

An Explorative Study of the Experiences of the Coach and Coachee during Executive Coaching

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KEYWORDS Executive Coaching. Experience. Coach. Coachee. Relationship. Exploring

ABSTRACT The experiences of coaches and coachees in the process of executive coaching has not been extensively researched. The study aims to obtain an in-depth understanding of such experience from the perspectives of the parties involved. The research purpose was to explore the perceived value and experiences of the process of executive coaching for coach and coachee. Reliable information about the real nature of executive coaching is lacking. Although executive coaching is a popular leadership development strategy, few studies have investigated its real value. Various articles have been published, describing executive coaching and its value mainly from the perspective of the coach. A case study design was used as it is regarded as a data collection method frequently associated with qualitative research. Purposive sampling was used to gather ten participants: five executive coaches and five coachees. Data were gathered through interviews and managed from a grounded theory perspective. Research quality was ensured through the criteria of transferability, credibility and dependability. Results indicated some significant positive and negative experiences from participants. These relate to issues such as emotional experiences, personal growth and benefits, diversity implications, leadership and management capabilities and the status of executive coaching. The findings can be utilised as information to coaches, managers and executives about the nature of executive coaching. The study contributes to expanding knowledge and understanding of the process and value of executive coaching.

INTRODUCTION

There are a number of factors in organisations today that lead to increased demands for coaching as an intervention. The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) indicated that these factors include the fast-paced business environment, flatter organisation structures, the importance of lifelong learning, the financial implications of poor performing executives and the trend for individuals to take greater personal responsibility (Jarvis 2004). However, one of the most prominent factors is the evolving business environment, and individuals and organisations having to learn to adapt to change more quickly. The primary pur-

pose of executive coaching is enhanced performance of the executive and overall performance of the organisation (Axmith 2004).

De Vries (2005) supports the view of Axmith (2004) by stating that the battle for talent is a reality in today's organisations and people are being promoted to executive positions at a younger age. As a result executives experience high levels of stress and are not always able to share their concerns and personal issues with subordinates or team members. Taking on executive responsibilities can often create feelings of insecurity and loneliness (De Vries 2005). Executive coaching focuses essentially on the development and application of core personal skills that the executive already has, but are not being adequately applied or displayed (Bluckert 2005).

Coaching has become one of the most powerful strategic and tactical weapons in the executive repertoire, due to its potential to establish, enhance or rebuild the executive's competencies that are needed to remain competitive in the work environment (De Vries 2005). The need to continue to learn and to renew oneself has become a great motivator for executives (De Vries 2005).

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Sherman and Freas (2004) believe that the environment of executive coaching is an untamed terrain that is largely unexplored but full of promise. Sherman and Freas (2004:1) conclude that: "Reliable information about executive coaching is scarce, mainly because major companies did not use coaching much before the 1980s". There is still a great deal of confusion and mystery as to what exactly happens in a coaching relationship when the coach and coachee engage (Kilburg 2004; Lowman 2005). Lowman (2005:91) argued that: "Adding the perspective of the person being coached is especially useful because what interventionists think may be of importance to a process of change may not be what was viewed as being most helpful by the client". Although executive coaching is a popular leadership development strategy, few studies have investigated its real value (Turner 2006). A great number of articles have been published, describing executive coaching and its value from the coach's perspective, rather than that of the coachee. Beginning in the 1980's, the concept of coaching has expanded to where it also now refers to training or developing people within the business/corporate environment and not focusing only on practical skills (Dilts 2003).

Executive coaching is a non-directive style of discovery. It has the viewpoint that the role of the coach is to help others release untapped capability and potential (Leimon et al. 2005). It involves a process of self-awareness and self-insight, where the coach believes the coachees know their own minds better than anyone else and ultimately know the answers to their own questions (Palmer 2003). Therefore the role of coach is that of catalyst or facilitator, to support and lead the coachee towards new insights.

Coaching is an appreciative approach that incorporates a discovery-based inquiry and helps executives to proactively manage their opportunities and challenges (Wright 2005). Morris (In Perlik 1999) also states that coaching gives executives an opportunity to confront and deal with day-to-day interpersonal challenges.

