Examining the Effectiveness of Executive Coaching on Coachees' Performance in the Israeli Context

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Abstract

While executive coaching is a key means by which organisations and individuals build executives' capabilities, very little research has investigated how effective or beneficial this development tool is to the individuals or the organisations in which they work. The purpose of this study was to examine executive coaching effectiveness by investigating whether executive coaching has an impact on coachee performance outcomes as well as individual outcomes as manifested by self awareness, career satisfaction, job affective commitment, and job performance. Coaching outcomes were examined through a quasi-experimental field pre-post design with an untreated control group. The study participants (n=197) were drawn from the client bases of four Israeli-based firms whose primary professional services focused on executive coaching. The primary conclusion is that executive coaching may be a mechanism by which executives could be helped in improving and maintaining a high level of career satisfaction. The results should assist organizations in designing more effective executive coaching programs, and in making informed decisions about implementing and measuring executive coaching.

Key words: executive coaching, executive leadership, developmental relationships, quantitative research

Introduction

The use of executive coaching has become an increasingly popular trend in the corporate world over the past several decades, and is seen as a key developmental intervention by which organisations build executives' capabilities (Bono, Purvanova, Towler, & Peterson, 2009; Bozer & Pirola-Merlo, 2007; Dutton, 1997; Feldman & Lankau, 2005; Jones, Rafferty, & Griffin, 2006; Kombarakaran, Yang, Baker, & Fernandes, 2008; Levenson, 2009; Luebbe, 2005; Passmore & Gibbes, 2007; Thach, 2002). In 2003, the annual revenue generated by coaching was worth $US1 billion worldwide (Ferguson & Whitman, 2003), which increased to $US1.5 billion by 2007 according to an ICF global coaching study (ICF, 2008). This emergence of executive coaching as a new management tool to increase productivity and efficiency at work is a product of and a response to the rapidly changing global economy where continuous improvement is required to adapt to the volatility and complexity of changes (Gyllensten & Palmer, 2007; Ozkan, 2008). Executive coaching as a person-centred, action-learning, process-personalised on the job approach focusing on real-life challenges is aligned with executives' corporate settings which emphasise constant retraining that is versatile, pragmatic, and fragmented. This opportunity for gaining an understanding of how one is perceived by others in the organizational context is vitally important to leadership and managerial effectiveness, both of which are underlying outcomes of executive coaching initiatives (Ashford, 1989; Bandura, 1982; Bass & Yammarino, 1991; Yammarino & Atwater, 1993). Moreover, executive coaching represents an opportunity for the executive to gain a deeper understanding regarding specific organizational issues and imperatives. This understanding includes awareness about discontent,

possible undiscovered opportunities, and the executive's own strengths related to the issues and imperatives (Moen & Kralsund, 2008).

Justification for the Study

While executive coaching is a key means by which organisations build executives' capabilities, currently, neither the coach nor the coachee and his/her organisation know with any scientific certainty what are the expected outcomes from engaging in executive coaching (Kombarakaran, Bsker, Yang, & Fernandes, 2008; Luebbe, 2005). There have been only a handful of empirical studies on the effectiveness and benefit of executive coaching as a development tool to the individuals or the organisations in which they work (Blackman, 2006; Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001; Levenson, 2009; Lowman, 2005; Natale & Diamante, 2005; Passmore & Gibbes, 2007; Smither, London, Flautt, Vargas, & Kucine, 2003; Spence, 2006; Wasylyshyn, 2003). Further, these studies primarily have used short term affective reactions as outcome measures, and ignored coachee learning, behavioural changes and organisational outcomes as effectiveness indicators (Feldman & Lankau, 2005; Kombarakaran, Yang, et al., 2008). In order to redress this gap, this study uses established, reliable and valid measures to examine pre-and post executive coaching outcomes.

