOTA

BY

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IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE OF

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

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March, 2009

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

As I reach the completion of this challenging journey, I reflect upon the help, encouragement, and support of so many wonderful people.

I am so appreciative of my advisor, Dr. Gary McLean, for his knowledge and expert guidance of this work. His relentless expectations for excellence have taught me many lessons that apply far beyond this doctoral dissertation. I would like to give special thanks to my committee members. I appreciate the time and valuable insights from Dr. Jim Brown, Dr. Brad Greiman, and Dr. John Romano.

And I am so thankful to the organizations that cared about this inquiry and opened their doors. This study would not have been possible without the executives who generously gave of their time and experience.

My love and gratitude go to my husband for his unwavering support of me and my dream to complete my dissertation, as inconvenient, lonely, and taxing as it was at times. And to my family and friends, thank you for understanding and supporting me throughout this journey.

Abstract

This hermeneutic phenomenological study attempted to provide a better understanding of the experiences of executive women who had been coached by an external executive coach. Ten executive women who worked for different organizations and had a wide variety of coaching experiences were interviewed. These executives were located through the *Dun & Bradstreet Directory* and referrals from executive coaches. They shared both personal and professional stories, reflections, feelings, ideas, and actions related to being coached.

I conducted a thematic analysis of the transcribed interviews to discover commonalities and synergies among participants' experiences. A list of preliminary themes emerged, and I conducted a follow-up interview with each participant to verify the findings. Themes were revised to incorporate their comments and reflect their meanings.

The analysis revealed insights into four categories of themes: (a) why coaching, (b) role of the coach, (c) insight to action, and (d) outcomes. A total of seventeen themes emerged: (a) feeling alone and wanting help, and motivated by challenge and growth; (b) coach is trusted, a professional, a guide, strengthens me, and expects action; (c) self-discovery and awareness, emotions, commitment to development process, challenges to thinking, tools guide action, and different actions get better results; and (d) being more effective with people, work life balance, how to work with my boss, and gender based workplace differences and challenges. The literature supported most themes; however, new insights were added.

Listening to the voice of these executive women added new perspectives to the coaching literature. Some new insights were that they sought coaching as a way to open themselves up to more challenge and growth, rather than to make behavioral changes. They also felt alone at the top, wanted some help, and felt strengthened by the coach to take different actions. And feelings about coaching and learning were important in the process. While the literature recognized the importance of organization support for executive coaching, it was glaringly absent in these executives' experiences. Coaching outcomes that were a priority for these executives included work/life balance and how to work with her boss, another difference from the literature. And, lastly, the workplace context for coaching provided gender-based differences and challenges that were not discussed in the coaching literature but were found in the women's studies literature.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Executive coaching is often highly rated by participants for self-development and has been reported by them to be an effective means of improving business results, while also contributing to their executive development (Hall, Otazo, & Hollenbeck, 1999). It is a strategy that variously emphasizes skill building, performance, development, and the executive's agenda (Witherspoon & White, 1996).

Executive coaching has become increasingly widespread, with no signs of decreasing use, and its popularity is in response to workplace demands (Joo, 2005; Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001; Kilburg, 1996). Within the last twenty years, consultation activities with senior leaders have been increasingly referred to as executive coaching. Joo (2005) stated that coaching has become part of a significant human resource development (HRD) strategy within many organizations. Within the field of HRD, coaching is seen as a particular intervention different from consulting, although it has appeared to some psychologists to be a repackaging of certain practices that were once subsumed under the general terms of consulting or counseling (Kilburg, 1996; Tobias, 1996).

> Coaching is meant to be a practical, goal-focused form of personal, one-on-one learning for busy executives and may be used to improve performance or executive behavior, enhance a career or prevent derailment, and work through organizational issues or change initiatives. (Hall et al., 1999, p. 40)

Coaching is about individually helping executives to learn and to make the most of that learning; it is about learning, growing, and changing (Witherspoon & White, 1996).

The literature is abundant when describing what executive coaching is and various authors' and coaches' views about how to coach. The practice of executive coaching is well-established; however, the empirical evidence underlying whether it does what it proposes, and why, how, or for whom remains unknown (Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001; Kilburg, 1996). Kilburg's executive coaching literature review (1996) clustered information into research studies, articles emphasizing methods, techniques or applications, and manager as coach. Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson (2001) provided a comprehensive executive coaching literature review that was critically examined from the views of psychology, training and development, and management disciplines. Their purpose was to determine the viability of executive coaching as a distinct intervention. Joo (2005) reviewed coaching research and articulated a conceptual framework. One suggestion he made for future research included a phenomenological approach that would examine the perspective of the executives, as most case studies were based on the perspectives of the coach.

Educated and talented women are going to become a competitive resource for companies in the coming years. Demographic trends indicate that there is a large movement of women entering the workforce; in the U.S., it is expected that by 2014 women will account for 47% of the total workforce (U.S. Dept of Labor, 2007). Recent demographic data on female and male managers and professionals indicate both progress and continued imbalance in the proportion of working women in leader roles. "Hiring, developing and promoting women into leadership positions can be one of the most useful strategies an organization can adopt to succeed in an increasingly globalized and uncertain economy" (Northouse, 2001, p. 269). To the degree that women are

underutilized in leadership roles, organizations undermine an important source of competitive advantage (Northouse, 2001)

Purpose, Need, and Justification of the Study

The purpose of this study is to gain a deeper understanding of the experiences of executive women regarding their executive coaching experiences. Research on executive coaching has largely focused on the coaching process and is far more limited when describing coaching as experienced by executives (Sztucinski, 2001); no research could be located that describes the coaching experiences of executive women.

The coaching literature within the last 15 years has described executive coaching conducted by white men with white male executives. As one interviewee shared from one of the few executive coaching research studies, "The fact that the pool of executives and the pool of coaches we have to draw from are so heavily white male, that's probably what you're going to get in most coaching relationships" (Hall et al., 1999, p. 47). Wasylyshyn (2003) conducted a coaching outcome study with executive participants; 85% of them were male. This study sought a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of executive coaching through the voices of executive women sharing their experiences.

One executive coaching study (Ballinger, 2000) had some unanticipated findings that point to potential gender differences within the coaching experience. This study looked at the self-perceptions of individuals and investigated the factors in the coaching that were most important in leading to behavior change for developmental or remedial purposes. While there were no differences between the types of behavioral change, women rated all coaching factors and all items associated with the value of the coaching experience significantly higher than men did. The only two areas that were not

significantly rated higher by women were related to support from the individual's boss or organization—which were rated significantly higher by men.

Research specifically focused on women and their experiences are under-represented in the literature (Mallon & Cassell, 1999). As an example, leadership development specialists at the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) looked for research literature on how to be a woman leader but found "a supposedly generic literature on career development based on the experience of white males. We wanted something deeper that went beyond career choices and traditional paths for men" (Ruderman & Ohlott, 2002, p. xiii). As a result, they conducted extensive research with their women's leadership program participants. Five key themes were uncovered that were deemed essential to guiding executive women's development today—the need to act authentically, make connections, control one's destiny, achieve wholeness, and gain self-clarity (Ruderman & Ohlott, 2002). Often, one or more of these elements are present within executive coaching programs (Hall et al., 1999; Sztucinski, 2001; Turner, 2003; Wasylyshyn, 2003). Executive coaching may be experienced differently by women than men.

Over the past twenty-some years, researchers of women leaders and managers have built a large body of literature addressing fundamental questions about whether women can be leaders, why so few women leaders reach the top, and whether male and female leaders differ in their behavior and effectiveness in organizations (Northouse, 2004). Findings have consistently suggested that

> male and female leaders differ in the lengths to which they must go to be promoted, in the need to adapt their behavior at work, in the amount of support

> they tend to receive at work, and in the impact of family variables on career advancement. (Northouse, 2001, p. 272)

Bem (1993) identified assumptions about sex and gender in cultural and social institutions and how they are perpetuated within individual psyches. She named these implicit assumptions lenses of gender, as they shape how people perceive social reality, along with their constitution in concrete ways, such as unequal pay. Naming the gender lenses is useful in making us aware that they exist and looking at it, rather than through it. The lens of androcentrism, or male-centeredness, defines "males and male experience as a neutral standard or norm, and females and female experience as a sex-specific deviation from that norm" (Bem, 1993, p. 2). Androcentrism describes how males' power is culturally and psychologically reproduced; it is the privileging of male experience and otherizing of female experience (Bem, 1993).

A study exploring how women executives experience the coaching process is important for several reasons. There are no identified studies that have sought to understand the perspective of women executives and their coaching experiences. Second, this study will give executives and human resource professionals a better understanding of the executive coaching experience from the perspective of women executives who have participated in the process. Third, it may aid "practice theory" (Vaill, 1989; Weisbord, 1991) or "theory-in-use" (Argyris, 1982) by increasing executive coaches' understanding of what women executives experience during coaching and may lead them to modify or adapt their methodology as a result. Last, it will contribute to the narrow base on executive coaching by sharing an understanding of the woman executive's

experience so that further qualitative and quantitative investigations may be conducted in the future.

Research Question

Hermeneutic phenomenology provides the appropriate methodology for this study as it involves an interpretive, naturalistic approach to the world; it is concerned with human relationships and social understanding and permits the hermeneutic interpretation and understanding of human action (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Palmer, 1969). "A theory of understanding is most relevant to hermeneutics when it takes lived experience, the event of understanding, as its starting point" (Palmer, 196, p. 68). This study is well suited to a hermeneutic phenomenological methodology as the study's focus is on describing the meaning of coaching for women executives who have experienced this phenomenon. Van Manen (1990) described phenomenology as fundamentally asking, "What is this or that experience like?" (p. 9), and its objective is to understand the meaning and nature of the everyday experience. "Phenomenological research tries to describe an experience from the point of view of the experiencer, and in the process, it hopes to achieve awareness of different ways of thinking and acting" (Hultgren, 1989, p. 51).

Using hermeneutic phenomenology as a methodology, I intended to develop deeper understanding of the lived experiences of executive women and learn about their coaching experiences through written text derived from interviews. This research will address the following question: What has the executive coaching experience been like for executive women?

Researcher's History and Perspective

The researcher needs to reflect deeply on his or her own life's journey when conducting a phenomenological study. Through this process, it enables the researcher to connect deeply with the participants to uncover the meanings of their coaching experiences. It is important to reveal my own perspective and history with regard to working in organizations, coaching, being coached, and conducting executive coaching.

I graduated with a Master's degree in Training and Development from the University of Minnesota and was employed for eight years as an internal organization development (OD) consultant in a variety of positions for Honeywell, Inc. I was accepted into the PhD program in Work and Human Resource Education and continued to take courses while I was employed there.

I worked in the largest division of the company, military avionics. It was engineering and manufacturing focused, with the armed forces being its customer. It was male-dominated. The vast majority of executives were male in the senior and mid-level ranks, with an occasional female leading a support function. My work consumed a significant portion of my life and was a major factor in shaping my identity, personally as well as professionally. The company valued professional development, and I continued to grow beyond my academic courses. I was exposed to many opportunities to work with reputable professionals both inside and outside the company. The OD projects were substantive, and they were the professional envy of colleagues. While employed in Honeywell and afterwards, I regularly had colleagues comment about how fortunate I was to be working in an organization that "got OD." had resources, had interesting projects I was doing, and provided meaningful work. Many colleagues were primarily in a training role, not OD, and wanted to do OD work. I was energized, engaged,

challenged, valued, and felt like I contributed in significant ways. I affectionately refer to my work experience at that organization in terms of dog years; I gained seven years' worth of learning within each year. However, the economy and markets shifted, and the organization's OD emphasis turned to downsizing and cost cutting measures rather than developing people.

I moved to Jostens, a medium-sized company, as the manager of organization effectiveness and was there for three years. The company was focused on sales and marketing. It, too, was primarily led by male executives in senior and mid-level ranks. The OD challenges were primarily around leading systems changes and integrating HRD work across the seven divisions. The senior leadership and culture were resistant to change, and several of the programs I was responsible for leading and implementing were not wanted by the functional leaders. In a downsizing and re-organization shuffle, I accepted a severance package and left.

I talked to individual OD consultants and collected feedback about being an external consultant. I transitioned my role from internal to external, and for several years I did some interesting OD consulting projects for a variety of clients. I have been an adjunct faculty member at the University of St. Thomas teaching leadership development in a mini-MBA program.

When speaking to a previous manager and senior mentor, she suggested that I check out executive coaching and get certified to do so—that large organizations were beginning to inquire into and require specific training in coaching. She said that coaching was the latest trend; it was an effective way to work with executives, which I would be good at it, it would make good use of my skills, and there is good money in doing it. I

talked to several other colleagues I respected from other large organizations and learned about their use of executive coaching and the models or certifications they respected. As a result of my conversations, I researched a professional coaching certificate program that was also accredited by the International Coach Federation (ICF), the self-appointed but recognized coaching discipline oversight group.

The coaching certificate course curriculum was rigorous. A three-day coaching course prerequisite, Coaching for Excellence, was required prior to applying to the program. I took it and then applied to take the Professional Coaching Certificate program, or PCC, through New Ventures West out of San Francisco, CA, and was accepted. The certificate program was a year-long course consisting of four on-site four-day sessions. The founder of the school, James Flaherty, is a well-known and respected executive coach; he led the course. Between-session assignments were substantive and consisted of reading ten specified books and writing book report and reflection assignments; daily 20-minute meditation practice; daily journaling about specific topics; and participating in a year-long weekly small group learning experience. Also, I was to seek an experience and become coached in it (I chose swimming lessons), so that I could experience coaching from the perspective of the coachee. And for three months I was to coach three or more clients and write up each of the cases for review and instructor feedback. In order to receive my certificate, I also needed to conduct a coaching session with a volunteer from the San Francisco area who wanted to receive coaching—this was in front of an expert panel of coaches. After much work, I received my coaching certificate.

I continued my learning about doing coaching. In addition to completing the PCC work, I initiated a coaching case supervision group with six graduates and the instructor

because I felt as if I was just learning how to coach; I was certainly not finished. This experience consisted of coaching case monthly conversations about our individual, specific coaching cases that we wrote up and sent to the group prior to the conversations. Later, I served as an outside resource to coaches in training and helped them with case consultation, assessment, and assignments. The coaching school requires that, in order to retain certification, annual continuing education or coaching case write ups be submitted to the school.

The coaching model I was trained in describes itself as an ontological, phenomenological approach to working with clients. The main premise is that the coach needs to work with the client where s/he is at and to understand the individual's structure of interpretation. Coaching interventions help individuals by providing powerful distinctions that allow an individual to see their way of being, or behaviors, in new ways so that they are able to make different choices. Assessment tools are not to be used, as the skill of the coach with the client is the assessment. Measurement tools, according to this model, prevent a coach from being with and seeing the client and get in the way of the work.

I learned a tremendous amount from the PCC course experiences. I was exposed to a coaching methodology that appeared quite simple and yet was complex. As a result of the coaching course I recognized that my consulting skills were strongly entrenched in my approach to working with clients. When working with clients as a coach, I learned that my tendency to jump into problem solving mode rather than coaching the client decreased my effectiveness. In addition, I learned that the most important way to coach is to work from the client's perspective and position rather than from my own agenda or

schedule for what is supposed to happen. Having patience in working through client resistance is another ongoing learning area for me as a coach. I learned how to deepen my ability to be effective one-on-one with executives, which applies whether it is within a specific OD project as a consultant or as a coach.

My approach to coaching has expanded beyond the specific methodology I learned, and I have adapted some other processes as I have worked with different clients. I occasionally incorporate some assessments, particularly an emotional intelligence tool. Organizational clients are inclined to want to purchase an engagement or package, indicating a particular amount of time. At times I have combined a consultative, expertise component in addition to coaching. And coaching can include some phone conversations rather than exclusively in-person, both a time and cost savings.

In addition to my experiences while taking the professional coaching certification course, the only other consultative services labeled coaching I have purchased from an external source has been from tennis coaches. While they are called coaches, they do not perform the role of an external coach as one does in executive coaching. However, as a result of my coaching background and experiences, I have appreciated their teaching and assistance more than I did prior to taking the PCC. I recognize how specific comments and feedback made to me while participating in a tennis drill are not teaching points generic to the lesson as I had previously thought but are specific to what they know about me and how I play.

After completing my coach certification program, I coached several individuals whose organizations paid my fees. One of my early clients was Lisa, a female executive from a mid-sized firm, the COO turning to CEO. We met bi-monthly in-person for

almost a year. Working with her was enjoyable, engaging, and challenging. It was rewarding to hear about how she followed through on assignments and the small wins. Some of the frustrations came from my ownership of the agenda, questioning whether her not following through was about my abilities or whether it was about her or her commitments. Lisa was already skillful in many areas. Her executive coaching program was more about enhancing her effectiveness rather than developing it from nothing. Five years after working with the client, just recently I had dinner with the company owner and shared my dissertation topic with him. He said that Lisa enjoyed working with me, learned a lot, and really benefited from the coaching. I interpreted this conversation to convey that my executive coaching work with her made a lasting, positive impact on her and that it had been successful.

My work as a coach and OD consultant continued, my curiosity expanded, and I continued my learning about the field of coaching. I engaged in conversations with colleagues, clients, and potential clients who had a wide array of opinions and questions about executive coaching: what was it, who was it for, how was it done, how did it compare with consulting? I was exposed to different perspectives about coaching and did some investigating into other coaching approaches, processes, and underlying philosophies. Two psychologist friends and two HRD colleagues became certified in different coaching programs than the one in which I was certified. We had many conversations about their respective schools' approaches to coaching. We shared coaching processes and practical applications with clients. I participated in and attended several Minnesota Coach Association meetings and networked with those who were coaches or learning to be a coach. I looked online at several ICF accredited coaching

school programs and tried to understand the different philosophical and theoretical frameworks that were supporting the methods and processes espoused by different programs, although they often were not stated.

My career as an internal and external OD consultant, and, more recently, as an executive coach, has been rich and fulfilling, and I have worked with a wide variety of men and women. I have learned so much about working in large and small corporations and have thoroughly enjoyed learning about individual and organization development while being able to implement and practice the profession. I have also facilitated several year-long business owner roundtables for executive women as an adjunct faculty member for St. Catherine College and have become familiar with the rhythms and challenges of women business owners, many of which are not different from managers and leaders in large organizations.

I have realized that the expertise I have developed is valued by others, whether it is strategizing about organization strategy and design, planning and implementing large scale changes, enhancing team effectiveness, or working in a coaching capacity one-on-one to enhance individual leaders' effectiveness. When I have worked with leaders on their professional development, most are interested, providing they can extract meaning and usefulness from it. I find it most effective when individuals are looking to solve a problem, rather than achieve a goal. A standard, one-size-fits all approach of professional development work with leaders is not effective, yet I find there is consistency among the types of developmental topics likely to be useful in particular situations. Professional and personal lives are intertwined into the fabric of a person, and that helps shape an individual's uniqueness and how that person is present. I think people in corporations and

business owners alike find it challenging being a leader and trying to do the right thing, and these stresses take a toll on the individual and can have a spillover effect on the organization as well as their personal lives. Most leaders I've talked with find that managing people often adds layers of complexity into their role, and dealing with people issues causes more concern than other problems. Many leaders appreciate having someone help them see situations in a new way, provide new skills, or to listen to them whether as a sounding board or advice giver when dealing with problems.

I have experienced my life as a woman, and I attribute some professional encounters as a result of my gender. I think that some of the situations I have experienced are similar to those of other women, whether they are noticeable or so much a part of daily life that they no longer stand out as unusual. One vivid memory is when I was in my first position at Honeywell and participated as part of a team of internal cross-functional improvement consultants with senior managers, all male, and we were traveling across the country, leading several day workshops in different divisions. We arrived in Seattle, WA, and when our group first met with the general manager of that division, he shook everyone's hands except he embraced me and gave me a kiss, instead. I can still feel the shock of that moment and have pondered what he might have been thinking (or not) at that time.

Another example from my early professional days that may or may not be attributed to my gender was when a well-respected and loved senior OD colleague suggested I shift my communication style. She said that, when I am working with men, I should soften how I make statements and instead use more tentative phrases, like "maybe" and "perhaps," and to use a less authoritative stance and gestures; she said a

direct and straight-forward way was not as effective, and I would be more influential being more "casual" and "softer." It is possible that the military technical culture in which I worked, and expectations of a person in the support role I performed, along with my age, were the influential factors dictating my communication style more so than my gender; I am not certain.

I have noticed that there are several leadership development companies that specifically target executive women as clients; coaching is often a component of the programming. My impression is that some women like such an approach and think it is an effective tool for enhancing skills, while others may value it but choose not to invest in themselves. I think there is a large and growing market for executive coaching, particularly with women. As executive coaching is a phenomenon that is socially constructed, I think women might be more open than men to the idea of getting assistance from others and enjoy the verbal exchanges in processing experiences and learning. My question remains: what is it like to be coached? What can we learn about the experiences of executive women being coached?

Definitions

Key words related to this study are defined in this section.

Executives

Executives are senior-level managers responsible for carrying out duties, leading functions and managing staffs in for-profit organizations. In this study, nine out of ten executives had position titles of director or higher.

Executive Coaching

Executive coaching is a one-to-one, individually tailored development process formally contracted between an external coach and a management-level client to help

achieve goals related to professional development within a business context (Kilburg, 1996; 2000; Peterson, 1993; Tobias, 1996). It provides new insights, principles, strategies, tactics, and skills to improve the effectiveness and performance of individuals at work. The process of coaching using critical reflective approaches can yield dynamic growth in a manager's thinking capacity, judgment, and decision making (Gray, 2006). Executive coaching can be quite helpful as part of a larger consulting effort and might include any of the following: executive assessment, development, and planning programs; managerial skill development, such as performance management and communications; consulting to help build organization values, vision, mission, and strategy; building and improving the effectiveness of executive teams; conflict resolution; and change leadership (Stern, 2004).

Formal Mentoring

An organizational "mechanism to address the inequalities that women face" (Blake-Beard, 2001, p. 332), these programs are externally directed and involve matched pairs between a mentor and mentee. Pairs usually include a more senior manager as the mentor and the mentee is less senior and seeking learning and career support. Often these relationships are of shorter duration and specifically contracted, including meeting frequency and location, and involve goal setting in the beginning of the relationship (Blake-Beard, 2001).

Managerial Coaching

Managerial coaching is a process over time of managers helping employees develop themselves to become more effective. There are multiple techniques in which

managers use everyday situations to help employees improve and maximize their potential (Parks, 2007).

Summary

In this chapter I described the importance and the need of gaining a deeper understanding of executive women's experience of executive coaching. Previous literature in the field has concentrated mostly on coaching processes, rather than understanding the perspective of the executive being coached. I advanced the idea of the need to explore the experiences of executive women when being coached by an external executive coach. As the workplace becomes more diversified and more women are in senior leadership roles, their experiences become valuable information that can help organizations and HRD professionals to serve their future needs and still be competitive.