Murphy (2004) describes executive coaching in the management domain as an intervention that helps organisations to reach their full potential by intervening at the executive level, and to enhance their overall functionality through improved interpersonal skills and/or business savvy and knowledge. Executive

coaching is a highly-personal learning process that involves action learning and a partnership relationship with the coach, which enables the executive to reflect on his/her own behaviour and impact as a leader (Bluckert 2005).

There are four important concepts that form part of executive coaching. These are: the client, (executive/ coachee), the coach, the coaching process or relationship and the organisation. Michelman (2004) describes the coaching process as a three-way partnership, namely between the coach, executive and the involved organisation, in which all stakeholders agree on specific goals and outcomes to be achieved in the coaching process. The organisation is not necessarily always part of executive coaching. However, when the coaching intervention is sponsored by the organisation, it is the responsibility of the coach to provide the needed feedback to the organisation.

The executive refers to those individuals or teams with executive responsibility or accountability and also decision-making authority. It will therefore include and focus on managers, directors or other high level individuals (McAdam 2005).

The coach is the person guiding the coaching process. Coaching can take place on a one-to-one basis or in a team environment, depending on the requirements and needs regarding the coaching intervention (McAdam 2005). The coach acts as a sounding board, allowing executives a safe and confidential environment to express their concerns, issues and problems faced in the work environment. Executive coaches help clients in setting higher rewards and in developing personal and professional goals that is aligned with corporate values. The coach inspires, motivates and challenges the executive with different techniques and viewpoints, in order for them to create win-win situations (Perlik 1999).

McAdam (2005) believes there are a number of issues that are non-negotiable for coaches who attempt to deliver the desired outcomes in a coaching process:

- ♦ Firstly they need to know themselves, their strengths and limitations
- ♦ They need to be passionate about learning, both from their own work and through review and reflection with an experienced supervisor

- ♦ They need to understand the organisational context in which coaching takes place
- ♦ They need to have undergone a professional training programme with observation as part of the process.

From an organisational perspective, Berger and Berger (in Washlysyn 2003:139) defines executive coaching as follows: "Executive coaching is a company-sponsored perk for top high-potential employees. It is a customized and holistic development process that provides deep behavioural insights intended to accelerate an executive's business results and effectiveness as a leader. This coaching is based on a collaborative relationship among the executive, his/her boss, his/her human resources manager, and an executive coach." With a strong emphasis on the organisation, it is important for the coach to build a good relationship with human resources or relevant stakeholders without compromising the trust relationship between the coach and coachee.

One of the few articles that explored the opinions of executives of executive coaching was written by Turner (2006), titled: 'Ungagged: Executives on Executive Coaching'. From research Turner (2006) identified five primary benefits of coaching. These are: continuous one-on-one attention, increased self-awareness, personal accountability for development, just-in-time learning and expanded thinking through dialogue with a curious outsider. Both Turner (2006) and Hancyk (2000) highlight the opportunity for reflective thinking as one of the main benefits of the coaching process. The coachee is able to understand his/her own behaviour by receiving objective and non-threatening feedback (Hancyk 2000).

The above indicated literature clearly indicate that the nature and benefits of the executive coaching process have been extensively researched, but that the personal value for and experiencing thereof by coaches and coachees did not receive comparable attention through research. This study therefore aims to address this problem and provide more clarity on these issues.

Research Objective and Questions

The objective of the study, conducted during 2011, was to explore the perceived value of executive coaching and the experiences of the

parties involved. The coach and the executive's perspectives will be compared to gain a greater understanding of executive coaching. The open-ended research questions for this study are:

- ♦ What are the positive experiences (perceived values or benefits) of executive coaching from a coach and coachee's perspective?
- ♦ What are the negative experiences of executive coaching from a coach and coachee's perspective?

Research Design

Research Approach

The research design of this study is a qualitative approach, using grounded theory to explore and investigate the value and experiences of executive coaching. A qualitative research approach was followed because it enables the researcher to describe and understand human behaviour rather than attempting to explain it in a statistical, quantitative manner (Babbie and Mouton 2005). Qualitative research attempts to study human action from the perspective of the social actors themselves (Babbie and Mouton 2005). It allows the participants to describe their attitudes and feelings without losing the rich descriptions and the essence of their experiences (Morse 1994).