This failure to specify the impact of executive coaching is a critical limitation of existing research, because executives have a major influence on the viability and, ultimately, the success of the organisations in which they operate (Aitken & Malcolm, 2010; Bertrand & Schoar, 2003; Jung, Wu, & Chow, 2008; Kaiser, Hogan, & Craig, 2008; Kirwan & Brichall, 2006). This influence is increasingly relevant given the changing nature of work (Arthur & Rousseau, 1996; King, 2004), the uncertain environment (Waldman, Ramírez, House, & Puranam, 2001), and the growing recognition by organisations that in order to address the economic, political and social changes in their environment that require continuous innovation and managerial flexibility (Aitken & Malcolm, 2010; Moen & Allgood, 2009; Yukl & Mahsud, 2010), they need to invest in their human resources development (Antonacopoulou, 2000). Further, because executive coaching programs are a significant expense, it is essential for organisations that manage these programs, as well as coaches who work with executives, to consider new ways of increasing executive coaching effectiveness. Given the early state of the practice, and the dearth of agreed-upon definitions and standards, more theoretical and empirical research on executive coaching effectiveness is required (Collings & Mellahi, 2009). It is hoped that this study will contribute to executive coaching as an emerging evidence-based profession.

The purpose of this article is to empirically examine executive coaching effectiveness by investigating whether executive coaching has an impact on coachee performance as reflected in greater levels of individual outcomes. The research question that was designed to fulfil the purpose of the study is: "Does executive coaching have a positive influence on coachee performance as reflected in greater levels of individual outcomes?" This research question guides the literature review and assists in establishing related hypothesis.

Review of Literature

At its broadest level, coaching is generally defined as a process of equipping individuals with the tools, knowledge, and opportunities they need to develop themselves and become more effective (Feldman & Lankau, 2005; Peterson, 1996). More recently, in the 1990s, executive coaching per se emerged as an intervention focused on managers and senior leaders in organisation (Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001; Stern, 2004). This intervention geared specifically to changing the behaviour of middle-and senior-level managers (Feldman & Lankau, 2005). Unlike life coaching, executive coaching involves a third party, the organisation that employs the executive. Usually, the organisation is represented by human resources or by the executive's manager (Gyllensten & Palmer, 2007).

Defining Executive Coaching

Numerous definitions of executive coaching exist, ranging from the specific to the comprehensive, and are influenced by practitioner backgrounds, theories, and models. Some authors define executive coaching as a training technique specifically focused at the individual level (Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001; McCauley & Hezlett, 2001; Orenstein, 2002; Pemberton, 2006; Peterson, 1996), while others adopt a broader definition, extending executive coaching to the team and organisational levels (Bacon & Spear, 2003; Hall, Otazo, & Hollenbeck, 1999; ICF, 2008; Kilburg, 1996a, 1996b, 2000).

While there is no universal definition of executive coaching, the different forms of executive coaching do share certain defining characteristics mentioned by various authors. Executive coaching always involves a highly confidential partnership between an executive and a coach (Blackman, 2006; Brotman, Liberi, & Wasylyshyn, 1998; Kiel, 1996; Natale & Diamante, 2005; Wasylyshyn, 2003). This personal outcome-focused activity focuses not only on interpersonal issues, but also on intrapersonal ones (Greene & Grant, 2003; O'Brien, 1997; Witherspoon & White, 1996a). Although executive coaching may be initiated by the executive independently, there is usually another party in the executive coaching relationship, namely, the organisation (Ennis et al., 2004; Luebbe, 2005; Scriffignano, 2009). Executive coaching is, most often, provided by the organisation and involves a clear link between the individual goals of the coachee and the strategic goals of the organisation (Ennis, et al., 2004). In this context, executive coaching has been defined as an ongoing relationship, usually lasting anywhere from a few months to a year or more (D Coutu et al., 2009; Diedrich, 1996; Levinson, 1996). Differing from therapy, most definitions assume an absence of serious mental health problems in the coachee (Brock, 2008; Cavanagh, 2005; Kilburg, 2004; Ozkan, 2008), and share the notion that the coachee is resourceful (Berg & Szabo, 2005). Overall, the executive coaching relationship is described as a partnership of equals in which the coach does not have any direct authority over the executive (Diane Coutu et al., 2009; Evers, Brouwers, & Tomic, 2006; Grant, 2006; Rogers, 2004; Witherspoon & White, 1996a), and may not be a specialist in the executive's focus area or professional field (Eggers & Clark, 2000; Hart & Kirkland, 2001; London, 2001). This collaborative relationship is one in which the executive coach is a facilitator of the process, rather than a director, and distinguishes executive coaching from the other developmental aspects of normal supervisory or managerial roles (Tett, Hal, Bleier, & Murphy, 2000).