Hermeneutic phenomenology requires complete involvement of the researcher in the research process itself. Therefore, I shared my personal history and perspectives about working in organizations and what led me to coaching. My personal experiences have enabled me to connect better with the participants of this study and provided a context for the reader to understand my interpretations and conclusions.

Chapter 2 provides an overview of the literature I reviewed while formulating my research question. Chapter 3 describes the hermeneutic phenomenology methodology and its attendant methods. I describe how I analyzed the text from the interviews. It also describes information on participants and assumptions I made about the phenomenon under investigation. The study's themes are reported in Chapter 4 and Chapter 5. Chapter 6 describes the results of the post-analysis literature review and how it relates to the themes that emerged from the text analysis. Finally, Chapter 7 summarizes the study,

includes my own reflections, suggests recommendations for practice, and makes recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER 2

RESEARCH AND LITERATURE REVIEW

In keeping with strong interpretive guidelines for inductive research, a literature review of executive coaching was done to frame the study (Creswell, 1994) and demonstrate why it is important and timely. Little has been written about executive coaching and what exists in the scholarly literature is sparse at best. Further, there has been little written sharing the executive's perspective and even less research has examined the phenomenon of the executive's experience with coaching in descriptive depth. This study will help to fill this gap through a phenomenological approach by exploring how the executive woman experiences executive coaching. In this chapter I introduce a few perspectives on gender, research about women in the workplace and their development in the executive role. I then provide an overview of executive coaching, comparisons with a few developmental interaction interventions, theoretical foundations of coaching, and selected research results focused on perspectives from coaching clients.

Perspectives on Gender

"Relatively little attention has been given to modes of learning, knowing, and valuing that may be specific to, or at least common in, women" (Belenky, Clinchy, Goldberger & Tarule, 1986, p. 6). The pattern of using male experience to define the human experience is seen in many areas, but most prevalently in models of intellectual development (Belenky et al., 1986). Feminist scholars have argued that adult psychology and development theories were based on research on men and, inappropriately, were adopted as standard resulting in women's paths being either ignored or deviant (Bierema, 1999; Gersick & Kram, 2002; Miller, 1976). Scholars are now specifically studying women within the fields of human development, psychology and other disciplines. When

the woman's voice is included, insights are obtained and transform our understanding of these areas. When scientific findings, theory and even basic assumptions "are reexamined through the lens of women's perspectives and values, new conclusions can be drawn and new directions forged that have implications for the lives of both men and women" (Belenky et al., 1986, p. 9).

Williams (2000) stated that organizations define the ideal worker as someone who prioritizes work above all other needs in life. She argued organizational systems of advancement are based on traditional life patterns of men, the married male manager and not the traditional life pattern of women, who have been the primary caregivers. An additional perspective of Meyerson and Fletcher (2000) stated that gender inequity is a characteristic of modern organizations and one in which a particular view of masculinity shapes the culture and norms. "It is true that the very ways we find to conceptualize experience are in large measure given to us by the culture in which we learn 'how to think and feel,' or even learn what thinking and feeing are" (Miller, 1976, p. 112). Miller (1976) suggested that for women to act and react out of their own being, that is in opposition to their appointed definition and prescribed way of living, that of a lower-caste individual and in a subservient fashion.

A full discussion of the importance and influence of gender dynamics and their permeation into society and the workplace is beyond the scope of this paper. However, whatever form it exists in today's culture does impact an executive woman's experience and may permeate her experience of executive coaching as well.

Women in the Workplace

Women assuming more and varied roles in the workplace can be traced back to the aggressive recruitment of women to address manpower shortages during World War II. Within a generation, a huge divide opened up between working women and their mothers. Working women often lacked mentors and role models to guide them in facing their work issues, and it has been noted as a possible reason why women began seeking answers in the human sciences. Moreover, the growing women's movement in the 1970's began to express a demand for managerial training and coaching to help them learn to assume their responsibilities (Falla, 2006).

> Before the mass entrance of women into the workplace beginning in the late 1960's, leadership was predominantly a masculine province. Though one could point to isolated cases of influential women, no model of leadership was constructed based upon their qualities and characteristics. Most often, these women were qualified as 'exceptional,' making it clear that they were not the norm. Even more to the point, women who aspired to become leaders in their fields in the 1960's and 1970's were pressed to follow the masculine model of leadership. Thus, no feminized model of executive leadership emerged, and even today women executives remain constrained by leadership characteristics that are other-gender specific. (Falla, 2006, p. 14)

"Although women have gained access to virtually every line of work and many have advanced to certain levels in organizations, their access to senior positions remains limited" (Wentling, 1996, p. 254). Women are getting into organizations, and now there are many women in middle management jobs. (Blake-Beard, 2001; Ruderman & Ohlott, 2002; Wentling, 1996).

Research about Executive Women

An executive coach in New York City ponders whether the women in executive positions who come to her think they've hit the glass ceiling or whether it is something personal about them. An executive client of hers stated

> After about a year, I began to realize that I didn't know how to play the game the way the boys played it. There were tensions with some of the other executives, and I found it hard to act as if I were their equal, because I didn't feel as if I were. (Wheeler, 1995, p. 49)

Little research has been specifically conducted about executive women. In the 1980's women were focused on fitting in male cultures and breaking through organizational barriers. Now, women spend more time on their lifestyle choices associated with their managerial careers and about how to be a woman leader (Ruderman & Ohlott, 2002). While it is positive that more women are in the workforce and in managerial roles, "we still know far more about helping men develop as managers than about helping women in this male-oriented environment" (Ruderman & Ohlott, 2002, p. 4). An exploratory study clarifying central tasks of high-achieving women (Gersick & Kram, 2002) revealed that these women struggled through figuring out their identity and resultant choices which were embedded within their lives, not exclusively those specific to work. This finding was similar to what previous feminist theorists described, and that is the difficulty for women to learn who they are and make choices based on their understanding (Belenky, et al., 1986; Gersick & Kram, 2002; Ruderman & Ohlott, 2002). Miller (1976) stated the crucial challenge for women is to claim their own needs and by doing so would move toward authenticity. Another study of executive women's

development defined their organizational contexts as male-centered (Bierema, 1999) and challenging to maneuver through.

Knorr (2006) reviewed the literature on women's career advancement and concluded that the implementation of organizational policies to enhance women's development was important in developing their careers, although it requires serious commitment from the companies to take actions and create programs that support the policies. Knorr (2006) stated top management support was found to be among the factors that contributed to women's career success. And Catalyst (1990) suggested organization's initiatives were more likely to be taken seriously and implemented if the CEO recognized the need and paid attention to the advancement of women.

Men and women who have risen into senior management levels credit the nature and quality of their relationships with others as a key element in doing so (Lyness & Thompson, 2000; Schor, 1997). However, career-enhancing relationships for men and women were found to be quite dissimilar in a matched comparison study (Schor, 1997). Schor suggested that having a high-level male mentor who fulfilled a wide variety of roles had been crucial for the women, but only 50% of the men indicated that a mentor played a role in their career success, often being their immediate boss. Mentoring is probably most often noted as a specific career advancement strategy that can be most helpful to women managers and minority executives. Women must piece together the help they get from both senior male managers in the form of career assistance or instrumental help and psychosocial help predominantly from women family members, friends and colleagues (Gersick & Kram, 2002; Kram, 1983; Schor, 1997).

Lyness and Thompson (2000) examined whether men and women executives climb the corporate ladder similarly. Matched pairs of 69 male and 69 female executives' careers were compared, encompassing perceived barriers and facilitators of advancement, self-reported developmental experiences, and career histories.

> Women reported greater barriers, such as lack of culture fit and being excluded from informal networks, and greater importance of having a good track record and developing relationships to facilitate advancement than did men. Career success, measured by organizational level and compensation, was positively related to breadth of experience and developmental assignments for both genders, but successful women were less likely than successful men to report that mentoring facilitated their advancement. Developmental experiences and career histories were similar for female and male executives, but men had more overseas assignments and women had more assignments with nonauthority relationships. (Lyness & Thompson, 2000, p. 86)

Much of the mentoring literature states that mentoring relationships include both career advancement activities and psychosocial support, usually between individuals at different levels within an organization (Roemer, 2002). However, the definitions of traditional mentoring are expanding to include both formal and informal. In fact, Gibson (2004) conducted an historical review of the mentoring literature in business and industry and found no consistent definition of mentoring or its roles or functions. And while there is a high degree of interest in the concept and practice of mentoring (Blake-Beard, 2001; Gersick & Kram, 2002; Gibson, 2004; Knorr, 2006; Schor, 1997), similar to coaching, Gibson (2004) suggested that gaining a deeper understanding of the essential attributes of

mentoring using a phenomenological approach would be useful in implementing more effective mentoring programs. She argued that a phenomenological approach to researching the mentoring experience would recognize the holistic nature and complexity of the mentoring experience.

Recent Historical Context of Coaching

Multiple dynamics influencing the use of coaching have been in play in the most recent 25 years of turbulent corporate change, global competition, mergers, downsizing, outplacement, and shift in corporate loyalty. In the early 1980's, during rampant corporate downsizing,

> the coaching of junior executives by senior executives (what was generally referred to as mentoring) disappeared. Both senior and junior executives found themselves dealing with chaos in isolation. Executives were expected to be more and more productive with fewer and fewer resources (Falla, 2006, p. 3)

Also in the 1980's, leadership development programs began to become more focused on the needs of individual executives (Hudson 1999). The focus included intrapersonal and interpersonal domains, including individual responses to change that might help them not only to adapt, but also to excel in an ever-changing world. "The trend toward coaching was accelerated by the need for human caring and daring"(Hudson, 1999, p. 4). With the highly competitive war for talent that began in the 1990's, the perceived need for coaching began to explode (Flaherty, 1999; Hudson, 1999).

Corporations first hired coaches to groom senior leaders and work with problem managers to improve their performance. Throughout the 1980's and into the early-1990's, many individuals who participated in executive coaching were doing so in an attempt to address shortcomings. The commonly held view was that while the individuals

were talented, they were faltering in either skills, performance, or both (Peterson, 2002). With the decrease in the mentoring and downsizing reverberations, counseling and later coaching became a critical resource for executives and corporations alike.

Now, however, the earlier assumption that coaching is exclusively for problem managers is no longer held. Executive coaching is taking on a positive, proactive tone. Increasingly, the view is that it is desirable to participate in and receive executive coaching rather than it being met with denial or defensiveness. For some it is seen as a coveted status symbol and conveys an implicit message from their company, true or not, that they are regarded as rising stars (Peterson, 2002; Seligman & Csikszentmiyalyi, 2000; Shea, 1999).

Executive coaching is an increasingly popular means of accelerating professional growth, viewed as a response to workplace demands and necessary in today's changing environment. Executives have tough jobs, particularly now, and it is increasingly difficult to be responsible for lots of people. Today, executives in flatter, leaner, and faster-moving organizations may expect transformational leadership, emotional intelligence, and soft skills from themselves and their colleagues, in addition to transactional or managerial skills (Joo, 2005; Peterson, 2002). In the larger context of the work world of today, job and financial security and success are no longer a function of a long-term permanent relationship between an organization and an individual. Instead, the individual is responsible for his/her own lifelong learning process that allows one to adapt to changes and continuously acquire the knowledge and skills required to generate income as necessary. This need for ongoing professional improvement and upgrading is also contributing to the demand for executive coaches (Falla, 2006).

Many executives have found it necessary to learn new approaches in order to keep pace with organizational change and compete in the expanded marketplace. Corporations, businesses, and individuals frequently hire executive coaches to work with executives and assist them (Flaherty, 1999; Hudson, 1999). Organizations use executive coaching to raise the skill level of an employee, to improve their performance, to provide them with a development experience, to give them the opportunity to have an objective sounding board (Witherspoon & White 1996), to develop high-potential leaders, and assimilate and accelerate the learning of leaders newly assigned to critical roles (Stern, 2004). Judge and Cowell (1997) found that the most common request from clients was to help modify their interaction style and to build more trust in their working relationships.

Coaches and the Coaching Industry

In the earlier coaching literature, coaches were understood to have psychology graduate degrees, and the profession was dominated by men; now, more women are in the field, and coaches do not necessarily possess graduate degrees (Hall et al., 1999; Judge & Cowell, 1997; Kampa-Kokesch 2001). Individuals with backgrounds in evidence-based organizational and human change are moving into the profession of coaching (Grant & Cavanagh, 2004). ”Coaching, of course, does not have to be ‘owned’ by psychologists” (Lowman, 2005, p. 92).

The maturation of the coaching industry is being driven by at least three interrelated conditions: 1) accumulated coaching experience; 2) increasing entry of professionals into coaching from a wide variety of backgrounds; and 3) increasing sophistication of HR professionals (Grant & Cavanagh, 2004). Available data suggest that the practice of coaching has grown at a high rate and has been well documented (Hall et al., 1999; Joo, 2005; Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001; Kilburg, 1996). Berglas

(2002) estimated that the number of professional coaches in the United States will exceed 50,000 by 2007. The International Coach Federation (ICF), the largest coaching association, has documented its members from about 1,500 in 1999 and to over 11,000 as of November 1, 2006, in 80 countries (ICF website, October 2007). ICF members have vastly different backgrounds: psychotherapists, management consultants, former executives, business academics, athletes, and more (Grant & Cavanagh, 2004).

Comparisons with Other Interventions

As a business practice, executive coaching is rather new. It is distinguished from other management consulting interventions in that the service is directed toward an individual, and the organizational benefits are accrued indirectly through the development of the individual. Much of the literature has put it into context by comparing it with more familiar practices of therapeutic counseling and management training (Ballinger, 2000). Comparisons with several developmental interaction interventions are provided.

Coaching and Counseling

Coaching has been described as very similar to counseling in several ways. Both are generally multi-session processes conducted as part of an intervention, privately in one-on-one sessions, and individually tailored to the specific needs of an individual. Frequently coaching, like counseling, deals with issues that are intrapersonal and interpersonal, such as attitude, motivation, and ability to relate to others. Unlike counseling, however, the coaching conversation is about what is rather than historical, family of origin, or theoretical explanations of why something is being experienced. Often coaching involves a sponsoring client, whether a boss or an HR representative. The conversation with a sponsoring client happens in the initial contract and agreement, when

the coach makes progress reports, or when other individuals in the organization become involved in some facet of the program (Gray, 2006; Hart et. al, 2001; Joo, 2005; Judge & Cowell, 1997, Richard, 1999). Coaching is a developmental process within the workplace. Counseling is a therapeutic intervention within the field of mental health.

Coaching and Management Training

Coaching shares similarities with management training in that both are often organizationally sponsored efforts aimed at enhancing individual development or performance in the workplace. Management training seminars are usually oriented and presented to groups, often conducted in the format of classroom training. Training topics range over a wide variety of knowledge, skills, or preparation to perform tasks. Coaching more often incorporates intrapersonal, interpersonal, and emotional attributes (Burke & Day, 1986; Sztucinski, 2001).

Sztucinski (2001) conducted an extensive review and found that "the literature on executive training and development informs us that, although there is very little empirical research, in the judgment of experts, general traditional executive training and development does not appear to be effective" (p. 37). Sztucinski (2001) summarized three specific reasons to support that judgment: 1) the nature of contemporary organizations and the transformational leadership required to lead them; 2) the executive persona characterized by heroes-don't-need-help syndrome; and 3) the use of classroom-based, didactic, and content-driven methodologies. Sztucinski (2001) reported a new direction for executive development that appears in the literature in response to these criticisms. This direction is "defined by (1) emphasis on development; (2) clear link to company strategy; (3) continuous learning; (4) focus on experience; (5) interactive; (6) self-

directed learning, and (7) customized processes and activities" (p. 38). The methodologies that are frequently suggested for implementing these learning characteristics are the use of assessment and goal setting, feedback, reflection, and interactive activities. These methodologies that are emerging as preferences are often present within executive coaching.

Coaching and Mentoring

In casual usage, mentoring and coaching are often used interchangeably, but mentoring is not considered to be similar to coaching as management training and counseling are seen as similar (Ballinger, 2000). Mentoring has been well-documented as helpful in career progression; however, there are distinct differences between it and coaching. Joo (2005) summarized several aspects of mentoring from the literature. Mentoring can be a formal or informal arrangement in which a more senior executive who is more experienced in one or more areas seeks to transfer that knowledge and provides guidance to a more junior individual, without necessarily having boundaries or specific objectives. Often there is no oversight or monitoring of the mentoring relationship. It is possible that someone might be a mentor to another without even knowing it; for example, mentoring exists if the mentee feels that valuable advice or guidance is being given in the relationship. A mentor is not typically a trained development professional. And mentoring relationships rarely focus on specific skill building but are likely to be on political or cultural types of issues (Gibson, 2004).

Term Confusion and Clarification

Stevens (2005) stated that the development of a scientifically based field of executive coaching is likely to be hampered when different things happen under the term executive coaching. In OD, organizational consulting, and executive coaching, "we do

not yet have consensual agreement by knowledgeable researchers and practicing professionals about the appropriate and professionally expected way to behave in particular sets of encountered circumstances" (Lowman, 2005, p. 119). Similarly, D'Abate, Eddy, and Tannenbaum (2003) initiated scholarly conversation to characterize developmental interactions using construct categories to distinguish among the various forms. Not surprisingly, there were few consistent definitions and understandings across the literature. Gibson (2004) stated that, while the concept of mentoring is promoted in business settings, there is no consistent definition of mentoring, its roles, or its functions. Lowman (2001) critiqued an OD intervention case in which the author described it as an example of "coaching," although the case write-up was of a consulting intervention, including multiple assessments for selection and process facilitation. "In organizational consulting, at this time, all roads do not lead to Rome, but neither is Rome the only destination city" (Lowman, 2001, p. 120). He stated that we need some scientific precision or at least consensual validity. Lowman advised practitioners and researchers alike to be mindful of terms and be specific and descriptive as an aid in the development of the profession.

Coaching Theory

In spite of the worldwide media interest in coaching (Garman, Whiston, & Zlatoper, 2000), the development of rigorous and coherent theoretical frameworks for coaching are lacking (Brotman, Liberi, & Wasylyshyn, 1998). Coaching is a broad area encompassing many issues, requiring multiple theoretical approaches. Executive coaching is a blend from different disciplines. It has been described as a new sub-discipline that stems from the knowledge and experience of many organizational consultants: traditional organization development methods, adult education, management

training, industrial and organizational psychology, and generic consultation skills that are blended together to define coaching (Kilburg, 2000; McLean et al., 2005). Gray (2006) argued that, rather than beginning from a psychological approach, one should explore coaching through adult learning theory and see the manager as a problem-solving professional practitioner. He identified several adult learning theories that are useful underpinnings to coaching because of the emphasis on the adult learner's self-determination, self-actualization, and self-transformation; learning is experiential and facilitated through constructive dialogue.

Hudson (1999) stated that coaching is derived from knowledge of developmental psychology, adult learning theories, and human systems theories. Flaherty (1999) described his coaching theory as drawn from "phenomenology, a school of modern philosophy centered on the way phenomena actually show up in people's lives, as distinct from metaphysical schools of philosophy in which events and experiences are categorized by pre-existing distinctions" (p. 8). Another perspective stated that appreciative inquiry grounded in social constructionist theory is the ideal framework for coaching (Sloan, 2007).

Grant and Cavanagh (2004) stated that having a scientific and conceptual discipline underlying the approach is more important than accepting a singular theoretical foundation. Applying rigor to the theoretical approach can protect coaches from "being either the slavish following of coaching 'recipes,' or the unreflective enactment of 'gut instinct'" (p. 11).

Much of the current coaching literature brings with it an underlying implicit assumption that, if there is one, the underlying theoretical model is from human

psychology, particularly a psychotherapeutic perspective. Kilburg (1996) stated that theories and methodologies of clinical psychology that focus on diagnosing and changing dysfunctional behavior patterns of individuals are being transferred into consulting and coaching processes with executives.

> The only unique claim psychology has to the field [executive coaching] is that which generates from its rigor in researching what works and what does not in therapy and in extrapolating from a variety of methodologies—qualitative as well as quantitative—to create better and more refined theories. (Lowman, 2005, p. 92)

Lowman (2005) identified "Kilburg, one of the psychologist-founders of the literature of executive coaching" who "has been a prolific contributor to this emerging literature." He was "very much immersed in the practice of coaching, in the challenging work of generalizing from experience to theory, and in testing theory at least against phenomenology and a pragmatic sense of what works and does not in the real-to-life work of professional practice" (p. 90). Kilburg (2004) states, "case studies as a narrative way of knowing and creating meaning are an extremely useful way of examining the practice and efficacy of executive coaching" (p. 203). Psychologists have relied on logico-deductive scientific methods, although case studies are a valued and time-honored way to help create a science of organizational assessment and intervention. They are most useful in the early and more mature stages of an emerging area of practice (Lowman, 2005). Case studies are used to help develop a theory and practice consistent with findings and to revise theory to guide empirical research. The goal is to create more of a science of organizational diagnosis and intervention. Neither methodology is superior to

the other, but neither is sufficient as a stand-alone approach; each methodology has its uses and limitations (Lowman, 2005).

Coaching Research Results

While executive coaching has market power and is popular with consumers and service providers, it lacks a scientific base with very little empirical research supporting the validity and reliability of coaching interventions with executives (Kilburg, 1996, 2004; Lowman, 2005; Stevens, 2005). Grant & Cavanagh (2004) stated that, as of December, 2003, there were 56 empirical investigations about coaching, 33 of them doctoral dissertations. Only a handful of empirical studies focused on executive coaching efficacy. These were conducted in the 1990s and early 2000's and collectively are beginning to indicate modest empirical support for executive coaching's efficacy (Kilburg, 2004). The most recent comprehensive coaching literature reviews were written by Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson (2001) and Joo (2005). These reviews summarized the empirical studies that were primarily performed as field research projects by graduate students. Each author stated that the studies reviewed provide two kinds of evidence: that executive coaching may positively impact the individual executive's productivity with a potential impact for the whole organization; and learning, self-awareness, and leadership development may be enhanced by executive coaching.

Quantitative

One of the first quantitative outcome studies looking at the efficacy of coaching was conducted by Peterson (1993). He used an innovative methodology for measuring individual change and development. He looked in great detail at the question of whether one coaching program caused the desired behavior changes and the amount of change in participants as a result of the coaching. Multiple measurement techniques focused on

behavioral outcomes. Findings indicated that the coaching was effective in enhancing on the job behavior. Specific training objectives and overall job effectiveness, a global outcome measure, were significantly impacted by the coaching. This study's results were quite favorable compared to the cumulative management training meta-analytic findings of Burke and Day (1986), who found an average effect size of .44 for subjective ratings of on-the-job behavior. Ballinger (2000) looked at self-perceptions of individuals participating in the same coaching program used by Peterson (1993). She was interested in whether there were differences about which factors in coaching were most important in leading to behavior change. She compared the two groups—those sent to coaching for development or remedial purposes, high performing and low performing, respectively—and found no differences between the groups. Coaching factors leading to behavior change were perceived similarly, whether a participant was getting coaching for development or for remedial purposes.