Research Method

The strategies of inquiry in this study included grounded theory and interviewing as the method of data collection. Grounded theory has a significant appeal for different disciplines due to the explanatory power it gives the researcher (Mills et al. 2006).

Grounded theory is a systematic research approach that is used to collect and analyse qualitative data. It is used to generate explanatory theory that enables further understanding of social and psychological phenomena (Charmaz 1995). In this study the researcher constantly analysed and compared the data. The data was then interpreted and translated into codes and categories. This constant comparison of analysis enables the researcher to develop theories around the participants' experiences (Mills et al. 2006).

Sampling

Sampling in a qualitative study is less structured and less strictly applied than in the case of quantitative research (Bryman 1998). Non-probability, purposive sampling was used, as people will be selected with a specific purpose in mind (Neuman 1997). The subjects chosen were based on very specific characteristics as it aimed to investigate the experiences around executive coaching (Doodley 1984).

This study is focused on in-depth information and an investigation of specific cases rather than to generalise its findings.

Participants

The research was focused on individuals who were part of an executive coaching process. A total of ten participants were used for this study. Because the depth of information was more important than the size of the population, it was decided to use a smaller sample size, but have individual, in-depth interviews. Five executive coaches and five coachees (executives) participated in the study. In terms of gender there was an equal distribution with 50% of the participants being male and 50% being female. In terms of ethnic groups, there were eight White and two Black.

Five coaches (two male and three female) ranging in age from 38 to 57, and with extensive experience in executive coaching were involved in the study. Their experience in executive coaching varied from three years to eight years. All of them had different qualifications and work experience. Five coachees (three male and two female) ranging in age from 33 to 48, and who had been part of a complete coaching process within the last year, formed part of the research group. All the coachees were in executive management positions in their respective places of employment.

The internet was used to locate executive coaches in South Africa and institutions such as the I-coach Academy were contacted to request names of possible participants for the study. Some of the coaches who were willing to take part in the study were also able to recommend other coaches in the industry. Once determined that they met the set criteria and if willing to take part, they were asked to each nominate one coachee. Because of confidentiality and

sensitivity around the information, the coaches were asked to contact the coachees directly. Once the coachees agreed to take part in the process, his/her details were provided to the researcher. Signed informed consent to participate in the study was secured from all participants.

Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were used in the data collecting process, as this method is able to address more complex issues and allows more flexibility, both in what the respondent chooses to say, and in the direction taken by the researcher during the course of the interaction (Bryman 1998). Because of the sensitivity around the information, the researcher felt it was best to conduct face-to-face interviews, as it also provides the researcher the opportunity to put the participant at ease and to clarify any uncertainties around the research. The interviews were recorded electronically and transcribed from oral to textual form to enable the researcher to analyse the data. The interviews were conducted in English as all participants indicated that they were comfortable in English.

Data Analyses

The transcribed data was encoded using a grounded theory framework that consists of three main categories of coding, namely open coding, axial coding and selective coding (O'Callaghan 1998). Open coding involves the creation of certain categories pertaining to certain segments of text (Babbie and Mouton 2005). Axial coding was used to connect the open codes into broader themes or categories (Babbie and Mouton 2005). The axial codes were then organised into 4 and 6 selective codes or core categories/themes for coaches and coachees respectively, based on conceptual similarity (Babbie and Mouton 2005).

Quality of the Research

Qualitative research is concerned with the notion of trustworthiness (rather than address reliability and validity), which can be addressed through the concepts of credibility, transferability, dependability and confirmability (Babbie and Mouton 2005).

Credibility (or internal validity) was ensured through consideration of the richness of the in-

formation collected, data saturation, and method and investigator triangulation. Transferability was ensured by providing a detailed description of the context, whilst an audit trail ensured dependability and confirmability.

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval for the study was granted by the Research Ethics Committee of the Faculty of Economic and Management Sciences, University of Pretoria. Signed informed consent was obtained from all participants prior to the recording of any data, and confidentiality was maintained.

FINDINGS

The open coded, thematic data analysis process followed led to the identification of four major themes relating to the experiences of coaches, and six major themes relating to the

experiences of coachees. Within the major themes a number of sub-themes were identified. The major themes identified by coaches are: overall experiences, most valuable experiences, positive experiences and negative experiences, while those for coachees are: overall experiences, most valuable experiences, positive experiences, negative experiences, value-add work and value-add personal. Some examples of responses will be provided to substantiate the themes identified.