For the purpose of this study, executive coaching is defined as a one-on-one relationship between a professional coach and an executive (coachee). The purpose of executive coaching is to enhance the coachee's behavioural change through self-awareness and learning, and ultimately contribute to individual and organisational success. This definition comprises three parts. First, executive coaching is defined as a service delivered in a one-on-one format. Second, the coachees are not direct reports of the coaches. Although this study focus on coaches whose exclusive responsibility is client coaching and have no formal authority over client, it is recognised that internal coaching provided by stakeholders within the organisation (e.g. supervisor, peer, human resource professionals) may be a legitimate part of organisations' managerial development programs. Finally, the focus is on performance improvement within the context of a specific organization.

Outcomes of Executive Coaching

Research on executive coaching, while relatively a new field of endeavour, is only now beginning to build a wider evidence base about the impact of executive coaching on organizational and individual outcomes (Passmore & Gibbes, 2007). Research suggests that executive coaching can lead to improvements at the individual and unit-levels, with the majority of studies measuring individual outcomes. Overall, studies have consistently found a positive relationship between executive coaching and both executive effectiveness and job performance, based on multiple

perspectives, including self, supervisor, subordinate, human resource brokers, and other stakeholders (Finn, 2007; McGovern et al., 2001; Olivero, Bane, & Kopelman, 1997; Passmore & Gibbes, 2007; Smither, et al., 2003; Thach, 2002).

In order to identify the effectiveness indicators of executive coaching in our study, we consulted the existing literature and had discussions with several practising coaches in Israel and Australia. In reviewing the previous existing empirical research on executive coaching, support for a number of points discussed in the practice-based literature was found. Specifically, executive coaching was suggested as a means for increasing productivity, learning, job satisfaction, and behaviour change (Finn, 2007; Garman, Whiston, & Zlatoper, 2000; Gegner, 1997; Hall, et al., 1999; Judge & Cowell, 1997; Kampa-Kokesch, 2001; Luthans & Peterson, 2003; Olivero, et al., 1997; Parker-Wilkins, 2006; Smither, et al., 2003; Starman, 2007; Sue-Chan & Latham, 2004). Accordingly, the effectiveness of an executive coaching intervention in this study is assessed using individual indicators, which can be aggregated into two clusters, proximal outcomes, and distal outcomes.

Proximal outcomes refer to the immediate behavioural, attitudinal, and cognitive changes of the coachee and include positive feelings towards the organisation (Finn, 2007), increased self-awareness, and enhanced learning (Baek-Kyoo, 2005; Feldman & Lankau, 2005; Finn, 2007; Hall, et al., 1999). The positive feelings of the coachee can be expressed as satisfaction with the coaching process and the coach (Gegner, 1997; Hall, et al., 1999; Smither, et al., 2003), as well as increased self-awareness (Baek-Kyoo, 2005; Feldman & Lankau, 2005; Hall, et al., 1999; Luthans & Peterson, 2003). Nonetheless, executive coaching does not always end with positive feelings or self-awareness. Joo (2005, p. 481) suggested that executive coaching can be a strategic learning tool for organisations, with "learning in executive coaching . . . focused on cognitive and affective learning". The proximal outcomes of executive coaching assessed in this study capture the immediate individual, behavioural, attitudinal, and cognitive changes experienced by the coachee as a result of his/her engagement in executive coaching, and include increased levels of coachee self-awareness, increased coachee career satisfaction, and job affective commitment.