One way to conceptualize the effectiveness of executive coaching is to consider the impact it has on leadership. Kampa-Kokesch (2001) tested whether executive coaching affects leadership using a multifactor leadership questionnaire. In this study, clients were different from leaders in previous leadership research in that participants scored consistently higher on active leadership and lower on passive leadership; this may indicate that participants were already strong leaders. She suggested that, perhaps leaders who already possess enough talent and skills get coaching, and, therefore, coaching may be more about enhancing versus developing leadership. The findings indicated that executive coaching does impact leadership. In addition, Kampa-Kokesch (2001) found

that clients were more likely to be women than clients in previous executive coaching research.

Qualitative

The perspective of the person being coached is an important part of the coaching equation and is severely under-represented in the literature. In addition to the lack of outcome studies on executive coaching, there is also a lack of research done from the client's perspective. The executive coaching literature is almost exclusively written from the practitioner's point of view. While coach training programs offer techniques and models for effective coaching, these are oriented to the coach and not grounded in actual research or the client's perspectives. The lack of the client's perspective in executive coaching should be addressed. The perspective of the client becomes increasingly important to understand as coaching becomes one of the top strategies for leadership development in corporations around the world. The client's voice should be acknowledged and used to help guide the coaching industry. Corporations are investing large amounts of resources on coaching programs, and they need to hear from executives that are benefiting from that investment. This is also an important perspective to consider for those who manage the coaching functions or are coaches themselves.

Recent qualitative research provides some insight into executives' perspectives about coaching. Sztucinski (2001), for example, interviewed seven executives, five men and 2 women, and asked them how they experienced coaching. The inductive analysis produced findings that described seven essential elements of their experience: path to achievement, unique to self, ownership, confrontation with self, array of emotion, bond with coach, and achievement. Hopf (2005) presented a single case that described the

experience of one male senior executive. This study did not find that the leader changed significantly and was not perceived to be more transformational after a year of executive coaching. Several factors influenced the coaching outcomes, including the organizational context, the leader's position, and the training and experience of the coach.

Sullivan (2006) found that, as a result of coaching, executives were each able to share an increased awareness of a specific trait that they would continue to develop more consciously in order to achieve greater results. This outcome suggested that executive coaching can be an effective tool in the enhancement of emotional intelligence competencies.

A few studies gathered executives' perspectives about what was effective in their coaching experiences. They gauged coaching as effective when they were motivated and committed to the process, they worked with a seasoned coach with whom there was positive rapport, and the engagement was structured and focused on development (Bush, 2004; Jaffe, 2006; Sullivan, 2006). Clients also valued being challenged by the coach (Jaffe, 2006). Several case studies focused on the executive's opinions about the experience (Kiel, Rimmer, William & Doyle, 1996; Peterson, 1996; Tobias, 1996).

Effectiveness in executive coaching is described as a shared responsibility among three stakeholders: the client, coach, and organization (Bush, 2004; Jaffe, 2006). An increased recognition in the literature is that the coach needs to understand and work within the organization as a system (Stern, 2004). One case study looked retrospectively at the most important factors leading to coaching success, including the coach, the client, and the client's boss's perspectives. In all cases, support of the client's boss was critical (Jaffe, 2006). Executives attributed aspects of coaching effectiveness to the ability of the

coach to foster trust and credibility between the client and the coach (Bush, 2004). Alvey (2006) conducted a grounded theory study to explore the development of trust between executives and coaches within leadership development executive coaching relationships. Multiple, independent factors were important in building trust throughout the coaching process. Trust was highest when: (a) the executive was willing to disclose honest feelings and thoughts to the coach, and these were met with supportive, nonjudgmental reactions from the coach; (b) there were clear, shared expectations for both confidentiality and outcomes; (c) organizational support for executive coaching was present; and (d) the coach was honest in a supportive way when confirming the executive's development needs and challenging certain executive leadership behaviors.

Summary

This chapter reviewed research studies and other literature on executive coaching. It first described the characteristics of the participants in the study, executive women. I reviewed some of the research perspectives about them, particularly as it related to their experience in the workplace and what it took to achieve it compared with executive men's experience. This was done to gain perspectives about their thoughts, hopes, and expectations. I provided a brief historical context for the executive coaching experience, and summarized a couple of executive coaching research studies that focused on outcomes. I briefly reviewed several qualitative executive coaching studies that focused on the perspectives of the executive. More depth will be provided about the literature following the analysis of the data gathered.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

This study considered the research question, what is the executive coaching experience like for executive women? For this study, I conducted 10 in-depth interviews, at which point saturation occurred. These interviews were with women executives from a variety of organizations with business locations in the Twin Cities. I asked them to describe their experience of being coached. This qualitative study allowed me to listen to the experiences of executive women to understand the meaning of their executive coaching experiences. This chapter described the interpretive paradigm and key features characterizing hermeneutic phenomenology. This study used van Manen's (1990) approach for conducting phenomenological research and also described the methods used to conduct this study. Within this framework, I describe the participant selection and data analysis processes I used.

The Interpretive Paradigm

The social sciences have a basic set of beliefs that guides action (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000) and consists of unique subject matter and methods and explanation framework. Strong philosophical arguments since the seventeenth-century have stated that, as social life is the product of everyday understandings, the social sciences should focus on interpretation and understanding meaning, not scientific explanation (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Schwandt, 2000). German and other European social scientists in the 20th century contributed much to the interpretive epistemological basis for the social sciences (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Polt, 1999; Schwandt, 2000). The process of interpreting or understanding, of reaching "verstehen," is to uncover the meanings of actions that deepens and extends our knowledge of why social life is perceived and experienced in the

way it is. It helps us understand interactions within the context of the social rules and forms of life in which they occur (Carr & Kemmis, 1986; Schwandt, 2000).

Hultgren (1989) used the term, modes of inquiry, to refer to ways of creating knowledge that are informed by specific intellectual traditions, not merely research techniques. Human interactions are forms of practical knowledge and interests. All descriptions of actions must contain an interpretive element (Carr & Kemmis, 1986).

> The preferred method for human science involves description, interpretation, and self-reflective or critical analysis. . . human science aims at explicating the meaning of human phenomena (such as literary or historical studies of texts) and at understanding the lived structures of meanings (such as in phenomenological studies of the lifeworld). (van Manen, 1990, p. 4)

The theory of interpretation and the technical method for interpreting text are known as hermeneutics and were adapted from the original use of biblical historical text interpretation to the humanistic understanding and interpretation of many forms of written and expressed human works (Palmer, 1969; Polt, 1999). “Thanks largely to Heidegger, hermeneutics has gained wide acceptance as an approach to philosophy in general. Many thinkers now view knowledge not as a static set of correct propositions, but as a continuing search for better interpretations” (Polt, 1999, p. 41). An important term Heidegger (1971) introduced was being-in-the-world, which refers to the way human beings exist, act, or are involved in the world (van Manen, 1999), and indicates that we are within a particular context. This place is within a meaningful whole, where we deal with other people and things. Each of us has our own unique experience of this

and can be thought of as being at home amid the things in our world; it is the quality of everydayness (Polt, 1999).

Phenomenology

Phenomenological research is a philosophy as well as a methodology (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; Giorgi, 1997). Phenomenology allows multiple realities arising from natural differences in the development of human perception (Isaac & Michael, 1995). The researcher seeks to understand the lived experiences and identify the essence of human experiences about a phenomenon, as described by study participants (Creswell, 2003). In contrast to quantitative science, in which truth and knowledge are gauged from objectively measured facts, phenomenologists recognize truth as that which arises from the individual's experiences. Wilber (1996) described validity claims that can be made from a phenomenological perspective. He stated that the individual in his or her sincerity is subjective and is the only individual who can know whether truthfulness exists in his or her statements. The voice of the "I" (p. 107) is consciousness, subjectivity, self and self-expression, truthfulness, and sincerity.

Phenomenology is "a theoretical point of view that advocates the study of direct experience taken at face value; and one which sees behavior as determined by the phenomena of experience rather than by external, objective, and physically described reality" (Cohen & Manion, 1989, p. 31). Husserl (1970, cited in Ulin, 1992), often referred to as one of the founders of phenomenology, stated that the basic idea about phenomenology is that it is the description of phenomena, and the constitution of meaning is primary (Ulin, 1992). Husserl, originally trained as a mathematician, looked for absolute knowledge of essences (Polt, 1999). Essence generally means "that aspect of something most true, real, or substantial (Almaas,1986, p. ix). Denzin and Lincoln (2000)

described phenomenology as how human beings construct and give meaning to their actions in concrete situations. The focus is on what shows itself to us and the patterns in how it is displayed. This perspective reflects that the individuals involved in any given situation construct reality based on their experience. A phenomenological approach "can be applied to any conscious experience whatsoever, because all acts of consciousness are about something that shows itself to us, something that can be investigated as a phenomenon" (Polt, 1999, p. 14).

Giorgi (1997) highlighted four critical features of the phenomenological approach that he drew upon writings of Husserl. First, phenomenology refers to the totality of the lived experience of an individual person—in my study, the experience of the executive woman engaged in executive coaching. The lived experience is accessed through the phenomenon of consciousness; ". . . phenomenology thematizes the phenomenon of consciousness" (p. 235). Second, experience is described as the consciousness that presents objects to us. The objects are present in space and time, are perceived by the situated individual, and have meaning. Third, a precise meaning for phenomenology is "the presence of any given precisely as it is given or experienced" (Giorgi, 1997, p. 237). This distinction Husserl illustrated with an example of two persons who viewed a painting: one person called it ugly, the other person viewed the same painting and called it beautiful. For the person who called it ugly, it had all the phenomenological properties of ugliness, and for the person who called it beautiful, it had all the phenomenological properties of beauty. A phenomenological perspective makes no claim that the painting is either beautiful or ugly; "only its presence of the experiencer counts, and an accurate description of the presence is the phenomenon, and it usually contains many phenomenal

meanings" (Giorgi, 1997, p. 237). And, finally, Giorgi (1997) summarized Husserl's essential feature of consciousness as intentionality. Examples he gave are "the object of the intentional relationship can be specific (pencil), or general (justice), real (bread), or fictive (the Centaur), amorphous (the sky) or defined (triangle), and so on" (p. 238). Each of these features of consciousness are intrinsically relational.

Palmer (1969) integrated the teachings of many phenomenologists and aided our hermeneutical understanding about meaning via language. He described hermeneutical phenomenology as the "laying-open of something which brings a message." (p. 13). Palmer listed three dimensions: (a) to say or express the message so it is brought to others; (b) to explain or make something understandable; and (c) to interpret or find one's own meaning within the text. This process is about bringing to understanding that which is said.

Methodical Structure of the Study

Incorporating the concepts previously described, I conducted a hermeneutic phenomenological study aimed at understanding the experiences of women executives engaged in executive coaching. Van Manen (1990) stated that "hermeneutic phenomenological research may be seen as a dynamic interplay among six research activities" (p. 30). These six activities guided my study. Specific methods follow this section.

I was purposeful when I selected participants, as I was interested in the executives' experiences in their own right and not to generalize results to a population. Information-rich descriptions for in-depth study were useful in order to learn most about issues that were central to the themes of coaching. Shared patterns cutting across individuals' experiences may contribute to a theme as they emerge from heterogeneity

(Isaac & Michael, 1995). I sought maximum variation in the organizations where the executives worked and from the coaches with whom executives worked as well. I was interested in learning about coaching that is central and the essence of the experience to these women.

Phenomenological research emphasizes quality, rich, thick descriptions rather than quantity (Denzen & Lincoln, 2000). Sanders (1982) advised the phenomenological researcher that more participants do not produce greater information, but data collection depth produces sufficient information. She asserted that three to six participants may be sufficient.

In determining the number of participants, I considered two factors to improve the trustworthiness of my study. The first is the phenomenological skill of bracketing (Denzin & Lincoln, 2000; van Manen, 1990), not an easy one to learn and use. There is the possibility of seeing what I expect or want to see or overemphasizing particulars from an individual participant because of my past knowledge (Giorgi, 1997.) Second, enough explications were gathered to cover a sufficiently wide range of situations to allow the necessary and sufficient to be separated easily from those that are isolated or specific to a situation.

I sought out ten participants because I wanted to involve enough executive women to hear a breadth of experiences and stories. I did not know if I needed to interview that many until I conducted several, as I wanted to achieve a saturation of experiences so I could understand and not miss something without interviewing more for the sake of more.

I did not make any contact with potential participants until this study was approved by the IRB. Only then did I follow the particular guidelines identified by that organization.

Turn to a Phenomenon that Seriously Interests Us and Commits Us to the World

My project, my search for understanding, is in what executive women were experiencing, thinking, learning, sensing, intuiting and feeling associated with their coaching experiences situated within their time and place. As described in Chapter 1, I have worked in organizations with executives and executive women. I anticipated that women would have a unique perspective, and I wanted to know what it was. I care about women and am interested in what they think. As described in Chapter 2, the quantitative studies on executive coaching have not enlightened us about the core experience of being coached and have not reached this deeper exploration with executive women. The few qualitative or interpretive executive coaching studies have not probed this area either. This study was intended to reveal the meaning coaching has for each of the individuals involved in the study. What was unique about the coaching experience for them? What did coaching mean to them? What did they seek from it, and was that fulfilled? What was the experience like?

Investigate Experience as We Live It Rather than as We Conceptualize It

This research informed me by listening to and recording participants' experiences, reading and rereading the writings, and reflecting on my own experiences. Previous research has focused primarily on processes and quantitative outcomes; little has been written about executives' experiences, as told directly by the executives.

Van Manen (1990) provided two purposes for the interview, and they often are achieved in two different stages during a research project. First, gathering lived-experience stories and recollections of experiences is the source of developing deeper understandings of phenomena, the narrative data or material on which to work. My objective was to be open to and present with the participant and her experience, while obtaining concrete, detailed description of the executive's experience and actions through the interview. The life-world is pre-theoretical and pre-reflective as it is lived, not as theorized (Giorgi, 1997). And, second, interviews are the conversational vehicle within which to reflect upon the experiences with the participant. Weber (1986) described the interview conversation as a personal experience between the interviewer and the participant in which the joint reflection allows both to learn more about the phenomenon. For each interview, it was critical to be prepared, fully present, and attentive to the individual, moment by moment.

Reflect on the Essential Themes that Characterize the Phenomenon

Reflecting on and seeking to understand the essential themes of the lived experience, the phenomena are the center of phenomenology. Van Manen (1990) described this research activity as

> a thoughtful, reflective grasping of what it is that renders this or that particular experience its special significance. Therefore, phenomenological research, unlike any other kind of research, makes a distinction between appearance and essence, between the things of our experience and that which grounds the things of our experience. . . what is it that constitutes the nature of this lived experience? (p. 32)

We come to the text without prior assumptions about what we will find and allow the categories, themes, and patterns to emerge.

Van Manen (1990) described an essential quality of a theme as the "aspects or qualities that make a phenomenon what it is and without which the phenomenon could not be what it is" (p. 107). The other type of theme revealed through the text is incidental, which is related to the phenomenon but is not central. To sort themes into essential or incidental categories, one might ask, "Could this phenomenon occur without this theme?"

Describe the Phenomenon through the Art of Writing and Rewriting

The essential structure of the lived experience was more apparent after I finished identifying the themes. I wrote about the themes from my experiences with the text. Van Manen (1990) eloquently described why we do this. "Writing objectifies thought into print and yet it subjectifies our understanding of something that truly engages us" (p. 129). My writing connected me more closely with what I discovered and opened doors to deeper understanding about the experiences within myself.

I spent many hours focused on each theme, describing it, revising my language, using the participants' text to describe fully its meaning. I then obtained feedback from each participant to see whether the theme resonated with their experiences, and made some changes to the themes to better reflect the meanings. After each theme was fully described, I reviewed the coaching research literature and other popular sources to add clarity and depth to each description. My intent was to convey the meaning of each part of the experience with revealing language.

Maintain a Strong Orientation on the Fundamental Question

Van Manen (1990) cautioned that the researcher must avoid being sidetracked or meander aimlessly and ". . . indulge in wishy-washy speculations" (p. 33). Phenomenological research requires a strong orientation to the fundamental question, similar to a heat-seeking missile to its target, a relentless pursuit and focus on the question. "The phenomenological approach is 'discovery-oriented,' and in order to discover meanings in the data, one needs an attitude open enough to let unexpected meanings emerge" (Giorgi, 1997, p. 246). I maintained a strong orientation on the fundamental question by: (a) referring to the research question throughout the interview process; (b) referring to the question throughout the text reading and re-reading; (c) documenting issues that seem important but irrelevant to the question, so they were noted but did not allow sidetracking; and (d) reviewing my writing and the research texts numerous times to make sure that they reflected the participants' experiences.

Balance the Research Context by Considering Parts and the Whole

The researcher needs constantly to balance the overall design of the text with its individual parts, the experience as a whole, and the essential themes as the experiential structures that make up that whole (van Manen, 1990). The parts and whole are intertwined and require each other for full meaning and understanding of the phenomenon. "It is easy to get so buried in writing that one no longer knows where to go, what to do next, and how to get out of the hole that one has dug" (van Manen, 1990, p. 33). Van Manen (1990) suggested that the researcher regularly needs to switch focus from the individual parts back to the whole to retain perspective about the phenomenon. Getting a little distance to see the big picture before digging back into the essential

themes is a way to engage rigorously in the research, to see "What is it? What is this phenomenon in its whatness?" (van Manen, 1990, p. 33). It is the whole that can inform the phenomenon, that is, what is it like to be coached?

Methods

Giorgi (1997) suggested that all qualitative methods go through a minimum of five basic steps: (a) collect verbal data; (b) read the data; (c) break the data into parts; (d) organize and express the data from a disciplinary perspective; and (e) synthesize the data to communicate with the scholarly community. These steps were incorporated within van Manen's (1990) basic approach for conducting human science research.

Participant Criteria

For this study, I conducted ten in-depth interviews with women executives who had been or currently were being coached. My selection criteria specified that the executive must have been coached within approximately three months of the data gathering so that the participant would have the ability to recall and draw upon her experiences being coached. I relied on my expertise to determine whether the participant met the criteria to be included in the study, including the length of time since she had participated in coaching, the length of coaching engagement and whether the coaching process approximately met this study's definition of coaching. Participants in this study all had participated in executive coaching within three months of the interview. In addition, the duration of each coaching engagement was at least three months, and many had engaged in coaching for a year and longer. Her position must have been mid-level manager or higher in a for-profit organization and within 100 miles of the Twin Cities, a reasonable geographic proximity of the researcher to facilitate face-to-face interviews. As I wanted to draw upon executive women who had a wide variety of experiences, I did not

want to have all my participants from the same organization, nor be coached by the same executive coach. In addition, the participant had to be willing to engage in a lengthy taped interview for a period of up to two hours, as well as a brief follow-up interview.

While the focus of the study was not about the executive coach, I was thoughtful about the qualifications of the coach; I wanted to make sure I was asking executive women about being coached and not something else. First, I made an assumption that any large organization who hired executive coaches for their executives had already applied their own selection criteria and that would be acceptable for my study purposes. In many cases, these coaches came from reputable coaching firms. And second, for those executives who hired their own coaches without their organization's involvement, I was interested in whether their coaches had formal training in coaching, a background in human resource development or specialized preparation; they all did.

I was also curious about the gender of the executive coach but did not select participants to ensure equal representation of men and women coaches. During the interviews, the participants shared their coach's gender, and the executive coaches were mostly women.

Participant Identification

My strategy in identifying possible participants was a combination approach. I identified companies using the Dun & Bradstreet directory of businesses and contacted the human resource senior executive as an initial contact person potentially to identify executive women who are engaged in executive coaching who may be interested and willing to participate in this study. When I made the initial inquiry to HR executives, I explained the purpose of my study and what I hoped to learn. I also sent a letter as a

follow up to people where there are possible participants accessible through that individual contact. That process was painstakingly unproductive and did not provide me with many participants; I did not get return phone calls from HR executives whom I did not know personally. I obtained permission from the IRB to modify my proposal to allow me to inquire directly to executive coaches to access executive women who participated in executive coaching. More descriptive information about participants, such as age, race, or educational background, is not provided to ensure confidentiality. See Table 1 for participant information.

Table 1

Participant Information

Participant Identifier	Industry	Position	# Coaching Engagements
A	Healthcare	CFO	1
B	Home Services	CFO	1
C	Finance	Partner	1
D	Manufacturing	Director	1
E	Marketing	Director	1
F	Airline	Reg. Mgr.	1
G	Finance	Ex-CEO	1
H	Marketing	Director	1
I	Finance	CEO	3
J	Finance	SVP	3

Participant Screening

My original plan was to have a brief telephone conversation with each potential candidate for participation; a consistent approach did not happen with all of them. I either had a brief phone or email exchange with the executive, a brief conversation with the HR individual who was arranging for the interview, or similar exchange with an executive coach prior to the interview. The purpose of the conversation was to determine whether she: (a) had been or was engaged in coaching that was congruent with the coaching definition articulated within the study; (b) had been or was engaged in coaching for at least three months; (c) was willing to talk about her coaching experience; (d) could contribute to situational variety; and (e) could contribute to coaching approach/ methodology variety. If the individual fulfilled those criteria and we agreed to proceed, then I explained the informal consent agreement and taping requirements, and set an appointment. I followed up with a letter that described the study's purpose and expectations for participant involvement (see Appendix A). The letter was to help participants think through their interest in participating.

Interviews

Initial interviews were conducted in-person, January through March, 2008 in the location of their choosing, which were either in their office, hotel lobby or restaurant. Prior to each interview, I looked at my bracketing notes to remind myself about what I already believed about coaching so I could acknowledge it and set it aside. I also had notes alongside my interview notes sheet, such as, "Be present now," to remind myself to be present with each person in the moment.

The interview question was developed based on the main research question and to some extent on the preliminary literature review. During the interviews, each participant responded to the question, "What has the executive coaching experience been like?" To record the experience as it was lived, I conducted in-depth interviews with each of the participants. I used an interview guide with probes to ensure that the interview remains focused if the conversation strayed off-course (see Appendix B for interview guide). The guide helped to remind me to explore fully all aspects of the coaching experience. Because of the individual nature of each interview, not every probe in the guide was used in each interview.

Each interview lasted between one and two hours. During that time, I took notes about the individual's main points, expressions and behaviors and recorded the interview with the interviewee's permission. (See Appendix C for IRB permission and Appendix D for the consent form.) At the end of each interview, I had the recording transcribed.

Data Analysis Process

After I conducted and transcribed all the interviews, I added the behavioral notations I made in a column alongside the text. I made notes on the side and highlighted what seemed to be the most relevant experience for each participant. My next step was to complete a global reading of all the texts, as suggested by Giorgi (1997). He stated that this process is critical to allow the researcher to begin seeing how the parts are constituted. After the global reading, I read each text slowly, looking for statements that were particularly revealing or insightful about the coaching experience and highlighted them. I looked for words that were at the center of the experience. As the meanings or center pieces emerged, I noted them in the margins of the text. I generated a list of emerging themes, then went back to the text and read it again for additional meaning.