The emerging major themes and sub-themes relating to the experiences of coaches and coachees of the executive coaching process and interaction are depicted in Figure 1.

Experiences of the Coaches

Overall Experiences

Emotional: The coaches experienced executive coaching as *a significant meaningful, ful-*

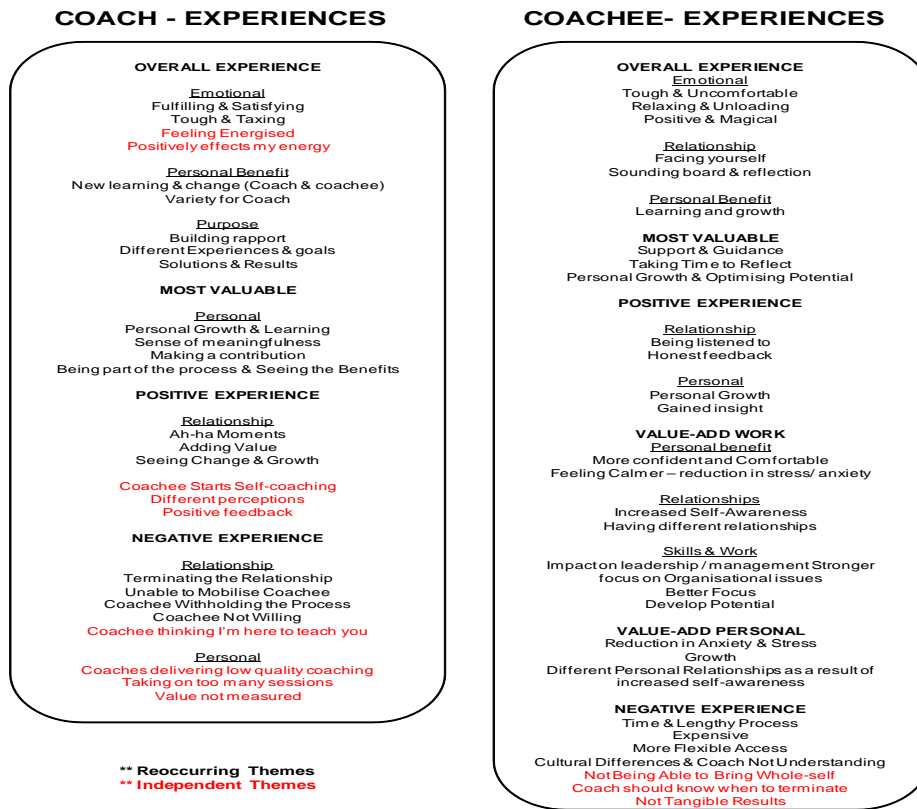


Fig. 1. Experiences of coaches and coachees – major themes and sub-themes

filling and satisfying process. Although often *tough and taxing*, it is a *valuable and energising* process.

Participant (coach) 2 for example related his experience as follows: “it’s one of the most fulfilling things I’ve done in my life ... there’s an amazing sense of satisfaction that comes with it”.

Personal Benefits: The coaches experience *new learning and change from each coaching engagement. Every coachee brings a different experience and variety* to the process. *The coaching process keeps on challenging them.* Participant 3 responded as follows in this regard: “... People creating the magic of change – positive change, new insights, new dreams and making it real and start seeing that”.

Purpose: The coaches indicated the importance of *building effective rapport* as well as *good active listening skills*. Participant 2 responded in this regard: “It’s all the time creative listening ... you cannot relax”. Research by Davison and Gasiorowski (2006) also indicated that an effective coach should have good communication skills, which include the ability to build rapport, listen intently and ask powerful questions to help the coachee to reflect. All coaches emphasized the *importance of obtaining constructive results from the process* in terms of solutions to coachee problems/expectations.

Most Valuable Experiences

Personal: Davison and Gasiorowski (2006) state that coaches experience a strong sense of value when helping others to develop and grow and are continually focusing on their own self-development. They indicate that coaches often perceive or experience coaching as a calling or a mission. This confirms the comments of three coaches who *described coaching as a calling rather than a vocation*. Coaches described the valuable experience for them as *making a meaningful contribution and being part of a process leading to change and benefits for the coachees*. They emphasised that *being a catalyst for change and growth* and experiencing this first hand, provide them with a *strong sense of meaningfulness* that also *positively impacts on their energy levels*. Participant 5 responded in this regard: “Every coachee is different ... every relationship unique and challenging ... what you’re trying to achieve is different”.

Positive Experiences

Relationship: The coaches experience the *clarifying (so-called ah-ha) moments in coaching as very positive*, referring to the moments where a coachee has a realisation or moment of enlightenment and things start making sense. The coaches *experience this change and growth, embedded in a relationship of trust, as meaningful and valuable*. Participant 1 described this as: “when they actually see the light, when they have the ah-ha moment, you know, coming through”. This aspect relates to the findings of Axmith (2004), who indicated the importance of establishing trust and intimacy with the client as part of the core competencies of the coach. Part of these positive experiences is that coaches also *feel that they are adding value to someone else’s journey of growth and development*. Therefore, *being part of this change and growth, seeing the coachee starting a process of self-coaching, changing perceptions and providing positive feedback, gives the coach a sense of personal meaning and value*. Participant 2 used an interesting metaphor to describe his experience of adding value: “to be the magic that people create, that they experience...the magic that they create in their own lives....that is it”.

Negative Experiences

Relationship: Negative experiences occurred *when the coach has to terminate a coaching relationship because the coachee is not ready or open for feedback and is withholding the process from moving forward*. Terminating the coaching relationship due to *no meaningful interpersonal connection or chemistry between coach and coachee* was indicated by the coaches as a negative experience. Participant 3 explained this issue as: “when you get to the point where you have to say to a client there’s no chemistry, no connection...in my view you need to find another coach...because that’s why I say it’s negative...because you feel that I’ve failed and stuff”.

DeNisi and Kluger (2000) stated that the relationship quality between coach and the coachee, especially a trusting relationship, seems to be a factor that could optimize the process of self-development in coaching.

The coaches experience it as negative and stressful when they are *unable to mobilise the*

coachee/ experience the coachee as stuck, and not progressing towards the goals set in the process. This relates to the perception that the coachee does not take personal responsibility for his/her growth, but rely on the coach to move him/her. Evered and Selman (1989) as well as Goldberg (In Michelman 2004) confirms these findings in their research and emphasise the importance of the coachee being ready to create change, and that if this is not evident, the coach could experience the process as very frustrating.

Personal: Negatives themes on a personal level refer to *the coaching industry as a whole*, for example, *coaches delivering low quality coaching* because the industry is “open” and easily accessible, leading to coachees receiving sub-standard coaching value. In this regard Sherman and Freas (2004) indicated that little regulation in terms of standards in the coaching industry causes many self-styled coaches to easily enter the field of coaching with varying experience and qualifications, resulting in coaching services of a dubious nature. Participant 2 remarked in this regard: “I’m speaking of people who present themselves as coaches and for me they’re not...there’s not a well groundedness in theory, wisdom, understanding...in life experience”.

Another negative experience indicated, is that *coaching results are difficult to measure, specifically where values are not tangible*. Participant 1 indicated the following on this issue: “The growth is not always measured...one should somehow...establish a baseline more formally...where you know this person is growing well”. Sherman and Freas (2004) indicated that it is important to produce coaching results and goals that are measurable and for organisations to know what the return on investment of executive coaching is. However, Gabriel (In Sherman and Freas 2004) states that it is debatable whether ROI can effectively measure the true value of coaching, and proposes that the value be assessed with qualitative evidence.

Experiences of Executives (as coachees)

Overall Experiences

Emotional: The coachees *experienced the process as a significant positive and magical process*. Initially, it seems *uncomfortable and*

tough, because you have to *face yourself honestly, discover yourself and build a relationship with the coach*. Participant 3 describes this as follows: “So that’s the value-add...its somebody who creates that safe space where I can be myself...I can think silly stuff, say stupid things...but not judged for saying that, for these things are the reality I need to work with”. Increased self-awareness and insight is supported by Turner’s (2006) findings, indicating that self-awareness, including becoming aware of personal blind spots, are some of the benefits that executives identified in executive coaching. This process involves self-discovery where the coach adopts the role of mirror and challenger (Mink et al. 1993). Although the coaching process is tough, *coachees experienced it as an opportunity to unload and relax*.