Again, I modified the list of emerging themes to try and capture a better wording of the themes.

Text Analysis and Theme Development

In this section I review how I developed the themes from the texts presented by the participants. This process included an analysis of the themes that resulted in a preliminary list, additional analyses after the second interview with participants, and a revised definition of themes along with participant comments.

Text Analysis

I compared the meanings of each text to identify the shared themes. Giorgi (1997) reminded the researcher that, as "phenomenology is interested in meanings, the basis of the division into parts is meaning discrimination" (p. 245). Also noteworthy is: "The meaning units do not exist 'in the descriptions' by themselves. Rather, they are constituted by the attitude and activity of the researcher" (Giorgi, 1997, p. 246). Discovering the shared themes took much reading, reflection and re-reading of the different texts, and clustering similar statements together to form initial impressions of shared themes. It was slow and laborious to sort out those themes that overlapped each other, identified the variations of other themes, and it required a back and forth re-reading of the texts. I shared my categorized themes with my advisor, who helped check my analysis process by providing feedback and asking questions about meanings. I modified the theme names to hone in on the true nature, the main point of the theme, so that it clearly and accurately described their experiences.

I reminded myself of van Manen's (1990) advice about sorting through themes. He warned the researcher to be careful not to confuse the incidental with the essential themes. Incidental themes are related to the phenomenon but are not core to its essence.

An essential theme is inextricably linked to the phenomenon, and it would lose its fundamental meaning without it—there is definiteness and there is certainty. It is the presence of a quality that uniquely substantiates the experience.

Theme Development

I described each theme in writing once the initial themes emerged. After I thought I adequately described the themes, I asked each participant to review them for accuracy. This took place during the second interview which were conducted by phone, May – June, 2008. At that time, I asked them to read each theme and give me their feedback about whether it captured what they meant and asked them for better words to describe what was meant or offer clarification. This conversation prompted a few of them to share additional examples of what they experienced and reflected more and offer more meaning to the themes that were identified. These themes were summarized in Chapter 4 and 5.

Summary

This chapter provided a brief description of the perspectives that have informed me about hermeneutic phenomenology. Van Manen's (1990) description of phenomenology is "the explication of phenomena (sic.) as it presents itself to the consciousness. It aims to understand the meaning and nature of our everyday experience" (p. 9). I also offered Giorgi's (1997) perspective of the four distinctive features identified with phenomenology: (a) the totality of the individual's lived experience is the phenomenon of consciousness, and this is meaningful via themes; (b) experience is the consciousness that presents objects to us, the listener; (c) phenomenology is the presence of any given precisely as it is experienced or given; and (d) intentionality is the essential feature of consciousness.

The methodology was described using van Manen's (1990) six dynamic activities. These activities were present throughout the interviewing and interpretation processes. I conducted ten in-depth in-person interviews using an interview guide for probes. Participants were executive women currently or recently engaged in executive coaching who worked in different organizations located in the Midwest identified through the use of the Dun & Bradstreet and executive coaches. Following each interview, I transcribed the texts and read them all globally once and then individually and parts of each individual transcript several times to identify themes that were unique to the coaching experience. The texts were also compared against each other in various combinations to identify common themes. I wrote and rewrote the themes, and asked each participant during a second phone interview to review each theme and check for accuracy based on her experience of coaching.

CHAPTER 4

THEMES RELATED TO WHY COACHING AND ROLE OF THE COACH

This chapter is the first of two that presents results from the study. This chapter describes each of the following categories in the participants' own words: why coaching and the role of the coach. Each category includes themes. Participant names are not included; instead, letters have been assigned to each participant, associated with their descriptions in Chapter 3, to maintain anonymity. When the participant mentioned her coach's name, I substituted (my coach); company names were also replaced with (my company). Interview transcript sections that present the most relevant parts of the experiences are included to describe the theme.

Why Coaching?

This section speaks to what brought the individual executive to coaching. For at least four participants, there was more than one compelling reason to seek out executive coaching. This section is divided into two themes that were mentioned by participants: first, feeling alone and wanting help and, second, motivated by challenge and growth. Both of these themes are now explored in depth, using participants' words, but with grammatical errors corrected.

Feeling Alone and Wanting Help

Because of their senior level within the organization or the nature of the issue, participants consistently stated that there was no one to talk with about specific career and work challenges; they wanted help. For example, interviewee J commented:

> So I decided I needed to find myself a coach who could really help me move into this new role. I knew I wasn't going to get that from my boss, which is fine. Too bad, he should play some of that role, but he wasn't going to.

Interviewee B commented on not being able to work with her boss on some issues:

> …helping me figure out finding my voice and being authentic. When you get to a level in an organization, you don't have anybody to go talk this stuff over with. Your CEO really isn't your counselor. He or she is not there to make sure you're personally successful day in and day out. You have that type of job, and they're thinking, "Get this stuff done." At some point you're, like, "I need somebody to talk to."…I'm trying to solicit input to help interpret what I'm dealing with here.

Interviewee D knew the kind of support she wanted, but it wasn't available:

> I'm highly collaborative. I'm much more comfortable and my style is to collaborate. And when you're in my position, with whom do you talk? I don't have many peers. I can talk about certain things, but there are other areas where I haven't had success in sharing insights and collaborating on projects.

Interviewee D also mentioned the lack of guidance and stated:

> I've never had a mentor in my career. You reach a point where you're looking for answers but in the absence of a mentor. You need some assistance to experience some breakthroughs in your position, just in my day-to-day activities. And you come up against barriers or walls, and you need some help to break through them. This is on the job, day-to-day. In the absence of a mentor, I couldn't figure out where to go to get past the hurdles. And I didn't think it was an appropriate role for my manager because I wanted to discuss some areas politically and relationship-related. I didn't see he was the appropriate person to help me with

> that.... I wasn't progressing. You're stuck, and you don't have the answers. And you don't know where to go. So you're looking for some breakthroughs.

Interviewee C recognized that she had previously had the support she wanted but only after it was gone:

> Now what I can tell you, and I didn't realize this until I went and found this coach, is that my husband was really my coach [until four years ago]. All of a sudden, he saw me as being unbelievably successful; what more could he give me? He stopped coaching me. But I truly missed it and didn't realize that he was providing it. So then I needed to find a coach, but it really wasn't the same kind of coach that he was. This person is really a life balance coach.

Interviewee C had interpreted significant energy and motivation changes as potential burnout signs and knew she needed to do something:

> I would relate it somewhat to Alcoholics Anonymous in the fact that you literally have to admit that you need help—in coaching, life coaching, or whatever the circumstance might be. And what led me to it is I have a real passion for what I do, beyond how many hours there are in a day. And I think if your personal makeup is as a driver, you know, you want to overachieve, do everything at 300 percent, and if you fall into a business you love, then you're going to be what some people call a workaholic. But I call it having a passion, an over-passion for what I do. It just means you want to work at it many more hours than the public thinks is healthy. So I decided two years ago to hire somebody because I didn't know how to balance my life.

Interviewee I shared an example of wanting another perspective:

> I wanted a third party to bounce ideas off of while I was going through that decision process. So I reached out to (my coach). We had a few sessions and talked things over. I decided to take it so I came here almost two years ago.

Motivated by Challenge and Growth

Every participant enjoyed work and career progress and was looking to keep her career moving forward to a next step. She felt motivated by challenge and growth. Whether in the areas of managing through transitions, career planning help, specific or general development, she sought coaching to help her achieve this next level or stage of growth.

Interviewee G stated:

> So my initial objective was, I'm going to be in a transition, and I'd like to explore, figure out what I'd like to do next. That's where we started.

Remaining challenged was mentioned by several participants. Interviewee I described her career as having a steep trajectory:

> Gosh, every time I went into a position I've shined. When I was in big organizations, like (company), I was top of national sales, for instance. Top trust officer in the nation. Or I would go to the next position, and I would turn basically an office they were almost closing down—instead I would triple it in size in the next year. I was, like, I'm good at this, and I like this. It's great. But I was starting to feel a little not challenged. I was thinking, do I want to do this the rest of my life? Or what's the next step for me?...Maybe that's the next level of complication I'm looking for or adventure or challenge. I like that. I don't like to be bored and just have things figured out. I needed that next challenge.

And Interviewee C also talked about her motivation:

> When you take an entrepreneur like me, it doesn't necessarily mean money because we've already achieved that. We already have that. It's "what's the next challenge?" Growth is about the next challenge and creating it.

Identifying and making specific changes in order to move forward was spoken about. Interviewee F sought coaching to help her get to the next position:

> I had tried on a number of occasions of getting promoted actually into my director's position and was passed by twice. And I think it was through support of some executives and belief in my abilities that sort of the conclusion was that I needed to have some executive coaching.

Participants frequently spoke about improving and/or enhancing their leadership. Interviewee E stated:

> I could tell that something was missing; something was keeping me from moving forward, whether that was my style or my capacities in being a leader. And no one internally could articulate that for me. It was a big gap, and I wanted an outside view to help me through that.

Interviewee A was seeking specific objectives:

> I have a goal to be much more effective as a leader, to have a much higher role, participation in the strategic planning vs. operations and figuring out how I can better contribute to that…I can't change myself, but how can I be more effective?

Interviewee B did not have specific goals, but coaching fit within her approach to growth:

> I was thinking about what's that next thing I want to work on, and [executive coaching] sounded kind of interesting and compelling, although I don't really know that I understood what I was embarking on. I don't know if I really knew what I needed help with. I didn't go into it saying, "OK, (coach), these are the things I really need help with." I just jumped in kind of blindly, saying, "I know I want development."

Role of the Coach

The coach was mentioned frequently throughout each interview. This section describes the role of the coach and is divided into five themes that were mentioned by participants: trust, professional, guide, strengthens me, and expects action. The participants looked to the coach to be a trustworthy professional to guide them through their coaching objectives. As a result of being coached, the participants found themselves strengthened as individual leaders. And the role of the coach was to help maneuver and work through specific objectives individual to each executive. These themes are now explained in depth, using participants' words.

Trust

All ten participants spoke about the importance of trust in a relationship with an executive coach; seven participants experienced trust completely and consistently in all of their coaching experiences. For those participants who had experiences where this was not the case (3 of the 10), trust was impacted due to either coach incompetence, inappropriate communications, or the relationship among the participant, her organization, and the coaching engagement. For example, one situation occurred when a coach had been assigned to fix the executive because there were complaints made about her making changes in the department. The coach was flown in, interviewed people and

conducted a battery of assessments and then selectively relayed back to her negative information to "beat her down." In addition, the coach made disparaging remarks about other leaders, shared names of who he was working with in the company and made comments about the individuals. She described this as inappropriate behavior and, therefore, a negative coaching experience that led to a lack of trust. Another executive said that she was not as forthright with the coach because that same organization was also going to be assisting the executive team with succession planning and other consulting work. While she was assured of confidentiality, she chose not to be as revealing as she might have been if they were not doing that other consulting work. And the third executive was not completely trusting of her organization, as there were some conversations among her boss, human resources, and her coach of which she was not a part and wanted to be. She also said that, in general, she had some trust issues.

Interviewee F expressed confidence in the coaching role when she said:

> It's the personal one-on-one. Really the confidence so you can tell people what you're thinking…Somebody I feel like doesn't have any other ulterior motive except to help me.

Interviewee B talked about how the trust she had with her coach influenced her communications:

> What does work is, I feel, being very open in my communications with her. I don't feel like I have to be guarded in my comments and my remarks. . . And that's where my guard is down with (my coach). I trust her implicitly. I have a high degree of trust in her.

Interviewee D selected her coach because, as she stated:

> She was someone I trusted and had a good rapport with...And her credentials, certainly, her professionalism, her practicality; she's very pragmatic.

Being honest was important to interviewee F:

> When I'm working with my coach, I'm sharing and reflecting on my experiences and looking for some affirmation in how I am thinking. I need and expect my coach to speak the truth.

Interviewee G had a bond with her coach:

> Having a coach is like having a really good friend who has the best intentions for you at heart. And they're trained!

Professional

Participants recognized skills, talents, and different areas of expertise in their respective coaches. Interviewee I recognized the contributions a professional can make:

> I felt like I did want a professional's help, because your friends aren't professionals. They're there for you, to be your friends. They may or may not challenge you to that next point. Or they may or may not know as much about your field, because (my coach) definitely knew about the lawyer field. A lot of times they can draw from their own experiences. But they have a more learned approach that they can maybe bring some good ideas to the forefront.

Interviewee B enjoyed the natural, easy, and effective way that her coach worked with her:

> It's not like we have a defined agenda every time we meet; it feels more conversational. I believe she has an agenda; I believe she knows what we're supposed to be doing. To me, it feels very conversational and very easy; we just

slip into it very naturally. When I walk away, I'm going, "Wow, I can't believe I learned all that." Or, "Wow, I can't believe I've reached this conclusion." It's so subtle.

Interviewee G described her coach as an insightful, talented professional:

She's a really good listener and really observant. She has a lot of tools and flexibility in her toolkit. She's not stuck with a certain way. When I interviewed the other coaches and read their bios and their approaches, a couple of them had me do a couple of things when I was interviewing with them. There was one approach that seemed to have this bias that "I'm going to fit you into these ways that I think about people." Maybe [other coach she interviewed] went to this coaching thing on body language is everything. "You're a this or you're a that." I don't agree with this approach; that's just one thing. It doesn't make you that. But all these assessments, you're still more complicated than all those views coming together. So what I feel like with (my coach) is that she's applying all her learnings that she's got, and she's constantly learning more. And that she has an appreciation of the complexity of the human person, and she tries to apply all these things that she knows to coach me.

Interviewee G valued the ongoing professional development her coach obtains:

(My coach) is continuously doing additional training. She talks about some of the things because it happens to come up. And she says, "I just came back from this where we did XYZ." And she's doing this other thing. She's always getting development. She's incredible.

Part of the professional doing his or her job in coaching is being business minded and familiar with the executive's workplace. Six of the ten participants identified this aspect as an important part of being a professional. Interviewee J stated:

> The last thing I would share is that the coach having context on the organization or industry is really helpful. When you're trying to do it from afar, and you're just coached on how to be a good coach, I actually think the more valuable situations are, you know, (my coach) really understanding the culture at (company); or (my coach) really understanding my job and what I needed to do; that he could write a memo, "If I were you…," which I then shared with my staff. It was great. I think there's that context that is valuable. I'm a strong content person. I don't like just process. I think you've got to have either cultural context or some content knowledge of the industry; that is extremely helpful.

Interviewee J had several coaching experiences and worked with several types of coaches on a variety of objectives. She reflected:

> Each coach has been different. Each one had been quite different, but pretty impactful in some crucial ways now that I think back on it.

She also recognized the importance of having a clear, upfront objective for hiring a coach:

> There's got to be a connection. You have to think through, "What is the value that I need at this point in my life that they can help me with?" Then you go out and find it.

Guide

Participants talked about their coaches helping to guide them as they pursued their objectives. Interviewee E appreciated the role of her assigned coaches:

> It's their job to hold up a mirror to me, and to be able to hold it in different places so I can see places I haven't seen before.

Interviewee B used a coach to help guide her through unfamiliar territory:

> That's been nice, too, just someone you can go and ask some really, what I consider to be, somewhat stupid questions. You wish things came with a manual. Now that you're in this role, these are the things you should be doing. These are the relationships you should be connecting with. It's a place where I don't want to look stupid. And so I don't feel like I'm stupid with (my coach) when I ask her questions about, should I be doing this more? That more? Or, how do I connect into this? Because I feel like this is somewhere I need to grow next. It's a safe place to test out those things…They are the sorts of questions that I don't know how everyone else figures it out.

Interviewee B also used a metaphor in describing their relationship and the role of the coach:

> She really lets me lead things and then follows up with her questions. I'm crystal clear I've done the work—but I feel like I'm the canvas in some ways and she's the painter, only from the perspective that she's bringing things out that I didn't even know I had in me. Or that I don't think I could have done without her.

As a result of her coach's guidance, interviewee G interrupted her pattern of doing what she always did:

> Now it's "So now what?" That was marching towards CEO. Achieved it, did it for five years. Don't know if I want to do it again. Go be CEO someplace else? I already did that. But if I hadn't had (my coach), I would have run out and done the next CEO thing. I would have been talking to recruiters because that's my path. That's what I have to be; I've got to do that. What else could I do?

Interviewee H described the guidance she received from her coaches as a result of their knowledge of her:

> And so they definitely have taken the time to make me and what they've learned about me--a part of their mind--and think about how to really help me overcome some of the things they perceive as developmental opportunities and challenges. I don't know that they're ah ha's in the sense that we hadn't talked about it earlier. But it is continuing to tap me on the shoulder that they notice these things that I do and trying to help me make them more in front of my mind for me.

Strengthens Me

Participants described how working with a coach reinforced them doing what they knew to be the right thing and fueled their confidence in making certain decisions or taking particular actions. Interviewee A described her feelings:

> And now, today, I have more courage and I take more risks in what I say. I'm more willing to be uncomfortable than I was a couple of years ago…I feel people relate to me differently.

Interviewee B feels stronger in facing her fears:

> There was tremendous turmoil in the organization about my becoming the CFO, and so my transition into this role has been challenging and difficult. . . Finding

my voice was more about being able to step out and say things I believed to be true, and in a bigger forum. I don't always put myself out there as far as I could, in terms of sharing what my thinking is. So I feel like I'm going to have all these arrows coming at me. (My coach) helped me work through the "What are you afraid of? What's going to happen?" She's helped me find clarity around who I am, which has then given me the confidence to really go and achieve what I want in my career.

Interviewee F said this about the process:

So a lot of having a coach to run this scenario by, run that scenario by, was truly just working for me—and not having any other objectives out there was helpful. It was allowing me to believe more in myself—validating. That part was really good.

Interviewee C said:

And it gives you that extra confidence to just go back to work and change something.

Having someone to believe in you helps to give Interviewee C courage:

And the other thing is you need someone to say, "You can do it. I know you well enough that you're good at this. You're good at that. You can do this." And you don't even have to have it said that often. But you need somebody to coach you to believe that, especially when you have the personality that I do that you're never really satisfied. Even if I had the very best employee, I don't think I would recognize it, because there would be something they could do better. But I don't

> treat them differently from me. See, I'm my worst critic because I didn't do that well enough. I could work harder on that.
>
> Interviewee J said:
>
> He's helped me with some of that stuff, too, basically giving me the moral courage to do that stuff.

The coach provides assurance and may even serve as one's conscience and make doing the right things a little easier, as Interviewee G said:

> I did have a couple of people at (my company) who were moved into other capacities. In their minds, they were on my shit list. I somehow decided that I didn't like them. So I'm like the queen bitch. That was hard for me. That's hard because you don't want to be viewed as being just arbitrary in your decisions like that. But (my coach) helped me with—she helped me be okay. Because I struggled with that. She helped me. "That's your job. That's what you have to do. So you can't help that that person's going to feel that way." You'd like everybody to like you, but it's not the way it works out. You're the CEO. You're not an effective CEO if you want everybody to like you. I knew that; it just bothered me a lot. You know, I still, even before I met (my coach), would make those decisions. She helped me not have it bother me so much. For somebody to say to you, "No, that's right. You're doing your job."
>
> Interviewee I described how some information strengthened her:
>
> The tests themselves were actually pretty validating. It was more [my coach's] approach that was just off whack for me. I did a lot of learning though those tests

and validated some great things that strengthened me. That kind of work can be valuable, too. It's just the whole way that that thing went was just not pleasant.

Expects Action

Most of the participants stated that her coach had some type of expectation that she would take action. The expectation ranged from participants feeling accountable to their coaches for specific actions and outcomes to expecting that the topic would be brought up for conversation next time or later.

Interviewee A shared that her coach had an expectation that she would take action:

> My coach needs to hear back from me, she follows up, asks me where I am at, wants to know the progress. I feel like she holds me accountable, like a personal trainer to whom I have to answer.

Interviewee H described it as:

> And then there's always interest from them in my feedback on, "Gee, you know, did that work for you? How did that work for you? Didn't it work for you?"

Interviewee B was already motivated to make changes and accept the responsibility for making those changes:

> I've already accepted it, the accountability is to me; it's self-imposed. It's like having a scale in your bathroom; seeing it is enough to keep you focused. And the coach has to trust my judgment that we're proceeding at the right pace or what we're working on in the program.

Interviewee I sometimes initiated the conversations:

> With (my coach) it's been—I would talk to her about an issue I was working on, and then I would walk away and actually work in the workplace with it. I might check back later to say, "Oh, this is what's happening. This is how it went. This is how it changed. What do you think?" Instead of me going home to a workbook to work on myself, it was more of actually applying it. But the workbook stuff is important to do.

Interviewee J welcomed the coach's expectations:

> I meet with him every two to three weeks. He holds me accountable for—he's always asking, this is his big deal, is holding you accountable for results. There are leading indicators of results that we can see that will drive sales. And so he's usually asking me, "What are your vital statistics for your area?" "My vital statistics this last week were the best in the country." Even though I completely reorganized my whole area in the last two months. I was very brave, perhaps stupid. I think it will be fine.

Summary

This chapter reviewed the themes associated with why coaching and the role of the coach. Why coaching had two themes: feeling alone and wanting help, and motivated by challenge and growth. Participants in the study all had at least one reason why they wanted to be coached. They expressed that there was no one within the organization who was appropriate to talk with or work with them through a variety of issues where they wanted help. The participants considered themselves to be interested in moving forward and growing in their careers, and challenge and growth were motivating to them. They thought coaching would help them work through and resolve issues so they could continue moving forward.

The role of the coach had five themes: trust, professional, guide, strengthens me, and expects action. Participants described how important it was for their coach to be a trustworthy professional who helped guide them through achieving their objectives. They felt stronger as a result of working with their coach, who expected them to take action.

Themes under the two remaining categories, insight to action and outcomes and result areas, are explained in depth in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 5

THEMES RELATED TO INSIGHT TO ACTION AND OUTCOMES

This chapter describes each of the remaining study themes, insight to action and outcomes.

Insight to Action

Insight to action refers to the thoughts and emotions that occurred about the learning from and reflection within the experiences of being coached. Six themes make up this category and include self-discovery and awareness, emotions, commitment to the process, challenges to thinking, tools guide actions, and different actions get better results.

Self-discovery and Awareness

All ten participants mentioned self-discovery and awareness as important pieces of the coaching experience. Participants described learning about themselves and about interacting with others as self-discovery and awareness. This learning emerged at different times and in different ways, both during and between coaching sessions.

Interviewee G enjoyed learning about herself and other people:

> Being a learner is my number one value. I'm really fascinated by the psyche and values and different people, the whole self-discovery process. I would take any assessment you put in front of me, and I could learn something from it. I find that fascinating.

Interviewee E considered herself quite self-aware prior to coaching, so her assessments provided very little self-discovery:

> I had a lot of confirmation. I'm pretty self-aware.

Interviewee C reflected on different areas she was learning about herself:

> Well, that part [never being satisfied with what you're accomplishing] I'm not sure I've mastered yet because I don't think you can just change overnight. The part that I think I'm getting better at is understanding once again who I am. I didn't know I was really that different from anyone else, that my makeup was that much different. It's all helping me understand what is my unique ability.

A few participants engaged in identifying and acknowledging their core values as part of a collection of self-discovery exercises early in their coaching programs. Interviewee J reflected back on being explicit about her core values and shared how they were useful as a focus reminder for her:

> I think what this allows you to do is, when you get into backup behavior or in a difficult situation where you're just in a bad place, if you can step back and remember, "Nah. This is what I'm about." It's like taking a bit of a pause. Hitting the pause button and remembering, "Oh, this is what I do."

Interviewee C had not previously considered herself self-aware and described learning about herself:

> I think it's a lot less confusing. I feel a greater contentment.

Interviewee H learned about herself and described it as:

> I learned so much; the whole discovery on this need for me to be comfortable and be conscientious about letting a softer side of me show at work, and not being so task-driven or outcome-driven. Also, the information about me needing to be more inclusive was not what I had expected.

Interviewee D described a significant breakthrough:

I had a big—my most significant breakthrough that I learned was I had not quite made the transition, the career transition from a mental standpoint, as a leader. And it was my learning that you're moving from the focus I see in your work being what and how to what and who. And I hadn't made that transition. . . In the leadership position you need to focus more on what is it I need to do and who is the resource I need to work with to get it done? You're leveraging people much more than you ever have in your career. And that was a mental shift that was a huge breakthrough that was slowing me down. . . And I can't remember what she [my coach] asked me specifically but it just clicked.

Interviewee G described her abundant learning from coaching sessions:

I always got value. I always walked out of every session with value. I got some insight or learning, an aha. Or I got relief, some burden removed. But usually a learning, some insight. The learnings were about myself, others, or about a certain transaction or interaction; some insight that I had not had.

Interviewee F increased her self-talk awareness and described it:

One of the things I still have to work on is my own sort of self-talk about trust. One of the things that I focus on—and I catch myself. You know I think part of the coaching process is I think now I recognize that it's happening. So I catch myself and look at what's reality, or what are you making up that isn't really happening? An additional self-awareness insight interviewee F described: This is a new learning. To really sit back and think about what is happening and the stress level. I realize that when my emotions go up and when I attack is when I feel like I'm being attacked.

Interviewee B described the gradual nature of her growth:

> I feel like it's been an evolution to get to where I am today. I seriously don't think I would have gotten there without the help of an executive coach. Maybe people intuitively know how to progress throughout their career. But, as you move up through an organization, you get less and less feedback. If you want to be effective, you have to be willing to listen. But it's harder and harder to find those people to be honest with you.

Emotions

All ten of the participants had their emotions engaged throughout their coaching. The women experienced many emotions, and a range of emotions was expressed.

Several participants described their love of learning, and all had experienced other forms of development, but nothing was similar to executive coaching. Interviewee B described the stimulating nature of executive coaching and how grateful she felt:

> The executive coaching in some ways is even more so [stimulating] than that [MBA program] because it's so intense. I'm meeting one-on-one to help me learn and grow. It's challenging, intense, stimulating. It's not intellectual academic learning, its personal. . . Not everybody gets to have this; I feel privileged to have the opportunity afforded to me to be able to do this. Not everybody gets that opportunity to get that one-on-one time to really focus on them to make their careers better. Or to help them make sure they're in a role that utilizes their talents and skills. A lot of people have to figure it out on their own. I feel very fortunate.

Interviewee F described working with a coach in this way:

It was good. I want to say it was very rewarding because she validated a lot of my feelings that I sometimes didn't trust myself. I kept thinking, well, a lot of my perceptions were truly there, really happening. It's just what I did with them that weren't productive. So I'm not crazy.

Interviewee B described some feelings she had during her coaching sessions:

Generally, I'd tell you they're very positive. There are days when it's exasperating beyond belief when I don't get any answers, because there are times when I get going so fast it's like, "Just hand me an answer, for gosh sakes. Are you seriously going to make me go through this and think? Just tell me what I need to do differently. Can't you just tell me how to go have better, more effective communication? You have to know the answer to this. Tell me and make it easier." There are times when it could be frustrating when I want an answer now. And it's something I have to figure out on my own. The positive, I just feel so grateful to go through it, because it's been an important piece of how I've gotten to the position I'm in today, both in my head as well as in the physical I'm the CFO of (my company). I think both I would attribute to that process. I don't know if I would have been mentally as ready for it if I would have had to do it without her help.

Interviewee A described her feelings about her growth:

This is very good, very good. It feels like I'm really developing into more areas.

Interviewee A had made positive changes, experienced personal growth, and moved to a different level, although her growth was not without difficulty:

> Some of the feedback was shocking. It made me step back and say, "Wow, is this really how I come across?" Emotionally, first I felt hurt, and then I was sad. Later, I came to look for what I could do about it. There was definitely some pain involved to get to the growth. As I look back, I'm in such a different place, and it all happened gradually.

Interviewee H was disturbed with some feedback she received:

> Those were some of the more alarming and disappointing pieces of feedback because I'd just been so much about the work that I hadn't stopped to think about how it was impacting the people whom I was trying to support.

Interviewee F expressed some anxiety that she had with the organization's arrangement about her coaching process:

> I wanted to be more a part of the conversation. If they could say to someone else, I'm a pretty pointed person, if you've got something to say to someone, I should be able to hear it, because I would never say anything behind someone's back anyway. From that perspective, I probably wished I was more a part of it. There were a lot of times that I felt very insecure I guess about the process, and just the confidentiality of it, because it seemed like there was so much happening without me being a part of it, like it was being done for me.

Interviewee E had a lot of frustration with how little structure and specificity there was in clarifying her objectives and how she was going to achieve them through the coaching conversations:

> This is where I want you to help me. This is how I want you to help me. This is the timeframe in which I think you should help me. Good night! I don't have time for that. Coach me.

Commitment to Development Process

Nine of the ten executives expressed commitment to the development process they experienced with coaching; all ten were committed to developing themselves and believed in development. Interviewee G believed everyone deserved and needed development, and she sought out many ways to provide that for herself. As an example, she valued her participation and learned a lot in an executive women's group. However, she identified a distinct difference in the kind of support, depth of understanding, focus, and guidance between what happens in that group and coaching:

> But you can never get it to that level of discussion. A meeting can't be an hour and a half focused on me. That's seven people, each talking very briefly about something. But a meeting with (my coach) is an hour and a half about me.

Interviewee C is open with her team about her coaching:

> They all know I go, and they are all aware that I'm trying to change and be a different kind of leader. They're very supportive, which is nice, too.

Interviewee C described her commitment:

> All this learning is new territory for me, trying to incorporate it into my everyday life and trying to evaluate what's working and what isn't. And I spend a lot of time on it.

Interviewee B talked about how committed she is to her coaching:

> As much as I say it's informal, obviously there's some form of a structure there just by the fact that I have to show up some place. Knowing that I need to show up some place tells me that I need to be thinking about me. I take it seriously. I don't come unprepared . . . I'm really committed to it. I feel like it's maximizing my career and maximizing myself personally.

Several participants described the importance of committing to a specific time for development. Interviewee D said:

> At least my experience with it was that it challenged me, and it gave me the space, it gave me the room—because you're moving throughout the day and you no longer take the time to reflect. It provided that space where you can reflect and challenge your activities that I was involved with and give some context to them. And to have someone to facilitate that exercise is the uniqueness.

Interviewee I had a coaching experience thrust upon her by her company as a result of some complaints they received while she was making significant changes within the organization. She had described a number of instances where the coach was inappropriate and not useful. It was a descriptive example of her commitment when she said:

> He (my coach) also said that his opinion was that I didn't want to do the work, which to me was odd. Because someone who really got to know me would know that I am willing to do the work. In fact, so much so that I seek out coaches on my own to do the work, to do the growth work in order to make myself better or fix me so the team could be better. That was the end of that.

Interviewee H was satisfied with her coaching, and, because of her commitment to her own growth, she had a suggestion on how to deepen the experience for her:

> I think it may have been interesting, maybe not comfortable but interesting, for a little bit more challenge and a little bit more pushing me into directions just to take me more out of my comfort zone, and see how I might have responded or reacted. I think just pushing me harder on talking about a broader set of experiences that I was dealing with through work, rather than just the topics I chose to bring forward in the coaching sessions, would have been better. I felt like I was really controlling a lot of the experience. And it could be because I like to control things. It just seems like there may have been more that they [my coaches] could have done to probe and pull out other experiences and expand the conversation beyond what I was bringing forward.

Interviewee E was not pleased with the amount of direction she felt she had to provide for her coaching sessions:

> I think after the first coaching session it was clear that all we were going to do is chat about whatever. So if I didn't mentally know how the coaching session was going to go, the flow of it, I wouldn't necessarily get out of the session what I wanted to get out of it. And they responded extremely well to it when I took control of the coaching session. Taking control sounds strong, but, when I drive the progress through the session, it helps a lot. . . Looking back, the sequence phases have been quite rigid, but the coaching has been quite shallow.

Challenges to Thinking

Consistently, all participants described ways in which the coaches challenged their thinking. Questions were used as a way to have participants consider different perspectives. Some participants remembered particularly powerful questions that they reflected on and used since the original conversation.

Interviewee A said of the coaching conversations:

> It's hard work—sometimes I feel foolish. She doesn't make me feel foolish, but it's, "Oh my God, why didn't I realize that this is where they're coming from?" Or I doubt myself; she'll ask, "Why is that? Why did you come to that conclusion?" Sometimes it's just not even rational, there's no basis for that, it's just how I might think they thought. She asks questions, she makes me think deeper than what might be on the surface. And thinking deeper is hard work!

And another way interviewee A said coaching is helpful to her in thinking through decisions is with the use of questions:

> So she really helped me through some of those difficult decisions. It was great to bounce ideas off her; then she could ask questions and give me a new perspective.

Interviewee D described some of the ways she experienced coaching questions:

> We have a dialogue, and she would maybe present questions back to me and challenge my thinking in the whys and what am I thinking. What am I doing? Why are you doing that? Have you considered this? And so we move around. And then the breakthroughs come; it is a discovery process.

Interviewee H described how questions helped her recognize her patterns:

> As we've talked about situations that are occurring, that I bring up as topics in these coaching sessions, they know me well enough to say, "Well, gee, have you considered that you might be doing a, b, or c?" and it's, "Yes, I have been doing that. Busted."

Interviewee I reflected back to a coaching experience several years ago and remembered a simple question that challenged her thinking. She shared the story and remembered the question that was so powerful:

> Even though neither (my coach) nor I knew that background piece, he was good at helping me question, rather than just accepting, what I was saying and doing. Just in general, one thing that really stuck with me was, "I wonder how much control she really has over you?"

Interviewee B described how being challenged in her thinking has been so helpful:

> It helps me bring some clarity around what my personal thinking is, because once I figure it out, I'm good to go. What it does for me is she helps me drown out the noise. You have to listen to feedback, right? But if you're so open to it all the time, and you lose where your center is, you have to be able to filter it. You have to figure out whether it's noise, or whether there's some negative truth there that I need to pay attention to. That's what I think has been helpful. She's helped me sort through how to deal with the noise and how to stay centered on myself and not become arrogant or dismissive of the feedback I'm getting, but address it for what it is, too, and know who I am.

Tools Guide Actions

Participants frequently described their coaches as using tools or providing tools for them to use to guide their actions in different situations. These tools they mentioned were of a wide variety of surveys, assessment questionnaires, particular questions, exercises, and models. In each situation, the participant was encouraged to use reflection before, during, or after the tool was used.

Interviewee H noticed areas in which the coaching was helping her:

> Having greater success in being able to advance change more quickly by having skills that would have me step back and take a breath before I reacted to negative energy that was coming from all kinds of places, using different tools to get them to come around and accept the change and move through the change.

Interviewee J described an effective use of tools her coach from ten years ago had used to help her:

> Then what she did is--she fed that [informal 360° interview data] back to me. Her big deal was, "I want to crystallize three things you can remember right on the front of your forehead so that you can really call them up." That's what it ended up being. I could actually have some things that, on a daily or weekly basis, I could do differently. She was more qualitative, not so boxy [formulaic coaching program].

Interviewee I remembers a tool used with her:

> So [my coach] just saying that, teaching me to question my beliefs or my interpretations of what was going on, was really helpful. I've learned to use that more now. . . The aha point with (my coach) was when he was able to take what I

was telling him from my thinking and help me question that. That was huge. That was a personal skill, I think, and that was a huge help for me. Instead of just accepting what was going on in the environment, to question it. It turned out that was useful for me.

Interviewee C spoke about what she does with the tools:

Well, it's all in what you put into it. So (my coach) gives me the tools and part of what I do is I've incorporated some of them.

A specific example follows of a tool that interviewee C uses to help her to celebrate her accomplishments:

The other thing about entrepreneurs is, remember, we don't stop to celebrate what we've accomplished. We're constantly beating ourselves up that we didn't accomplish as much as we possibly could have in that day or in that quarter. So, when we write these accomplishments down, work and personal, and say them out loud, then it's a great feeling. This is a great tool that really helps me.

Interviewee F found benefit from the tools even when they were not implemented completely:

I can't say that I've done it [journaling]. First, I can't read my writing that well. But I've done some of it. And that was really just to talk about, really take notice of what I'm feeling and what different circumstances cause different reactions in me, and what I'm thinking at that time, so I can keep track and go back and reread what I have put in there. It's something I need to do more of that I don't do so much, although I do pay attention to what's triggering emotions and what's happening.

Interviewee J wanted to learn some technical job skills and found someone who coached her in those specific skills. She commented on how her coach provided unanticipated additional content. As an example, she was planning a reorganization, and her coach wrote a memo he would write to his staff as if he were conducting the reorganization and gave it to her. She shared that memo with her staff. Another example of a tool she obtained from him was a values identification card deck that could be used in many different ways.

> . . . basically skills based competencies in this role. I have to say though he's been very interesting. You always get extra things you don't realize.

Several participants also talked about specific consulting help they received from the coaches that guided their actions, too. Several executives respected the coach's experience in consulting and didn't separate obtaining expert consultant advice and tools from the executive coaching engagements. As an example, Interviewee I said:

> So it's more of "This is the immediate need I have right now; what do you think?" So, given some tools we can use in the workplace, what can we do with this to go the next step? That's how I do it. Then we might meet for a while, and then not at all with no promises that we will be meeting again. I go back and forth with her as a team consultant as well as a personal coach on the as-needed basis.

Different Actions Get Better Results

As a result of coaching, most of the participants were able to see their world from a different perspective. This new perspective facilitated their taking different actions in various areas. Often they talked about better outcomes as a result of their actions.

Interviewee E described how seeing a situation from a different perspective was making a big difference for her:

> When I took on a different perspective, used a different lens, it gave me an awareness of a large blind spot. I didn't even know there was a door there, and I opened it up and now it's open. And I didn't even know the door was there before! This is about my old source of frustration. I'd put my intellect out there because that's who I thought people valued. This is making a huge difference for me, and it really feels good; it's fun.

Interviewee H described how valuable coaching has been for her to think and act differently:

> I think one of the most valuable things is that this type of a process forces you to think differently and to act differently. That's what I've valued most about it. I've gotten enough tools from the different leadership programs I've been through and the MBA program. But it takes a lot of discipline to keep it in front of you and actually use them and reinforce them and make them become a part of your natural process over time.

Learning how to switch to different perspectives was important to interviewee B:

> When I reframe a situation, view it from a different perspective, I can see a different solution. And it's helpful when someone else is hearing you, is giving you this different perspective so then I can take different actions.

Rather than taking the time and making the effort to learn everything by herself, interviewee C wanted to hear different perspectives from others so she could eliminate unnecessary actions:

> I want to hear from somebody else what they did, what they tried, what worked and what didn't. I don't want to go through that if I don't have to.

Interviewee H also appreciated hearing how others may have achieved an outcome:

> They provide new ways of looking at situations and providing tools, sharing other experiences or situations that may have been similar and outcomes that have been reached by using a particular tactic or method. Sometimes they use some of their personal life experiences to draw parallels, or share from others' experiences and this is the outcome they had. And then they ask me, "Would that be something you would be comfortable trying?"

As a result of the different perspectives she's gained through coaching, interviewee C shifted how she uses her available work hours:

> I don't have a real conclusion on that [whether I still have to work these hours] because I'm doing different things in those same hours. But they're actually still work related. They're more fun for me. I've created different things to do in those hours that keep me challenged and interested versus just doing what I did three years ago and going through the motions. So I've delegated a lot of the things that I see as no longer challenging. And I've incorporated things that are more challenging for me, which makes it more interesting.

Through coaching, interviewee G gained different perspectives and insights that she is applying:

> I become a better person because I'm applying those insights, as a better leader, a better person in every regard. I'm happier. I'm more tolerant.

Interviewee C is taking many new actions as a result of different perspectives she has received through coaching:

> I think [coaching] is making a huge impact and some things aren't tangible. I stop by and talk to people all the time now because I'm actually, really interested in what's going on in their life. I think it's because I have more time. And I only have more time because I hired more people, and I delegated more. And then what am I going to fill that free time with? I'm finding out if you put a little fun in your day, the days are actually more fun.

Interviewee F acknowledged changes that she has made as a result of the new perspectives gleaned from her coaching:

> I certainly think that there's more I could benefit from if it continued on. It still is such a short time. I see myself reverting back. . . Like I didn't move ahead, or I'm not moving ahead, because I think, obviously, you take steps forward and you move back, too. It is a long process.

Outcomes

Outcomes themes are related to where participants wanted to make improvements, identified goals and objectives, experienced learning, or worked through challenges. Four major themes emerged from our conversations: being more effective with people, work/life balance, how to work with my boss, and gender-based workplace differences and challenges.

Being More Effective with People

Most participants described a variety of ways in which they wanted to be more effective with people. They talked about different situations during their coaching conversations and sought to learn how to work better with people or spoke about areas in

which they had improved. Many participants recognized the importance of understanding that people were different and that they needed to shift their approach in working with them to accommodate them as individuals.

Interviewee G talked about how critical it is to learn about other people:

> You need to learn this whole component about who you are, what you are, how you work with people, how to work better with people, what other people are about. . . Because you grow up thinking everybody's like you, or they should be like you, right? It's a learning process to learn everybody's not like you. And to really understand all the facets of how they're not like you is pretty amazing. I think you're just a much smarter person and a better interpersonally-skilled person if you learn those things.

Interviewee E recognized that she needed to make a change in how she approached people:

> One of the aha's we had was that I connect first intellectually with people, but people really want to connect with the person at more of an emotional level. And I want to connect with them intellectually.

Interviewee A recognized how she could be more effective with people:

> Understand the other person, other people, to be more effective; it's so basic. I think that recognizing the differences in people is so important. I can be so much more effective given different ways of communicating with different people. I can't communicate the same way to everyone, because they think differently. I know it now, and I can change my way of communicating if they need more information. It has really improved. As an example, I often think that this is what

> I want to tell the Board without thinking about what they need to hear so they can do their job and how I can deliver that. I'm changing.

Having a larger repertoire of approaches with people was a significant lesson for interviewee H:

> Using different styles with different people was a big learning for me. I guess I used to think that there was a right and a wrong way, but not anymore. I have a bigger toolkit now, more styles and experiences to draw from. I'm now aware of the setting and the audience and being flexible about how to get results.

Recognizing and dealing with value conflicts in the organization were an important discovery for interviewee G:

> As a result of learning about values and how important they are in driving behavior, I am able to allow, or be more tolerant of, others' values, because I recognize that conflict is arising from people having different values. And it's important to have an acceptance of that, but we have to learn about that first. I think our biggest diversity challenge has been not about gender, race, or sexual orientation but about our values. This was so powerful for me to understand. So once I recognize that we've got a conflict in values, then we can devise ways of working to be more tolerant of the views. It's been so helpful in so many areas to recognize that the direct conflict is happening at the values level.

Interviewee H gave an example of how she is working to be more effective with people:

> Having this year-long process has provided enough opportunity to revisit a topic and to make it become bigger and a part of how you think every day. I'm stepping

> back and spending more time before I go into a meeting to prep for it and think about who the audience is and what the outcome is I'm looking for.

Work/Life Balance

Six of the ten participants stated that achieving more of a balance between the allocation of personal and professional time was important. They recognized that they needed to pay attention to it and work on it regularly.

Interviewee I had intentionally shifted her career path earlier, the first time she sought the assistance of a coach, when she recognized her pattern of working too many hours. She said:

> At the time, too, I was thinking, "Gosh, I wish I could—," Balance was coming up again. "I wish I could work in law and be part-time." That was another part of my search.

Interviewee H stated that not only did she want more balance in her life for herself, but it was recognized by her new supervisor. She described that and also reflected on what she needed to do to achieve more balance:

> I was losing myself in the job, becoming very one-dimensional. I think I was becoming bitter and burning out and not recognizing that I really had a lot more control of my experience in my life. . . And my new supervisor really wanted me to achieve work/life balance. It became clear to her early on that I sort of became the funnel for all the things the organization needed done that nobody else had the experience or the background or knowledge on which to move forward. At one point she said to me, "Well, why do you own everything? And why are you here every night until eight or nine?" She wanted me to focus on that aspect, and she's

> a big supporter of developmental opportunities in general . . . Again, I need to focus on drawing those boundaries around my work day and learning how to say, "no," and that by saying "no" doesn't necessarily mean that somebody will look at me as being less valuable or less competent. It's just that I'm taking more control over me, and I value myself enough to say "no" and to make sure that I do have time for the things that are more important or as important for me.

Part of what interviewee B worked through with her coach was identifying the different areas that were important to her in her life:

> She's assisted in helping me gain some clarity around life goals, both the personal and the professional. Then we worked through what I want to do to make sure the different areas get fulfilled for me. . . I work, I race home, and I'm a mom, and a wife. . . We talked about a design for life. I liked the fact that she was willing to tackle the personal and the professional, that the person sitting at the desk every day is effective or not effective based on things going on at home, too. So you can't just leave that person at the door and say, "I'm at work and none of that stuff matters." She recognizes that you are an integrated person. I like that. We work through a lot of those things. I think it was a good thing to do.

Interviewee J expanded on some of the coaching assignments and extended the notion of core purpose into different goal areas in her life. She shared some ways in which she was making changes:

> So I began to think, okay, if I am really proactive, not just from a work standpoint but from these standpoints, that's going to allow me to have better balance. . . What I wanted to do was integrate parts of my life together because I just don't

> have…I have to get twofers. I don't have enough time in the day. So I'm taking my daughter to a work conference on Sunday. I'm going to take her to San Francisco with me for four days. And she'll sit in some of the business meetings, and I'll see her in the evening, and she'll just hang along. One of my coworkers is taking her on some outside jobs. . . I've gotten much more conscious about my calendar. I share this with (my assistant). (My assistant) knows this. Basically you can see here things like, "No more than two evenings per week away from family."