Relationship: Important themes highlighted were *facing yourself and looking in the personal mirror. The coach provides a sounding board for the coachee*. The coachees experienced *support to be able to reflect on their own behaviour in a trusting space* where the coach provides them with honest feedback. Participant 4 describes her experience in this regard as follows: “A relationship...a good relationship to have somebody that you feel the person is on the journey with me...we’ve uncovered the stuff and he has given me some pointers...some actions and stuff to go and work with”. Bluckert (2005:4) confirms these experiences by stating: “Everyone needs feedback, insights and encouragement, particularly the executive leading an institution, but they still need to turn to someone, somewhere, for a confidential and informed sounding-board and advice”

Personal Benefit: The coachees indicated the *importance of personal learning and growth* that takes place in the coaching process. Bluckert (2005) and Turner (2006) highlighted the importance of personal growth for the individual, and its benefits for the organisation as part of the coaching outcomes.

Most Valuable Experiences

All coachees indicated *as significantly valuable the personal support and guidance they received through the coaching process*. The process also *provided them with time to reflect on important personal issues and behaviour dynamics*. These aspects in turn *promoted a*

measure of personal growth (better understanding of themselves) and *optimisation of their potential as individuals and executives*. Participant 1 mentioned the following regarding the executive role: “the other thing is the better understanding of your role and position in the business and the journey of your business”.

Positive Experiences

Relationship: Coachees highlighted the fact that *someone is actively listening to them and providing them with honest feedback*. Participant 4 mentioned in this regard: “first and foremost there’s the value of being heard, really heard...having a space where it’s just about me”. Bluckert (2005) confirms the importance of having a non-judgemental space that serves as a sounding board for coachees. The coachees indicated that this *enables them to clarify their personal values, beliefs, goals and dreams. Truthfulness and real understanding from the coach* were indicated as very valuable experiences. Participant 5 describes this issue as follows: “just having an anchor to help you tackle some of these issues”. Turner (2006) also indicated that the role of the coach is that of a sounding board, a trusted collaborator, challenger and catalyst for change.

Personal: *Personal growth facilitated in the coaching process* is an important and reoccurring theme reflected by the coachees. They also highlight the fact that they *gain insight in their own behaviour which aids them to be able to overcome stumbling blocks in realising their personal potential*. Participant 1 mentioned in this regard: “Important is the bigger understanding, self-understanding, self-awareness as a leader and who you really are...and your style and all that”.

Value-add Experiences (Relating to Work as an Executive)

Personal Benefit: The value-add of the coaching process in the coachees’ work environment, highlights key aspects like *feeling more confident and comfortable in their role as executives*. It seems that reflecting on challenges with an objective party, *helps the coachees to gain clarity in terms of their roles and what is required to reach their goals*. Also, *feeling less stressed when challenged*, and *being able to deal more effectively with difficult situations*,

were indicated as valuable gains from coaching. Participant 3 mentioned in this regard: “The coaching conversations confirm that...this is really what my purpose in life is...what I really should be doing...so there’s clarity in my mind what I want to do with my life..whether it be personal or business”. Bluckert (2005) also stated that executive coaching enables coachees to approach their work environment with more confidence and a wider perception of what is needed to successfully fulfill their roles.

Relationships: Increased self-awareness was indicated as a significant benefit of the coaching process. Coachees indicated that they are more aware and understanding of themselves, their emotions and behaviour. *This again impacts positively on their relationships with colleagues and clients*. Thus the coachees’ *inter-personal and intra-personal relationships seem to improve*. Participant 2 described this issue as follows: “We learn to relate better to wives and husbands or children...also colleagues, clients...so its all these sort of spin-offs too...away from the other immediate issues”. Fortune magazine reported results of a survey of executives and managers who went through a coaching process for six to twelve months. Seventy-seven percent of the executives described improved working relationships with their direct reports, 71% with supervisors, and 63% with peers (Anonymous 2006). Sherman and Freas (2004) found in their research that executives tend to move on rather than to reflect and they sometimes climb the career ladder without addressing their limitations.