Interviewee C described that the main purpose of her coaching was around incorporating more balance and appreciation for what she has accomplished:

> It's still, work less and make more. And it's all about getting balance in your life. I admit that I belong in Workaholics Anonymous. The first big, big milestone for me was that I control my calendar, I control my time. You can actually go in and block it out. And the coaching is really for entrepreneur-like people –one of the things he [my coach] talks about is never reaching the horizon because we see it and we're forever chasing it to get to it. And even if we do have, and many of us do have, successes in our life, we don't even stop to celebrate. We're so busy creating the next milestone that we don't stop to celebrate.

How to Work with my Boss

Six of the ten participants used coaching conversations to discuss ways to improve the way they worked with their bosses. Some experienced different outcomes as a result of the different ways in which they worked with their bosses.

Interviewee E shared about the different way she worked but also the content of the conversation:

> So part of how the coaching has helped me is to actually be bolder in speaking to my boss about not only what I want and for my next career move, but also how I engage with him, emotionally and not intellectually always. And pull out the right part of me that needs to connect, and not feel so disconnected when I can't connect on the idea. I have to connect emotionally.

Interviewee H had a specific focus in working with her new boss:

> Probably the biggest thing that I can take away is the courage to make the decisions without always needing [her boss'] input. Finding ways to keep her informed of things without having face-to-face meetings or having a lot of dialogue, that's been challenging.

Interviewee A has experienced improvements in working with her boss:

> Through that mentoring, through that coaching with (my coach), I was much more successful in having a better working relationship with (my boss), and I don't think that she'd do that today—she was just frustrated, didn't get the information she needed, and that was kind of her style. But now she'll say, "I really appreciate you, that you challenge me, that [making broad, critical statements, especially publicly] isn't appropriate"; things have changed. What I've learned from (my coach) is to get the courage to do that, that she is my CEO, but you don't treat people like that. She apologized to me; it was a big win.

Interviewee D realized something important about working with her boss:

> Also, along with that, this was a big breakthrough, too, because I don't think it applies just to him. But I'm pretty verbal, and I will verbalize; this is also why I didn't think he was a good person to do coaching with, but I verbalize a lot. I think out loud; I am not necessarily looking for you to take any action. But I may toss something out, use you as a sounding board to get feedback. He interpreted that I was looking for him to tell me what to do. And so what I've learned is that I have to preface my conversations with him and say, "I'm looking for some coaching from you on this topic," or "I'm sharing; I don't need anything from you." I have to put it in context so he doesn't automatically think I'm dumping on him, and I don't know what to do. I learned that I have to manage that with him. And if I do that, then he can get his head around, "Okay, she's not looking for me to come up with answers," because that's what was happening. And it is no longer working against me. He was misinterpreting that I was looking for him to solve my problem. That wasn't it at all. I just use sounding boards.

Interviewee B struggled in wanting acknowledgement and appreciation that she was doing a good job from her boss:

> That was my growing up thing, in that I really like that validation. I really like people saying "Thank you. Nice job." So it's been a long time. That's a lot of what we've focused on is, why do you need that, because I wanted it from our CEO [her boss]. I just wanted him to say, "Thank you. Nice job." And she's asked, "Why is that so important to you? Knowing that he can't give that to you, why is that so important to you?" We spent a lot of time thinking about that, because it did matter.

Gender-based Workplace Differences and Challenges

Gender-based workplace differences and challenges were mentioned by six of the ten participants. This was an area in which they were looking to make a change, or it was noticed and commented about.

The work environment was an important component for Interviewee J as she described her first coaching experience:

> The first [coaching experience] was probably…I was mid-30's and in a tough, all-male organization. . . I was having some bumps in the road with the sales force. The chairman of the firm, whom I really liked, said, "You've got some bumps in the road from a team-relationship standpoint. Let's have (coach) figure that out."

Interviewee B commented on disrespect she experienced:

> I've got other department heads not reporting to me who…there are gender-based differences. There is a lot of disrespect that flows out that is uncalled for, unnecessary, unwarranted, and it drives me crazy. And I think it is a male-female thing.

Later, interviewee B offered an explanation for some of her experiences:

> One, I think they're personally threatened by me. I think its gender more than anything else. It's so funny because it's the people who come up to me and say, "Wow, it's really tough being a woman in your organization." Why would you say that? But it's interesting the number of people I have coming up to me and saying that. I don't know why our corporate office wouldn't be more accepting of women in leadership roles. Executive women are threatening for some men. Strong women are threatening. For me, that's one of the hardest things to say out

> loud because I don't want it to be a crutch. It can't be a crutch, because, welcome to life. Sometimes it's hard to figure out how to navigate in that arena [gender]. That's challenging. That's where coaching is helpful, too.

One participant recognized her preferences for idea generating or working together that was not universally shared by others. Interviewee D said:

> I don't see guys collaborating or talking like I want to…, they're out to the bar and those types of things, at those types of settings. There are a couple of guys I can talk to, to some extent, who are my colleagues, and we toss around ideas to some extent. But it's challenging. I think it's mostly because we're all so busy, and carving out time to do that is difficult. I don't have time to hang out at the bar with them. I have responsibilities in the evening with my family situation. It's challenging.

Interviewee F noticed her contributions were sometimes attributed to others:

> One of the concerns I had was I wanted to be able to speak in a way that was captivating to my audiences, because I felt there were many times that I would say something in a meeting, and someone would give someone else credit for it. That's only going to create me feeling like I have to prove myself even more because how do they not even hear that I was the one who said that? And how do you manage it so that it doesn't come across as, "I said that. He didn't say that"?

Another example interviewee D related was about how suggestions were perceived:

> I don't believe I'm incorrect in saying that I can execute a suggestion, and a male colleague of mine could execute a suggestion, but the perception will not be the

> same for the both of us. And I've talked to my manager on occasion about this, and he doesn't necessarily agree with me on this, but I know that how I'm perceived as a female is different from a male. It's analogous to women being defined as bitches. What's the difference? It's just a perception so you have to, at least I believe, to get the same results you have to know how to execute in a manner that can generate them. And it may be different from what your male colleagues have to do. . . So you just have to develop, knowing that that's the state of the world or the environment; you find ways to deal with it and overcome it. And that's part of the coaching is to hopefully help you do that.

Interviewee J recognized that being a woman and the boss is unusual:

> The managing partners who work with me have all been at (company) for 25 to 35 years. They're all older than I am. They're all men, and I'm sure I'm their first woman boss. It's a weird dynamic.

Other gender dynamics at the workplace were noticed not only in executive teams but elsewhere. Interviewee J thought that creating good quality working relationships was important:

> Clearly, in executive teams, there are some strange things that go on in terms of people feeling truly comfortable with one another. It almost moves beyond results to qualitative companion ability. In my working relationship with my directs, it's not about that. It's more around, how can I help them do their jobs? And that transcends gender, is what I've found. . . Being on good terms with their spouses is really helpful. When their wives give me big hugs, I know that I've arrived. They like me and that's good; it's all good.

Having a woman's perspective in coaching was important to interviewee D:

It was a pleasure working with a woman. That was the whole deal. For me, that was one of the draws also with (my coach). I know that she could appreciate the perspective I'm coming from. We had common experiences in the workplace, but our perspectives are different. And so my interpretation of a circumstance is going to be slightly different from my male colleagues. . . Talking to another woman, it may be something they've encountered, also. In being a woman, they may have a similar interpretation that I may have, and may have also used some tactics that were successful.

Interviewee I talked about not having a mentor as she saw other men having:

Through the years there haven't been a lot of sponsors or mentor-type individuals who held themselves up and said, "I really believe in you. Let's go to lunch. Let's talk about this and that." So I think that's why I'm more proactive to go out and find that for myself or try to create it for myself. I did see that with other men, other younger men who were mentored by the older guys. I didn't feel good about it, but I was used to it by then, because that's how it's always been.

Interviewee I also talked about the length of time it takes to be seen as credible:

What I've tried to do through the years is keep some contacts now with older male trusted partners in the field, or the same age as me. Now that I've been in the field long enough, they may be more accepting of that--that I am around, I am someone to be respected. I think I've built that enough now that people go, "She wasn't just a flash in the pan. She's good at what she does. There's substance

behind it." It takes time. It does take longer for some women, for a lot of women, including me. I've still done okay, but, yeah, it's been a lot of work.

Summary

In this chapter I explained the themes within the insight to action and outcomes categories. Insight to action had six themes: self-discovery and awareness, emotions, commitment to development process, challenges to thinking, tools guide action and different actions get better results. Participants in the study believed that growth was not possible without self-discovery and awareness. Participants generally had many positive feelings during learning about themselves and taking actions, although some difficult emotions were stirred up as well. All participants were committed to their development, as well as the coaching process. They described the coach as challenging their thinking and providing tools to guide their actions; questions were an important component of the coach's approach. Being able to see a situation from a different perspective allowed them to take different actions that often generated better results than previous actions taken.

The outcomes area had four themes: being more effective with people, work/life balance, how to work with my boss and gender-based workplace differences and challenges. Participants expressed how valuable it was to understand people and now they felt they had more effective ways to approach and interact with people. They expressed ways they were seeking more balance between the amount of time and energy devoted to work and that devoted to their personal life. The participants identified areas where they were communicating differently with their bosses, often getting better results. Finally, participants described examples where workplace issues occurred with men; some were those that participants were working through, and others were described as "just the way it is." These situations were described matter-of-factly, although some

generated feelings that made them uncomfortable, confused, disappointed, frustrated, or mad.

Chapter 6 provides a post-literature review that discusses how the themes that emerged from the study are represented in the literature. Chapter 7 presents a summary of my research and also my reflections on how my personal experiences related to executive coaching align with those of the study participants. Lastly, recommendations for practice and future research are provided.

CHAPTER 6

POST-ANALYSIS LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to present a post-analysis literature review to discuss the themes that emerged from the study from the perspective of the literature. The chapter examines each of the themes within the context of the relevant literature and how the themes are supported or if there are differences. Themes are presented within these four categories: why coaching, role of the coach, insight to action, and outcomes.

Why Coaching?

Two themes emerged from the participants' texts: feeling alone and wanting help, and motivated by challenge and growth. Participants stated that there was no one with whom they felt they could talk about specific work or career issues, and they wanted help, another perspective, or more. The participants expressed that they were motivated by challenge and growth and were looking to continue moving forward, whether that required learning new skills, having more responsibilities, being promoted, or generally wanting more knowledge and understanding.

Much of the coaching literature has been written from the perspective of the coach and suggests that executives seek coaching to bring about lasting behavioral change or are looking for ways to refine and enhance their skills in order to continue in current positions or move into more advanced positions (Brotman et al., 1998; Judge & Cowell, 1997; Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001). More recently, the purpose of executive coaching has expanded to include assisting managers and senior leaders in achieving maximum personal and professional growth (Blattner, 2005).

Feeling Alone and Wanting Help

The literature reflects two kinds of isolation that executives experience as they move into higher positions within an organization. They receive little direct feedback about their leadership impact. In addition, some executives feel that leading a business or major business function is a lonely activity, without being able to be vulnerable and think out loud. Discussions do not always feel safe, and there are no confidants to offer insight or constructive ideas. These situations often prompt executive coaching engagements that are loosely structured and of an indefinite duration where executives are able to obtain feedback and bounce ideas off a trusted coach (Hall et al., 1999; Saporito, 1996; Witherspoon & White, 1996.) One study of six male and 1 female CEOs or presidents (Stevens, 2005) reported that their reasons to engage in executive coaching were to have a sounding board and for self-improvement, but they did not reflect the feeling of being isolated or alone.

Motivated by Challenge and Growth

All ten of the participants described themselves as motivated by challenge and growth and wanting more within their career. While some already knew what they wanted and others were exploring what was next, they brought that strong attitude to their coaching engagement.

The literature does not specifically address the internal conditions, predispositions, or readiness factors of executives prior to coaching and the implications of those conditions, although a little has been written about the individual coachee. For example, Peterson (1996) stated that people are motivated to work on their development when they perceive discrepancies between where they are and where they want to be.

And Johnson (2004) reported that coaching is popular because individuals want more success, both personally and professionally. In his coaching process, Diedrich (1996) employed an upfront assessment of the individual's critical competencies that include the measurement of their social motives, one of which is achievement. There is no mention about how those individual motives are used or involved in the coaching process or outcomes.

Joo (2005) identified coachee characteristics as an important antecedent within the conceptual framework of successful executive coaching. He stated that the ability to gauge a coachee's readiness and suitability for coaching was important in order not to waste resources and to increase the likelihood of success. He proposed studying two dimensions, the proactivity personality factor and one's goal orientation as motivation factors and hypothesized that they both would have a positive impact on successful coaching outcomes. In another study, a typology for assessing executive coaching engagements (Wasylyshyn, 2003) suggested that successful executives and other high-potential employees would have sustainable learning and behavior change as a result of coaching, with key criteria being the executive's motivation for change or new learning.

Role of the Coach

Every participant talked about her coach in many different ways throughout the interviews. Five themes within this category included trusted, professional, guide, strengthens me, and expects action. This section discusses the literature in relation to these themes.

The role of the coach refers to the functions performed by the coach while in relationship with the executive. The relationship is typically a one-to-one helping and facilitative relationship while retaining a peer status. The functions are focused on

helping an executive learn, grow, and change within different contexts; examples include teaching specific skills, addressing performance issues on the job, or supporting an executive's behavioral changes in broader applications (Hamlin, Ellinger, & Beattie, 2008; Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001; Levinson, 1996; Sherman & Freas, 2004; Witherspoon & White, 1996).

Witherspoon and White (1996) emphasized the importance of clarifying the specific role of the coach early in the process. They identified four primary functions: coaching for specific skills, coaching for the present job, coaching for a future job, and coaching on the executive's agenda. My study findings did not support the importance of clarifying this or necessarily staying within one function but, rather, supported that the coach's roles are adapted to the presenting issues as determined by the client.

The literature states that the coaching relationship is important, and having a good match between the executive and the executive coach is critical in coaching effectiveness; however, this has been determined from a practice perspective, and specific criteria have not been empirically identified (Joo, 2005; Kilburg, 2004; Lowman, 2005). In this study, participants valued the role of the coach and specific aspects of that role, but they did not specifically describe these experiences or identify the value due to such a relationship.

The importance of the alliance in producing individual change is well established in the literature (Goodstone & Diamante, 1998). "In all the literature on helping human beings with their problems and issues, the single most important item repeatedly identified as contributing to positive outcomes is a meaningful, lasting, and effective working relationship" (Kilburg, 2001, p. 258).

One six month study (Carter, 2002) investigated learning that emerged in professional development relationships among ten managerial women during mid-career transition. The participants used journals and conversations with work colleagues, bosses, family, friends, and internal dialogues. Participants reported learning that significantly revised some beliefs, attitudes, and values and resulted in a changed worldview.

Trusted

Participants spoke about the importance of trust in a relationship with an executive coach; seven participants experienced trust completely and consistently in all of their coaching experiences. For those who did not trust their coach, participants described situations in which the confidentiality agreements with their organizations were not up to date or clear, or where the coach had senior management as a client in addition to the executive being coached.

The literature reported that trust was a foundational element within the coaching relationship; being external to the organization facilitated trust. In addition, being approachable as a coach allowed an executive to feel safe. Building mutual trust and understanding with the client was the first strategy for a coach, so people would want to work with that coach. Clients would then be confident that the information obtained during coaching was privileged and would not be shared with anyone. As a policy, some coaches do not perform assessment consulting work and executive coaching for the same clients as information obtained within the coaching engagement had to remain confidential and should not influence assessment work (Brotman et al., 1998; Flaherty, 1999; Hall et al., 1999; Johnson, 2004; Peterson, 1996; Stevens, 2005).

Professional

Participants in this study viewed their coaches as professional and identified different qualities that made them so. Several mentioned their coach's credentials and experiences as part of what they initially screened for and valued in them as professionals prior to selecting them. However, what they valued in them as a professional after they began working with them shifted to how they felt about how the coaches worked with them.

The literature is lengthy in its discussion of the qualifications and credentials of who is best or most qualified to be an executive coach. The majority of the psychologically based coaching literature has been written by psychologists and is located within the consulting psychologist's journals. The argument was advanced that the coach should be a psychologist or at least theoretically grounded in human psychology and social systems. Additional coach training and preparation included being knowledgeable about the context of particular business areas and potential political implications, ability to work with organization systems, and real-world understanding (Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001; Levinson, 1996; Saporito, 1996; Stern, 2004; Stevens, 2005). Wasylyshyn (2003) studied 87 executives who received coaching and reported the top three credential and experience criteria used by executives to choose coaches: graduate training in psychology, 82%; experience in business/general management, 78%; and coaching experience and positive reputation, 25%.

No studies were identified that conclusively demonstrated specific professional training that makes a coach qualified or better than another coach. Many articles identify the broad variety of executive coaches' backgrounds (Joo, 2005; Judge & Cowell, 1997;

Sherman & Freas, 2004; Smither, London, Flautt, Vargas, & Kucine (2003). Thorough discussion about who is coaching, who is qualified, licensure, credentialing, and implications are available. (Brotman et al., 1998; Grant & Zackon, 2004; Hamlin,et al., 2008; Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001).

Similar findings from this study about the quality of interactions were in the literature as well. Good coaches require skill, plenty of practice, and depth of understanding and are developmentally mature (Flaherty, 1999; Modoono, 2002; Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001; Korthagen, 2005; Witherspoon & White, 1996). Stevens' (2005) study of seven executives who received coaching reported factors related to the coach for an effective engagement. He described it as effective when the coach is interested in the success of the executive; comfortable and knowledgeable about the executive's context; credible; a good listener; had a smart, insightful perspective; and possessed an authentic and ethical personal character.

Guide

Participants talked about their coaches as a guide as they pursued their objectives. The literature discussed the role of the coach from several perspectives. One is the use of the coach him- or herself as a tool through which an empathic understanding of the executive is obtained (Gray, 2006; Hall et al., 1999; Orenstein, 2002). The coach's understanding of the different dynamics within and around the executive is used as she or he guides the executive to accomplish the coaching program objectives.

A partnership role has been inferred when the coaching process is described as a collaborative learning journey with shared commitment toward the outcome (Gray, 2006; Kilburg, 2001; Wasylyshyn, 2003; Witherspoon & White, 1996). Coaches provide

feedback and guidance through different processes, such as goal setting, collaborative problem solving, and the development of concrete plans (Kilburg, 1996; Olivero, 2001; Peterson, 1996). Richard (2003) likened the coach to a teacher, deliberately teaching techniques and rules for using them throughout the coaching process. Being able to employ appropriate learning strategies for different skills is critical. "The role of the coach is to find the best way for an individual to learn a specific skill" (Peterson, 1996, p. 80). Not only does the coach identify the particular intervention to use to accomplish the intervention, but also guides the client's attention and employs various tactics to facilitate program adherence (Kilburg, 1996, 1997, 2001).

Strengthens Me

Participants described how working with a coach reinforced them in doing what they knew to be the right thing and fueled their confidence in making desired changes. They used language about the coach providing them with courage and strength.

Very little was found in the literature that identified ways in which the coach strengthened the individual client. Stevens (2005) gathered data from seven executives. When asked why an executive would engage in executive coaching, one theme was for self-improvement, to strengthen one's ability to meet the responsibilities of the position. Goodman (2002) stated that coaching dialogue is focused on transforming the client's thinking and behavior and is done in two ways: support, or helping clients to take risks, and challenge, by providing the push that encourages change.

Expects Action

Many participants stated that her coach expected some action as a result of their coaching work together. The women in this study did not state that the coach was to hold

them accountable for actions and results but identified that it was their own responsibility, not the coach's.

Similar to my study, Witherspoon and White (1996) stated that executive clients are held accountable for their own progress. The literature describes the connection between goals, learning, and taking action and identifies specific strategies that coaches employ that promote persistence and adherence to coaching commitments on the part of the client (Hart et al., 2001; Kilburg, 2001; Peterson, 1996; Witherspoon & White, 1996). The strategies involve different conversations with clients about the application phase of coaching. These are designed to learn about one's history of deliberate change to ensure agreement or goal clarity, goal setting, behavioral contracting, corrective feedback, and positive reinforcement.

Insight to Action

Insight to action is the category that refers to themes that emerged from participants' conversations about the coaching process. The six themes included self-discovery and awareness, emotions, commitment to development process, challenges to thinking, tools guide action, and different actions get better results.

For all of the executive coaching work that has been conducted and written about in the literature, Kilburg (2004) concluded that what actually happened during engagements is a mystery. Based on psychological research, he stated, "it would appear to be reasonable to conclude that the nonspecific aspects of helping create most of the positive leverage for change in human lives. Differences across foundations are nil, nevertheless positive" (p. 204).

A difference was noted between this study and the literature's description of the importance of orchestrated organization support and distributed responsibilities for

successful coaching outcomes. The literature described executive coaching as consisting of a triangular relationship with shared responsibility among the coach, the client, and his or her organizational sponsor. Agreement on the coaching plan increases ownership, support, visible links, and commitment to change from all parties (Joo, 2005; Judge & Cowell, 1997; Peterson, 1996; Sherman & Freas, 2004). As identified in chapter 1, Ballinger (2000) identified a significant difference between men's and women's experiences of receiving the boss's and organizational support for coaching. In my study, organization support for executive coaching and joint responsibility to ensure success, was prominently absent. The participants pursued coaching on their own and then obtained reimbursement; few conversations occurred with their bosses or human resources about the process, goals, outcomes, or value to themselves and the organization.

Another discrepancy between what is stated in the literature but not found in this study is about the clarity and timing of goal identification. All of the participants in the study began their coaching programs with varying clarity about their goals and development; as described earlier, they all wanted something more but some did not necessarily know what that was. In the literature, however, having specific intentions about how coaching will further measurable goals was identified as an important up-front aspect to ensure positive results (Peterson, 1996; Sherman & Freas, 2004).

The literature described several general models of executive coaching. Most of the coaching literature focused on the what and how of various methods of individual practitioners; academically, very little is known about how coaching works (Blattner, 2005; Kilburg, 2004). The basic process is consistent with other consultation models and

had six stages: relationship building and contracting, assessment, feedback, planning, implementation, and evaluation appropriate (Diedrich, 1996; Joo, 2005; Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001; Kilburg, 1996; Peterson, 1996; Saporito, 1996; Tobias, 1996). One study critically examined the existing literature across psychology, training and development, and management to determine whether executive coaching was a distinct intervention (Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001). They generally support that executive coaching is distinct; however, they encourage more substantive delineations between it and psychotherapy and counseling, in addition to encouraging more empirical research about coaching's outcomes. In my study, as previously reported, there were several instances when a couple of participants directed the intervention towards consulting rather than coaching.

As coaching models and approaches have not been standardized (Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001), the literature was inconsistent in specifying the duration of a coaching engagement and ranged from a few sessions to an indefinite time depending on the coaching purpose and objectives (Peterson, 1996; Stern, 2004; Witherspoon & White, 1996). This study was consistent with the literature, as coaching duration ranged from a few months to as-needed to ongoing.

Self-discovery and Awareness

All ten participants discussed the importance of learning new things about themselves and paying attention to different areas within themselves and their interactions with others. The learning occurred throughout the coaching engagement.

The literature reported that clients identified the most helpful coaching component to be forcing oneself to reflect (Judge & Cowell, 1997). Carter (2002) reported study

findings that managerial and executive women were more likely than men to engage in reflective learning about self and connections with others. The capacity to reflect, and the effectiveness of that reflection, differed across individuals; it may be a differentiating feature for those who learn effectively from experience (Korthagan, 2005).

Transformative learning was a potentially powerful guide to coaching, and encouraged self-reflection of experiences and assumptions; this transformed the learner's meaning perspectives and allowed learners to take new actions as a result. Transformational learning was both gradual and sudden. It was reported that significant change was possible when we critique the assumptions held about ourselves; however, the process is not complete without acting on the new learning (Elkins, 2003; Gray, 2006).

Participants reported self-discovery learning both as ah-ha flashes and more gradual learning experiences. The literature reported this phenomenon in distinguishing two forms of intuition, where logical-analytical thinking played almost no part; this was described as an intuitive flash, brief moments of deeper insight, and was compared with a more stable capacity to act on deeper knowing (Korthagen, 2005).

The literature stated that a major principle underlying executive coaching was improved self-awareness. When the coach stimulated clients to think, feel, and explore new ideas and assisted the individual in working through resistance to change, those who took time and did so positioned themselves to learn more quickly and effectively than those who did not. As people improved their ability to be self-aware, they were better able to take action and made positive changes (Hart et al., 2001; Joo, 2005; Kilburg, 1996; Kilburg, 1997; Orenstein, 2002; Sherman & Freas, 2004.)

Emotions

All ten of the participants expressed emotions when they described their coaching experiences. The women experienced many emotions as a result of their learning during the coaching engagement, ranging from joy and happiness to sadness and painful feelings as well. Some were clear and easy to express, and others were more complicated and difficult to verbalize succinctly.

Flaherty (1999) labeled one domain of human development as emotional. He stated that it was the ability to discern one's own emotional states not only in the moment, but also the background tone of one's life. Being developed in this area also includes the ability to discern the emotional state of others. It also includes the ability to stay present and available to one's self and others in the midst of strong emotional events.

In this study, the emotional qualities of participants' experiences were prominent and reflected a healthy range. However, the literature's primary mention of the occurrence of client emotions warned about unearthing deeply rooted psychological trauma, significant emotional responses, or other issues during coaching conversations. Dealing with these belonged within the framework of therapeutic interventions and in a psychologist's or clinician's practice rather than within an untrained coach's practice (Gray, 2006; Hart et al., 2001; Kilburg, 1996, 1997, 2000; Joo, 2005).

The literature was sparse in acknowledging emotions and coaching. It was reported that people differed in their awareness of the way their feelings influence their actions (Damasio, 1999). And, the importance of tending to feelings as a precursor to change was noted (Gray, 2006; Korthagen, 2005; Prochaska, Norcross, & DiClemente, 1994).

Commitment to Development Process

Study participants expressed commitment to the coaching development process. All ten of the executives were committed to developing themselves and believed in personal and professional growth.

Bierema (1999) identified three development levels for executive women. The highest developmental stage, change agents, was characterized by women's focus on personal development. The literature also identified the importance of the client being a partner in the coaching process and taking ownership for their development and growth; much of the success was dependent on the way the client approached the work (Hall et al., 1999; Joo, 2005; Kilburg, 2001; Peterson, 1996; Stevens, 2005). One study reported that approximately half of executives initiated coaching (Judge & Cowell, 1997).

Challenges to Thinking

All participants described ways their coaches challenged their thinking. The use of questions was particularly powerful and, as a result, caused participants to consider different perspectives.

One study of seven executives (Stevens, 2005) reported that coaching was useful in challenging and sharpening one's thinking. Executive clients valued honest, reliable feedback, and coaching prompted them to see the world from another perspective (Hall et al., 1999; Wasylyshyn, 2003).

The literature also reported that questions were an important component of coaching, and their use occurred throughout the process. They were included as part of the upfront intake and assessment phase to address compliance, used when problems arose, to encourage the exploration of new options, or the use of strategic questions were

purposefully taught to shift thinking (Kilburg, 2001, Richard, 2003; Witherspoon & White, 1996).

Tools Guide Actions

Participants referenced their coaches using tools with them in two ways: as a guide in focused assessment, self-discovery, or awareness that may or may not include data feedback to the participant, and tool used in particular situations. Coaches focused participants' attention and awareness in a particular area while using the tools.

The literature referenced the use of tools. One study's executive clients reported their top preferences for coaching tools to be: coaching sessions, 360 degree feedback, and relationship with the coach. In addition, more than 50% gave high ratings to testing and readings on leadership (Wasylyshyn, 2003).

Coaches reported using assessments, tools, and exercises; examples ranged from career counseling, values and goal clarification exercises, critical competencies identification, psychological and personality measurements, 360 degree assessments, formal and informal interviews, and informal assessments (Brotman et al., 1998; Diedrich, 1996; Judge & Cowell, 1997; Peterson, 1996; Smither et al., 2003). The majority of the assessments were conducted in the beginning, while other tools and exercises were used throughout the engagement, depending on the objectives. Orenstein (2002) stated that the use of self was the tool; the coach experienced an empathetic understanding of the client and the situation and was engaged in bringing about desired change with the client.

The literature specifically identified 360 degree assessments and feedback as a coaching tool. Smither et al. (2003) examined the effects of executive coaching on

multisource feedback and reported that those managers who received coaching were more likely to set specific goals and to solicit ideas for improvement from their supervisors. A year later in the second measurement, their direct report and supervisor ratings improved more than other managers who did not work with an executive coach. Kilburg (1997) also reported a significant positive relationship between managerial self-awareness and managerial performance. In Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson's (2001) literature review, they stated that, regardless of coaching approach, the use of 360-degree feedback was used in the coaching process. In my study, 360 degree assessments and feedback were not used with all participants.

Goodstone and Diamante (1998) provided theoretical support for the role that self-awareness played in receiving 360-degree feedback within the coaching process. They summarized Carl Rogers' (1980) tenet within person-centered therapy that self-awareness is a central and active agent of change as the individual explores his or her own perceptions and experiences of the information received. However, 360-degree feedback in itself did not lead to change; it had to be accurate and meaningfully processed by the receiver, and the personal change had to be acceptable within the framework of organizational culture and goals.

The literature noted that coaches used methods, techniques, activities, structures, and processes with clients. When used to direct client attention, reflection, and self-awareness, tools were helpful in guiding new behaviors (Kilburg, 1996; 1997; Witherspoon & White, 1996). Carter (2002) identified the importance of journals in assisting in transformative learning. Korthagen (2005) reported that the meta-level tool of

learning how to reflect in order to self-steer was an important skill for clients to apply in a variety of situations.

Different Actions Get Better Results

Participants reported that they gained valuable new perspectives. As a result of coaching, they altered their thinking and at times took different actions and got better results.

The literature reported that achieving some behavioral change and helping individuals to improve their performance was usually the goal of executive coaching. Often the learning and changes were focused on human interactions within the interpersonal sphere. Some coaching examples and case studies were described, but little documentation for improved results was found (Brotman et al., 1998; Diedrich, 1996; Hall et al., 1999; Hamlin, et al., 2008; Judge & Cowell, 1997; Peterson, 1996). Similarly, Gray (2006) reported that transformative learning fostered critical self-reflection and helped learners to take action. The learning was not complete without the individual acting on the basis of the new learning.

Outcomes

Women in this study had several areas in which they wanted to make improvements, identified goals and objectives, experienced learning, or worked through challenges. Themes under this category were: be more effective with people, work life balance, how to work with my boss, and gender based workplace differences and challenges. This section discusses how the literature supports or differs from these themes.

The literature reported that good coaching was results oriented. The coaching process included the upfront agreement about roles and goals, along with the evaluation

of coaching successes and failures (Hall et al., 1999; Kilburg, 1996). Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson (2001) stated that the type of outcomes executive coaching had in the field needed further study.

Be More Effective with People

Most participants described a variety of ways in which they experienced being more effective in their interactions with people, or situations in which they wanted to be more effective with people. Many participants recognized the importance of understanding that people were different and how to accommodate them as individuals.

The outcomes and result areas reported in this study were supported by the literature. Modifying one's interaction style to be more effective with people was a commonly desired coaching outcome. In addition, other frequently reported desired interpersonal outcomes included building trust, improved relationships, and improved listening skills (Diedrich, 1996; Hall et al., 1999; Johnson, 2004; Judge & Cowell, 1997; Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001; Kilburg, 1996).

In this study, participants spoke about developing their authentic voice and learning to speak from it. They described the absence of it, learning to recognize and locate it and then cultivating it through their coaching work. The use of their authentic voice facilitated their ability to be more effective with people. Gray (2006) stated that it was essential for women to develop their own authentic voices and allow time for the knowledge that emerged from first-hand experiences to inform that voice. He stated that coaching allowed individuals to connect with these experiences.

The literature identified other goals or outcomes that executives included in coaching programs; they were only mentioned by a couple of participants and were not a

theme in this study. These goals or outcomes were being more personal and warm, dealing better with change, clarification of goals, career management, improved delegation skills, and improved effectiveness of the team (Hall et al., 1999; Judge & Cowell, 1997; Kilburg, 1996).

Work/Life Balance

Six of the ten participants stated that they wanted more balance between work and personal time. They recognized the need to pay attention to it continually.

The coaching literature also identified balancing work and personal life as an executive coaching outcome (Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001; Kilburg, 1996; Judge & Cowell, 1997). Achieving or paying attention to the balance was not identified as one of the top priorities, however. Roemer (2002) conducted a study on career development and mentoring of 35 women CEOs of health care organizations. One finding was that marriage and children had not previously been considered in the mentoring literature, and she posed that perhaps it was not seen as important in men's careers. In this study, participants who had stay-at-home husbands did not identify work and life balance as a priority coaching outcome.

How to Work with my Boss

Six of the ten participants used coaching conversations to help them improve the way they worked with their bosses. Some took different actions and reported different outcomes as a result of the changed ways in which they worked with their bosses.

Hall et al. (1999) identified improving and managing interpersonal relationships with boss and senior managers as one of the most difficult issues covered in executive coaching. They stated that coaches offered the greatest value for the most difficult issues.

Other literature that specifically discussed managing up, or how to work with one's boss, was not located.

Gender-based Workplace Differences and Challenges

Discussion of gender based workplace differences and challenges were mentioned by six of the ten participants. These were areas in which they experienced a challenge or described dynamics that they noticed within the workplace.

Statistics about men and women in the workplace indicated that, in 2007, women made up 46.3% of the labor force, and 50.6% of managerial, professional, and related positions (Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2007). The U.S. Census Bureau reported that the pay gap between men and women was decreasing, and, in 2005, women were earning 81% of their male counterparts' earnings (Zupek, 2007). The financial inequity was not commented on by this study's participants.

The women's studies literature stated that corporate cultures had been historically designed and controlled by a homogenous group of white men (Bierema, 1999; Lyness & Thompson, 2000; Meyerson & Fletcher, 2000; Morrison, White, van Velsor & the Center for Creative Leadership, 1992). Meyerson and Fletcher (2000) described modern organizations as those where the priorities were: work is above all else, individual achievement and competition are valued, and success is defined in terms of financial rewards. Gender inequity was characteristic of modern organizations when a masculine view has shaped the culture and norms. One ex-CEO woman stated:

> The thing that makes the glass ceiling real is not that people are actively prejudiced against women or other groups. Rather, it's not generally understood how excluded some women can be from a culture. . . Some of the relationships

> that make business more comfortable, that make you think more highly of someone, do not necessarily happen in meetings where you're showing great results. (Wehrwein, 2008, p. 51)

This sentiment supports several stories participants told in this study about feeling excluded and not part of the action.

Another study of 60 eminent women leaders conducted by Erkut (Wellesley College, Wellesley Centers for Women, 2001) sought to understand their experiences in order to share and help other women rise to top leadership positions. This study confirmed findings that other researchers observed, specifically, that there were institutional roadblocks to women's success rather than individual roadblocks. She stated that most of the obstacles were embedded in the organization of work and was not designed with the support of a family structure in mind. An additional finding was that the leaders surmounted gender-based barriers in their own careers. While some struggled with it on a daily basis, others reported that their individual prominence and achievements seemed to have protected them from incidents of gender-based inequity. One ex-CEO in my study reported that she previously experienced gender inequity, but, once she achieved CEO, she no longer did.

Eagly, Karau, and Makhijani (1995) synthesized the research on the relative effectiveness of women and men who occupied leadership and managerial roles. When aggregated over all of the studies, male and female leaders were equally effective. However,

> Men were more effective than women in roles that were defined in more masculine terms, and women were more effective than men in roles that were

> defined in less masculine terms. Also, men were more effective than women to the extent that leader and subordinate roles were male-dominated numerically. (Eagly et al., 1995, p. 125)

Many participants in this study described experiences of being in a male-dominated culture or industry; the literature supported this.

Bierema (1999) examined executive women's learning and development within a corporate culture. One unexpected finding she stated was the women's lack of gender consciousness with regard to how they were treated in the culture. Her evidence of this was the women not referring to themselves as feminists, or descriptions of discriminatory situations were not attributed to harassment or sex discrimination. The participants in my study identified several situations in which they did identify gender differences; some of these were reported matter-of-factly, as this was the way it was. I disagree with Bierema's conclusion that, because the women did not use particular labels, they were not gender conscious and were perpetuating discriminatory social and power structures in organizations.

Blake-Beard (2001) reported that, although women had achieved virtual parity with men when entering organizations, within five or six years their careers began to lag behind their male counterparts. To address this situation, many organizations created formal mentoring programs as a way to address inequalities that women face in organizations. However, Duff (1999) noted that special programs for women may have negative effects; they perpetuate the assumption that women do not know how to act in the workplace, and they are deficient and require remedial training. When an ex-CEO was asked about promoting the careers of women, she replied: "It's about finding and

nurturing great talent. I would rather create an environment where great female talent wins out in a genderless race, as opposed to winning in the 'chicks' division" (Wehrwein, 2008). Some participants in this study mentioned that they had mentors throughout their career; others had none. Those who had mentors were very thankful that they had them and described how doors were opened for them. Several participants who stated that they did not have a mentor in their career wished they had, and a few were still hopeful that one would emerge. None of the participants spoke about formal mentoring programs.

Summary

This post-analysis literature review supported most of the thematic experiences of study participants. The research presented also disagreed with some themes or presented new information for human resource development literature. Following is a list of the themes that were supported by the literature, those that were not supported, and new themes that emerged from this study that should be investigated.

The themes supported by the literature to some extent include: under the why coaching? category--alone and want help; under the role of the coach category--trust, professional, guide; under the insight to action category--self-discovery and awareness, commitment to development process, challenges my thinking, tools guide action; and under outcomes--be more effective with people.

The themes that were not addressed in-depth by the existing literature include: under the why coaching? category--motivated by challenge and growth; under the role of the coach category--strengthens me and expects action; under the insight to action category--emotions, different actions get better results; under the outcomes category--work/life balance, how to work with my boss, gender-based workplace differences and challenges.

The new themes that evolved from this study that deserve further investigation include:

- Women seek executive coaching because they are motivated by challenge and growth.
- Coaching strengthens the individual to take new actions.
- Emotions play a role with growth and development.
- A coach balances among expecting action from the client, being an accountability partner, and being responsive to the client's agenda.
- Executives take new actions as a result of coaching.
- Coaching provides support mechanisms to enable work/life balance.
- Executive women want coaching in how to work with their boss.
- Top management plays a key role in the support of women's advancement.
- Executive women receiving coaching need organizational support.

The intent of this hermeneutic phenomenological study was not to generalize but to gain a better understanding of the coaching experiences of these ten women executives. The use of literature is aimed at supporting the reader's understanding of the complexity and spectrum of experiences women executives who were coached have. The study was devoted to translating the experiences of women who have participated in executive coaching into new insights and knowledge. This generated knowledge can be translated into practical applications for individuals, coaches, and organizations who want to help women develop personally and professionally.

CHAPTER 7

SUMMARY, DISCUSSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this chapter, I review the interpretive research inquiry I conducted with ten executive women who had participated in executive coaching. I then briefly review the themes that emerged from this study and discuss the results from my own experiences. I also explore the implications of these findings for professionals in the field of HRD, especially coaches and those concerned with executive development. I make recommendations to organizations that engage in executive coaching. I include recommendations for further study related to the experiences of executive women who have received coaching. In closing, I share my personal reflections.

Research Summary

This study describes the experiences of executive women who had participated in executive coaching to gain a deeper understanding of the phenomenon of executive coaching. A preliminary literature review confirmed the need for more research into the nature of executive coaching from the voice of the client, and, specifically, the nature of executive coaching for executive women. The available literature largely focused on executive coaching from the perspective of the coaches. However, no studies were identified that provided an account of executive women's experiences of executive coaching.

Executive coaching for women is of interest to the field of HRD. We cannot assume that research conducted primarily with men is generalizable to women. Executive coaching is a socially constructed experience; I was interested in what coaching is like for an executive woman. I wanted to obtain a deeper understanding and increase our awareness of the different ways of thinking and acting that are part of this phenomenon.

The knowledge that is generated from their experiences can expand our understanding of executive coaching and also help to inform executive development for women. Professionals and practitioners in HRD cannot ignore the development needs of women in the workplace. It is a business imperative to develop women in the workplace; understanding the experiences of women who have participated in executive coaching is critical to optimizing their development and ensuring their potential contributions to the organization.

In addition, this research contributes to the field of HRD by providing knowledge of how some women experience executive coaching, so HRD professionals, HR organizations, and coaches can be better attuned to the experiences of executive women in coaching contexts in the future. Practical implications are suggested for those responsible for executive development within organizations, those who oversee executive coaching, and coaches who work with women. This information should allow them to do a better job in understanding the context of executive women's environment, the potential ways in which they might be best served, and the primary areas in which development might be most valuable.

My personal and professional experiences have inspired me to be involved in HRD and executive coaching. As a professional woman, I have worked in male-dominated organizations and have participated in women's networks, discovering that other women shared similar experiences and challenges that I have had. While many women today are in professional and managerial roles, there is a wide gap between the number of women wanting to achieve more and thrive in the workplace compared to those who are discouraged with the culture, opportunities available to them, and feeling

that they are alone and swimming upstream. As a result, I am passionate about connecting with women to discover their direction, find their voice, and help them get the support and tools necessary to soar. This reflection facilitated my ability to make a strong connection with the subjects of this study and provided the reader with a context to understand the interpretations and conclusions.

Hermeneutic phenomenology is the appropriate methodology for this study as it involves a naturalistic approach to the world and begins with human lived experience. Individuals knowingly or unknowingly bring an attitude to a phenomenon, and that interpretation of an experience shapes their own meaning of a situation. This methodology is useful in the human sciences particularly when not much is known about a subject. Hermeneutic phenomenology as a descriptive and interpretive methodology provides an adequate framework from which to investigate the nature of the executive coaching experience from the perspective of executive women for several reasons. First, the methodology is concerned with how things appear and lets the experiences speak for themselves. Second, the methodology states that lived experiences are central to this type of inquiry and can be captured through language. And third, it requires me as the researcher to reflect upon, clarify through language, and make explicit the nature of the experiences.

Hermeneutic phenomenology allowed me to understand better the lived experiences of these ten executive women and to learn about their executive coaching experiences through written text derived from interviews. I attempted to understand their meaning of executive coaching by asking the research question: What is the executive coaching experience like for you? After obtaining their approval, I interviewed ten

executive women identified through Dun & Bradstreet and through referrals from executive coaches. In preparation for the interviews, I reviewed my bracketing notes about what I knew about executive coaching. While I was in the interviews, I had notes alongside my interview sheets with "Be Present Now" as a reminder to be present with each person. I initiated each conversation by asking them what brought them to coaching. I then asked participants to describe their experiences of what it was like to be coached. As they answered this broad question, I followed each response with probing questions to learn more about what they shared, and to elicit deeper information about what that meant to them. Throughout the interview process, I sought to be open to each participant and listen so I could understand what it was like to be coached. The transcripts were transcribed, and I reviewed the resulting texts. I highlighted meaning statements and searched for common themes. I read and re-read the texts several times, highlighting more texts and making notes about their meanings. I then wrote and rewrote descriptions of themes that represented what I believed were the descriptions of their experiences of executive coaching. I then shared my list of themes with participants and asked them how the themes reflected their experiences of executive coaching. Participants' comments resulted in the following list of four categories with 17 themes; these are summarized in the following section.

- Why coaching
    - Feeling alone and wanting help
    - Motivated by challenge and growth

- Role of the coach
    - Trusted
    - Professional
    - Guide
    - Strengthens me
    - Expects action
- Insight to action
    - Self-discovery and awareness
    - Emotions
    - Commitment to development process
    - Challenges to thinking
    - Tools guide actions
    - Different actions get better results
- Outcomes
    - Being more effective with people
    - Work/life balance
    - How to work with my boss
    - Gender-based workplace differences and challenges

Review of Themes

The purpose of this study was to understand the executive coaching experiences of ten executive women. The reasons they sought coaching or participated in coaching was because they felt alone and wanted help and were motivated by challenge and growth. The role of the coach was important throughout the process. They viewed their

coaches as trusted professionals who guided them, strengthened them, and expected action from them. They obtained insight and converted that to action during the coaching process. They made self-discoveries and found new awareness, and the learning throughout generated a broad spectrum of emotions for them. Participants were committed to development and found that coaching challenged their thinking. Tools guided their actions, and they discovered that, when they took different actions, they got better results. Participants identified desired outcomes and result areas focused on being more effective with people, work/life balance, working with their boss, and gender-based workplace differences and challenges. The post-analysis literature review revealed literature that was primarily written from the perspective of the coach or about the coaching process and not from that of the client. The literature supported some of the participants' experiences and that which was not part of their experiences. Each theme is briefly summarized next.

Why Coaching?

There were two reasons why these executive women sought executive coaching: they felt alone and wanted help and were motivated by challenge and growth.

Feeling alone and wanting help. Because of their senior level within the organization or the nature of the issue, participants consistently stated that there was no one to talk with about specific career and work challenges; they wanted help.

Motivated by challenge and growth. Women in this study enjoyed career progress and continued to look for what would help propel them forward. They described themselves as achievers and ready for more challenge and growth, and selected coaching as the vehicle to get them there.