Skills and Work: Coachees emphasised the importance of coaching as it *positively impacts and develops their leadership and management skills*. They are *able to lead team members more successfully* and have a *stronger focus on key organisational issues*. Participant 3 mentioned in this regard: “I’m basically here to find myself better...to keep in touch with the real self...I need to have that to be a good boss, a good leader...to be good at what I have to be and do”. Bluckert (2005) also reflects on the importance of executive coaching impacting on organisational issues and leadership style of the executive.

Value-add Experiences (Relating to the Person of the Executive)

The personal benefits indicated by all coachees include *a reduction in anxiety and*

stress. The coachees experience *noted overall personal growth that is not only linked to their work skills and abilities, but to broader growth as a human being*. Improved personal relationships were also indicated as an important developmental benefit from the coaching process. Some of the coachees indicated that *coaching also had a strong impact on improved relationships with their spouses and family members*.

Negative Experiences

The negative experiences relate to issues like *a lengthy, time consuming coaching process and finding time for weekly coaching sessions*. Executives are busy and have extremely high demands on their time. They also find *the process takes long to produce tangible results*. The coachee needs to commit to the process for a number of sessions and it is not a quick-fix approach. It takes energy and commitment from the coachee to make coaching successful. Executives have high demands on their time and need a good return on investment for the time they spend in coaching (Thompson 2004).

Another negative theme relates to costs. The coachees indicated *coaching is an expensive process from the perspective of the coachee and the organisation*. Sherman and Freas (2004) indicate that executive coaching is far more costly per person than many other learning interventions. The coachees also *experience a lack of flexible access to their coach*. When challenged with a difficult situation where they need immediate support, they are often not able to engage the coach to this end.

An interesting and significant more negative theme indicated by some of the coachees is *cultural differences and the coach not understanding*. One coachee indicated that the coach did not understand her personal experiences because of a difference in background and culture. The participant, a black female executive, indicated that her work environment was mostly dominated by white males. She felt that a Black coach from the same cultural background would be able to better understand her specific challenges in the work environment. This participant said in this regard: "I would think of the cultural issue... background...because I don't know what would have been the situation if I had a black lady as coach...you know, where

there is also an understanding of the culture... where you come from, how you've been brought up and things like that".

Other more negative experiences reported were: *not being able to bring your whole self to coaching, not ready for coaching, no honest commitment, the coach should know when to terminate the relationship* (especially when the coach realises the process is not working or that the coachee is not committed to the process) and *no tangible results obtained through the coaching process*. Participant 5 mentioned in this regard: "I did not have the sense of comfort in also getting to some of my personal things that I'm going through...we kept it...you know... on the work level". All coachees again *emphasised the importance of a good trusting, working relationship with the coach*. Bluckert (2005) indicated that the coaching relationship is a critical key success factor in the coaching process.

CONCLUSION

The findings seem to indicate that executive coaching do have significant personal and professional developmental benefits for executives (coachees) and coaches.

The importance of establishing a positive, trusting relationship between coach and executive was accentuated. Where this does not materialize, the ethical onus rests on the coach to terminate the process and refer the executive to another coach who could possibly provide a more effective/productive coaching experience to the executive.

Coachees indicated that executive coaching can be a significant cost factor to the company employing the executive. Executive coaching should be a good investment in terms of the development of high level human capital for an employer, again emphasizing the importance of effective service delivery by well trained and professional adequate coaches.

The experiences of both parties indicated that the coaching process demands a high level of interpersonal and behaviour dynamic knowledge and skills from coaches, and that often there is a thin dividing line between coaching and psychotherapy. Coaches therefore should be able to detect when coaching tend to become psychotherapy and how to adequately address this situation.

The relevance and impact of aspects like cultural differences between coach and execu-

tive on the coaching process should be carefully considered. Incompatibility in this regard could jeopardize the coaching process.

There currently seems to be a lot of controversy around regulating the coaching industry. While this issue was indirectly indicated by coachees in this study, it is relevant and important for effective and professional coaching service delivery. Thus it seems necessary for future researchers to focus on this. The coaching industry is attempting to gain a greater level of identity and credibility in the marketplace and to achieve this there needs to be more clarity and consistency with what is being delivered to the market by executive coaching (Stevens 2005).

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