Role of the Coach

The coach was mentioned frequently throughout each interview. This section describes the role of the coach and is divided into five themes that were mentioned by participants: trust, professional, guide, strengthens me, and expects action.

Trust. Women in this study identified trust as an important element in an executive coaching relationship. While most experienced trust completely and consistently in all of their coaching experiences, a few did not due to either coach incompetence or inappropriate communications with the coach. Complete trust was also difficult where the coach had dual roles and served as both coach and consultant with senior management

Professional. The participants in this study wanted to work with an experienced professional and recognized their different areas of expertise, talents, and skills as their respective coaches worked with them. In addition to effectively using their skills with them, it was important that the coach be business minded and familiar with the executive's workplace.

Guide. Participants talked about their coaches helping them as they pursued their objectives. They valued the different ways that coaches guided them to see themselves differently, recognize behavioral patterns and choices, and navigate new work situations. The literature described the coach as being in a partnership with the client and responsible to find the best ways for clients to learn new skills.

Strengthens me. Women in this study described how working with a coach gave them more strength. Specifically, participants said that it provided them with more

courage, it made them feel stronger to face their fears, they were able to believe more in themselves, and it gave them extra confidence to take particular actions.

Expects action. Many of the participants stated that their coach had expectations that they would take action; some felt accountable to their coaches for specific actions or outcomes to expecting that the topic would be brought up for conversation next time or in the future.

Insight to Action

Insight to action is the category of themes about the coaching process. The six themes include self-discovery and awareness, emotions, commitment to development process, challenges to thinking, tools guide actions, and different actions get better results.

Self-discovery and awareness. Each of the women described learning about themselves and about interacting with others as an integral component of the coaching experience and said that growth would not happen without self-discovery, reflection, and awareness. Learning happened during and between coaching sessions. Some of the self-discovery was about reconnecting to the self, values, and behaviors. They talked about paying increased attention to particular areas and the role this awareness played in their new perspectives.

Emotions. All of the participants engaged their emotions throughout their coaching and expressed them about the process or some specific feedback and the resulting learning. Most experienced executive coaching as stimulating, intense, challenging, and rewarding, although they were occasionally exasperated at the organic

pace of learning and discovering for oneself. There was also pain associated with growth, primarily from feedback from others.

Commitment to development process. Nine of the ten women expressed a strong commitment to their executive coaching development process. All said that they were committed to development and developing themselves.

Challenges to thinking. All of the women described ways in which their coach challenged their thinking. The skillful use of questions was powerful and instrumental in causing them to experience breakthroughs. The dialogue and questions were used to dig deeper below the surface and to do the hard work to recognize patterns and assumptions or think through decisions.

Tools guide actions. The women in this study described their coaches as using tools with them or providing tools for them to use in different situations. The coach taught skills that the executive would apply, such as self-management, and directed attention to how to influence others and lead change better.

Different actions get better results. As a result of coaching, most of the women gained valuable new perspectives. They altered their thinking and at times took different actions and talked about better results. Some described their new perspective as reframing, which prompted them to think and act differently; to learn to switch to other views and see a different solution. One example of tangible results was a shift in how one woman used her work hours, and she experienced more challenge, interest, and fun in her day.

Outcomes

This category of themes included areas in which the women wanted to or made improvements, experienced learning, or worked through challenges. These themes were being more effective with people, work/life balance, how to work with my boss, and gender-based workplace differences and challenges.

Being more effective with people. Women in this study described a variety of ways in which they experienced being more effective in their interactions with people. A key learning was that they recognized the importance of understanding that people were different from themselves and how to communicate with them as individuals. An additional way in which several of the participants were more effective with people was when they spoke the truth and referred to this as their authentic voice.

Work/life balance. A majority of the study participants stated that achieving more of a balance between the allocation of personal and professional time was important, and they needed to keep it in constant focus.

How to work with my boss. The majority of women in this study used coaching conversations to discuss ways to improve the way they worked with their bosses. Some experienced different outcomes as a result of changes they implemented.

Gender-based workplace differences and challenges. Gender-based workplace differences and challenges were talked about by six of the ten participants. These were areas in which they experienced a challenge or described dynamics they noticed within the workplace. Some examples of this include disrespect shown to women, women executives or strong women being threatening to men, not getting heard or credit for their ideas, lack of mentors or taking a long time to be seen as credible.

Discussion

Most of the coaching literature described executive coaching conducted by men with men. This study offers a number of insights into the lived experiences of executive women who have participated in executive coaching. While the results are not generalizable, they do offer perspectives and information to women who are considering executive coaching or currently being coached. The results may also help HR department heads or coaches facilitate better coaching outcomes with these individuals.

Some of this study's results seem particularly important. One conclusion reinforces the basic importance of knowing and understanding yourself, and understanding who and how you are in relation to others. I think the interconnections and learning that weave self-discovery, awareness, and being more effective with people together supports the primary processes and outcomes of coaching.

When I reflect back on my executive coaching engagements with both men and women, I am struck by the basic nature of what we worked on and how powerful the small adjustments were for the executives, both personally and professionally. Most often the objectives included making improvements in their interactions with others to get better outcomes and learning to work differently with their boss. My experiences with clients somewhat mirror the coaching outcomes identified by the women in this study and the literature.

The coaching literature invariably identifies the use of assessment and 360 degree feedback as an initial component of a typical coaching engagement, when new learning and discovery are designed to happen. From this information, goals are identified, and coaching programs are implemented. However, in this study, self-discovery was not primarily obtained based on completion and analysis of an intense battery of assessments.

The insights came from talking with their coaches and working through their presenting issues real time, talking about perceptions and reality, trying out new behaviors and processing what happened. The coach would challenge some of the executive's ideas of reality and hold up a mirror so the individual could get a different perspective about what she's saying. The self-discovery and learning were experienced in two main ways. Sometimes the coach provided a powerful distinction, in which the executive would experience a flash of brilliance in an instant that immediately illuminated her new understanding, an ah-ha. These ah-ha's were used by the executive as the rationale, the lever to try new behaviors or to smooth the edges of an uncomfortable interpretation of a situation. The other way the executives described self-discovery and learning was as more of a layering of understanding gleaned from smaller, at times imperceptible to them, incremental different experiences. Their discoveries were made while looking back over time, recognizing that they were making different choices and were changing over time.

Another finding I was also a little surprised about was that these women at the top felt somewhat alone and isolated. While I had heard this before, I understood it at a much deeper level after I conducted this study. I think some of the aloneness comes from being a woman in a man's organization with some subtle cultural nuances. Taylor, Klein, Lewis, Gruenewald, Gurung, and Updegraff (2000) proposed that females' behavioral responses to stress were marked by a pattern of tend-and-befriend, rather than fight-or-flight. Women may naturally seek more connections with others, particularly in stressful situations. I recognize the importance of relationships in navigating one's career. I had assumed these women had many rich relationships and somehow had figured out how to

be included and integrated as one of the guys and thought some of them would exist within their current workplace, and they did. So even with good relationships at their workplace, isolation, feeling alone, and wanting help were present.

Through listening to the women in this study, I heard much more clearly the strength they absorbed from their interactions with their coaches. I did not realize this was happening to the extent they described. I learned that the role of the coach has such a large potential impact for the individual in providing more confidence, helping to strengthen and provide courage to executives. It is likely that coaches—maybe even more so if they are also women—may serve as an additional source of strength for women in male-dominated environments. Women may be hardwired naturally to seek out and value supportive connections, such as executive coaching, particularly when under stress. While many of them were taking the tough actions already, the coach provided extra support to do the right thing and to feel better about doing them. In addition, the coach helped some women discover what they referred to as their authentic voice, about going inside and finding their real selves and the courage to stand up, speak, and take different actions. They described it as a metamorphosis, and viewed themselves as better, stronger leaders because of their voice.

Recommendations for Practice

The type of knowledge generated from this hermeneutic phenomenological study helps to create a better understanding of the experiences of these specific women who participated in executive coaching. Potentially new insights into executive coaching for executive women were generated.

In this study, women who sought executive coaching were motivated by challenge and growth. In addition to their motivation, these women also had a commitment to the

development process. Executives have a compelling need to achieve, and they view coaching as a possible path to help them on their journey to achievement. Executive women may want to consider more executive coaching opportunities for them to thrive. In addition, individuals and organizations responsible for career planning, leadership development, and succession planning could recognize that women might seek coaching not because they are looking to get fixed, but because they are interested in achieving more and are willing to do the work to get there.

These senior level women reported feeling alone and wanting help as well as feeling strengthened by the coach and the coaching process. Some described gender-based challenges and social exclusion in their careers and workplaces. Executive women may want to consider executive coaching as a means to deal with a variety of work issues. Executive coaching may not only provide benefits of development assistance but may also provide additional benefits to the executive woman as a result of being engaged and participating in a connected, supportive relationship with her coach.

The women in this study described important discoveries about themselves and new, better ways of interacting with others as a result of the learning obtained through the coaching process. Executive women may want to consider executive coaching as a means to understand themselves, improve the quality of interactions they have with others, and work better with their bosses; executive coaching may lead to more effective outcomes for them.

The women in this study primarily sought coaching on their own, and it was not actively supported or encouraged by their organizations. If an organization does not keep track of who is participating in coaching, coaching programs may get off-course when

certain reporting relationships shift. The sponsorship of an executive's coaching program changes if the executive's manager changes, if the executive is moved, or if the HR sponsor changes. The coaching agreement needs to be revisited to ensure commitment. Conversations need to occur with the new parties to inform them about the objectives, establish roles and responsibilities, and discuss accountability. In addition, not being interested in the executive's objectives or progress can provide a significant disconnect in the executive coaching. Executives can be left in the lurch if the new HR sponsor or new manager does not become engaged in the agreement and the fulfillment of their roles. If these parties do not demonstrate interest in the executive's development program, those behaviors can deliver divergent messages to the executive.

Organizations should have a clear understanding about client confidentiality boundaries within coaching engagements. It is often appropriate to share the coaching program goals among the executive, his/her manager, and HR sponsor, while the specific details and content of the conversations remain confidential. It is helpful to have a specific written agreement about how a coach will work within an organization and what will or will not be shared with the client's manager and HR sponsor. This is a useful tool to encourage honesty and help the executive get the maximum benefit from the coaching. Agreements that specify checkpoints with progress updates bolster accountability and foster trust. Acting differently from the agreement diminishes the integrity of coaching.

Several of the women in this study had used a 360 degree feedback tool in the beginning of their coaching work. However, their self-discovery and learning primarily occurred as a result of integrating that information with their coaching conversations and the different actions they took. Many organizations currently use 360 degree feedback as

part of their leadership development programs. A recent study (Hezlett, 2008) summarized empirical research on the use of these processes and identified them as positive, but the changes in leaders after receiving the feedback were small. In addition to being implemented correctly, organizations may want to supplement the feedback executive women receive with coaching conversations to increase the meaningfulness of the development planning process. Often leaders do not know what they do not know, and the assistance of a coach in working through building an awareness of their development needs, gaining commitment and setting development goals can be pivotal in supporting their growth. A coach can guide them to make basic changes in how they interact with others, which may have a substantial impact on themselves and how others perceive them.

Recommendations for Future Research

Women in this study reported that they sought out coaching because they were motivated by challenge and growth, although this finding was not in the literature. It is generally stated that the client her/himself has the most powerful influence on whether coaching will be successful. Individual characteristics within the client seem to be important differentiators between those who follow through and benefit from coaching compared to those who do not. It would be interesting to identify the readiness factors within a client that would be more likely to lead to a successful coaching outcome. Another important inquiry would be to identify individual traits or characteristics that might be associated with coaching success.

The executive women in this study did not experience organization support for their coaching; however, the literature stated that support is critical to coaching's success. It would be interesting to identify the readiness factors within an organization that would

be more likely to lead to support for executive coaching for women. An additional area of study would be identifying organizational characteristics that might be associated with coaching success for executive women.

Several aspects of the coaching role were important to women in this study. New information how the executives obtained strength from their coach was uncovered. The literature has recognized the coaching relationship between the client and the coach as an important dyad. A further, in-depth study into the relationship dynamics between the coach and the client would be useful. What are the most important elements that determine coach-client fit? What is it about the bond between the coach and the client that leads to imparting strength? What is it about the bond between the coach and the client that leads to successful outcomes?

Women in this study spoke about the importance of self-discovery and awareness as critical components of their coaching, which was also reflected in the literature. I did not notice a distinction between the definition of and use of these terms. In my experience as a coach, there is a clear distinction between the two, and self-discovery, or knowing, needs to be in place prior to engaging in the practice of becoming aware of a particular behavior. A research study that clarified these terms and then identified and tested the most effective tools of engaging in both self-discovery and processes that identify awareness would be helpful to the executive coach. For example, in this study, some clients were guided to use journals to capture assignments or reflections, although it was not consistently done. Yet, paying attention to a particular area leads to learning that makes a difference in how people choose to act. For what kind of people might journals

be a helpful tool? In addition to journaling, what are some of the most effective tools in generating useful self-discovery and awareness that leads to change?

Several assessment tools were used by some coaches in the early stages of the coaching process that many women did not particularly value. There are a plethora of assessment tools, with different measurement objectives available to coaches. I think that learning about some aspects of the self are more important to one's ability to be a good leader, and other areas of discovery are not as important. A research study that identified particular areas of focus and tools to be used to satisfy particular self-learning objectives would aid in coaching effectiveness and also the efficient use of resources. The outcome could result in providing a rationale for the use of particular tools and with particular populations that would provide the highest value; this might facilitate more executives the opportunity to benefit from coaching.

One theme identified within the outcomes category by women in this study was how to work with her boss. Surprisingly, only one other study in the literature mentioned this as a focus of coaching, and it was described as a particularly challenging area in which to work. An identification and examination of the primary challenges in working with one's boss and managing upward relationships would be a fruitful area of research. It would be interesting to know what these areas are, and then identifying if there are unique challenges that executive women find that executive men do not. In addition, querying individuals about what they have found that provides success would be helpful as well.

Personal Reflection

On a personal level my own interest in this study was sparked by my work with organizations and teams, along with observations of the significant impact individual

leaders had on others and their ability to produce results. I worked with executives in a coaching and consulting capacity for many years, aimed at helping them be better leaders and get better results with their teams and ultimately with their organizations. I began formally coaching executives after completing an intensive coach certification program and have had the privilege of working with very talented individuals. It was apparent that the executives found it valuable, and colleagues talked about the advantages of coaching. Conversations with other coaching practitioners usually led to a discussion that revolved around coach certification programs or the merits of different processes and tools. After digging into the coaching literature and finding an abundance of descriptive information from coaches about the process, it seemed like a good idea to ask the client, the executive, about their coaching experience.

With this research project, my mission was to attempt to understand coaching as a lived experience of the executive through her own words, and the meaning she made of it. I thought it would be interesting and wanted to make a small contribution to the literature and practice. I did not anticipate that it would challenge me personally as the researcher, but it did.

When I was conducting the interviews with the participants, I had to remind myself to set aside my preconceived ideas and assumptions about coaching and about what they would be telling me. As I enjoyed meeting and listening to each of the women I interviewed for my study, I also needed to be mindful that the judgments I had about each executive woman did not bias me or interfere with what she shared with me. And while I wanted to build rapport with my participants, I had to make sure I did not lead the interview a certain way, fill in the blanks, or attribute meanings to what she may have

said. I worked hard at honing in on their experiences and digging deeper into what they shared with me. It was a challenge not to initiate topics about which I thought they should tell me, but to let the interview be completely about their experiences, their meaning of coaching.

I also learned that conducting this type of research required a tremendous number of hours and a systematic disciplined approach; only until I was wading through stacks of transcripts, reading and re-reading and re-reading more, did the themes speak to me. I could not have estimated the number of hours I would spend or how many times I would need to go back to the transcripts and original recordings.

As a result of this research, I learned a lot. Some of what I learned about coaching was not new to me. However, much of what I learned about the executives' experiences and what it means to them was new to me. I now have a much deeper appreciation for and better understanding of what it is like to be an executive woman within the context of being coached. It was a privilege to talk with these women and to learn about their being in the workplace constantly surrounded by expectations and challenges. Being present, consciously setting aside my assumptions and working hard to listen, allowed me to hear their voices. I expect that this will deepen my ability to work with executives in the future. This deeper listening is important to inform both theory and practice.

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APPENDIX A

Recruitment Letter Sent To Participants

Dear (name):

I am a doctoral student in the Department of Work and Human Resource Education at the University of Minnesota. For my dissertation, I am studying executive women's experience of executive coaching.

If you agree to participate, your involvement in this study will consist of two interviews that can be scheduled at times and places convenient for you. The first interview will take between one and two hours, while the second interview will be considerably shorter. In the first interview, I will ask you what it is like to be coached--how you understand and interpret your experiences. The second interview will take place after transcription and preliminary analysis and will give you a chance to provide feedback about the themes that have been identified.

As you consider your willingness to participate, it may help you to know that all of your responses will be confidential. Other persons will not have access to your specific responses except, perhaps, my advisor. In any publications resulting from this research, I will take care to conceal any identifying information. Your participation is completely voluntary, and you have the right to withdraw from the study at any time or to refuse to answer any specific questions. Prior to the first interview, you will be asked to sign a consent form that will specify the conditions of your participation.

Your willingness to take part in this study will increase understanding of this important aspect of executive coaching. Although I am not able to pay you for your participation, I believe that the opportunity to reflect on your executive coaching experiences in this way will be rewarding for you. It could also help future executive women, human resource executives, and executive coaches gain knowledge so they may more effectively deal with particular experiences as they engage in executive coaching with executive women.

This study is being carried out under the supervision of Dr. Gary N. McLean. If you have any questions, feel free to contact me (952-944-5135; dgaluk@comcast.net) or Dr. McLean (612-624-4901; mclea002@umn.edu). I will follow up with you in the next week to determine your willingness to participate. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Deborah A. Galuk

PhD Candidate

University of Minnesota

APPENDIX B

Interview Guide

Opening question/discussion

Tell me about yourself. What is your occupation? How long have you been in this position? At this company?

Research question

Please tell me what the executive coaching experience has been like.

Possible Probes

- Can you tell me about a specific situation where you felt like that?
- I want to be sure that I understand what you are saying. Do you mean. . . ?
- Can you tell me when you experienced this and how it felt?
- Can you recall a specific time or event in which you felt that way?
- What was the experience like?

APPENDIX C

IRB Permission

12/11/2007

Deborah A Galuk
11763 Mt Curve Rd
Eden Prairie, MN 55347

RE: "Executive Coaching: What is the Experience Like for Executive Women?" IRB Code Number: 0711P22022

Dear Ms. Galuk

The referenced study was reviewed by expedited review procedures and approved on December 6, 2007. If you have applied for a grant, this date is required for certification purposes as well as the Assurance of Compliance number which is FWA00000312 (Fairview Health Systems Research FWA00000325, Gillette Children's Specialty Healthcare FWA 00004003). Approval for the study will expire one year from that date. A report form will be sent out two months before the expiration date.

IRB approval of this study includes the consent form and recruitment materials received November 29, 2007.

Please note that due to evolving guidelines, the following items are now required on each page of the consent form: consent form version date (the date of the most recent consent form revision). This will be required at the time of continuing review.

The reviewer would like to compliment you on a very well-written application.

The IRB would like to stress that subjects who go through the consent process are considered enrolled participants and are counted toward the total number of subjects, even if they have no further participation in the study. Please keep this in mind when calculating the number of subjects you request. This study is currently approved for 10 subjects. If you desire an increase in the number of approved subjects, you will need to make a formal request to the IRB.

The code number above is assigned to your research. That number and the title of your study must be used in all communication with the IRB office.

As the Principal Investigator of this project, you are required by federal regulations to inform the IRB of any proposed changes in your research that will affect human subjects. Changes should not be initiated until written IRB approval is received. Unanticipated problems and adverse events should be reported to the IRB as they occur. Research projects are subject to continuing review and renewal. If you have any questions, call the IRB office at 612-626-5654. On behalf of the IRB, I wish you success with your research.

Sincerely,

Carol Siegel, MLS, CIP
Associate Director
CS/egk
CC: Gary Mc Lean

APPENDIX D

Consent Form

Executive Coaching: What Is the Experience Like For Executive Women?

You are invited to be in a research study of what the experience is like for executive women who are participating in executive coaching. You were selected as a possible participant because you agreed to participate in response to an invitational letter. We ask that you read this form and ask any questions you may have before agreeing to be in the study.

This study is being conducted by: Deborah Galuk, a doctoral student at the University of Minnesota. Her advisor is Dr. Gary N. McLean, Professor in the Department of Work and Human Resource Education, College of Education and Human Development.

Background Information

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of what is the experience of executive coaching like for executive women.

Procedures

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to participate in two separate interviews. In the first interview, you will have an opportunity to relate your experiences and express your feelings and perceptions regarding your executive coaching. The interview will last between an hour and two hours. It will be conducted at a mutually agreed-upon time and location convenient for you. In a second interview, you will be asked to confirm or disconfirm the themes that emerged from the data analysis. The second interview will last less than one hour and may be over the phone.

Risks and Benefits of being in the Study

The study has no foreseeable risks. Remember that your participation in this study is voluntary and that you may choose to leave the study at any time with no explanation and no risk or negative consequences. You may refuse to answer any question without having to provide a reason. All data will be coded so that your identity is protected.

The study does not represent any immediate benefits for participants; however, your participation will contribute to knowledge about executive women's experiences of executive coaching. Other executive women, human resource executives and executive coaches may gain knowledge so they may more effectively deal with particular experiences as they engage in executive coaching with women executives.

Compensation

You will not be compensated for participating in this study.

Confidentiality

The records of your participation will be kept confidential. In any reports to be published, no information will be included that would make it possible to identify you, your institution, or your responses. Records of your responses will be kept in a secured location that will be accessed only by the researcher and her advisor and will not be available to others. I will tape record the interview sessions so as not to miss any key points being made. A coding system will be used to handle the generated data. Tapes and transcriptions of interviews will be erased two years after the completion of the study. Findings will be presented as group data, using quotations and pseudonyms.

Voluntary Nature of the Study

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of Minnesota or your current professional organization affiliation. If you decide to participate, you are free to not answer any question or withdraw at any time with out affecting those relationships.

Contacts and Questions

Deborah Galuk is conducting this study. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, **you are encouraged** to contact Deborah Galuk at 952-944-5135 or by email at dgaluk@comcast.net, or Dr. McLean at 612-624-4901 or by email at mclea002@umn.edu. If you have any questions or concerns regarding this study and would like to talk to someone other than the researcher(s), **you are encouraged** to contact the Research Subjects' Advocate Line, D528 Mayo, 420 Delaware St. Southeast, Minneapolis, Minnesota 55455; (612) 625-1650.

You will be given a copy of this information to keep for your records.

Statement of Consent

I have read the above information. I have asked questions and have received answers. I consent to participate in the study.

Signature:_____Date: _____
Signature of Investigator:_____ Date: _____