In comparison, distal outcomes, the ultimate purpose of executive coaching, consist of individual success and organisational success (Baek-Kyoo, 2005). The evidence for executive coaching having a positive impact on work-based performance is weak, but it does support the claim that executive coaching is positively associated with stress management, job satisfaction, self-regard, and leader development and performance (Jones, et al., 2006; Passmore & Gibbes, 2007). Jarvis (2004) suggested that individual success may be captured via increased managerial and interpersonal skills, greater problem solving skills, increased confidence and an improved adaptability to change, better relationships, a better work-life balance, and reduced stress levels. This argument is empirically supported by Gegner's (1997), and Hall et al's (1999) findings. Smither et al. (2003) found that executives who worked with coaches (compared to those who did not) set more specific goals, were more open in sharing their feedback, received action ideas from their supervisors, and had improved performance according to multi-source rating.

The distal outcomes of executive coaching assessed in this study include a measure of individual "success", namely self-reported job performance which should translate into organisational success (Baek-Kyoo, 2005; Kaiser, et al., 2008). Organisational success is expected to result from an improvement in coachee job satisfaction, and job commitment (Wanberg, Welsh, & Hezlett, 2003). Additionally, organisational indicators of success, namely improvement in coachee job performance as reported by his/her direct supervisor, and improvement in supervisory-rated task performance (Luthans & Peterson, 2003) are also examined in this study. Thus, the following hypothesis is proposed:

Hypothesis 1: Coachee (experimental group) performance will be improved to a greater degree than peer (control group) performance as reflected in greater levels of individual outcomes.

Method

The Sampling Strategy

This quasi-experimental study was conducted in Israel over a period of approximately nine months. The participants (n=197) drew on the client base of four Israeli firms whose primary professional services focused on executive coaching in the commercial, government, and education sectors throughout Israel. The four executive coaching firms participating in this study were identified and accessed by the researchers through a public domain source. Executive coaches from these four firms were contacted by an initial contact letter emailed to them by the researchers inviting them to participate in the study. All four executive coaching firms in this study were similar in terms of employee numbers, organisational structure, processes, and the type of clients (middle to senior level managers). Under direction from the researchers, the executive coaching firms contacted their clients who were about to commence executive coaching programs and invited them, their peers, and their direct supervisors to participate in this study. Similar methods for distributing survey materials were used and described in previous research on executive coaching (Gegner, 1997; Kampa-Kokesch, 2001). The number of executives (i.e., coachees), peers and their direct supervisors who received this initial invitation was not tracked in this study due to confidentiality clauses imposed by the Monash University Standing Committee on Ethics in Research Involving Humans. The participants in this study were offered a summary feedback report that was prepared by the researcher upon completion of their executive coaching program and analysis of the results.

Approach

The executive coaching approach underlying the current research represents a cognitive-behavioural approach, where the coach and the coachee together work through a process of behavioural change. The executive coaching process implemented by all the coaches participating in the study included 10-12 coaching sessions with weekly interventions. All executive coaching endeavours commenced with an assessment and identification of a developmental issue, followed by a feedback session, goal setting, action planning, and follow-up coaching sessions, and concluded with an evaluation of outcomes. This approach of executive coaching is similar to coaching adopted by many organisations (Ennis, et al., 2004; Feldman & Lankau, 2005; Finn, 2007; Natale & Diamante, 2005). Though the coaches in the present study followed the same executive coaching process, each had the flexibility to tailor the executive coaching content to meet the specific needs and circumstances of their coachees. Multiple coaches were involved in the executive coaching programs in this study. Therefore, it was not feasible to account for the potential impact of factors such as coaching style, techniques, and tools in this study's results.

Participants and Procedure

In total, 72 executives (coachees), 68 coaches, 29 peers and 28 direct supervisors agreed to participate in the pre-test (i.e., prior to the commencement of the executive coaching program) administered from August to December 2008. All of these participants also completed the post-test (immediately after the executive coaching program was completed) from January to April 2009. The study included one data set with two groups. The two groups in the study are referred to as the experimental group (Group A), and untreated control group (Group B). The experimental group comprised executives who participated in executive coaching programs provided by the four executive coaching firms described previously (n=72), their coaches (n=68), and their direct supervisors (n=28). The control group (n=29) comprised their peers, namely, executives from the same organisations from which the experimental group was obtained. The research design graphically

presented in Figure 1 shows that participants in the experimental group (Group A) engaged in executive coaching programs and were distributed surveys prior to and following the executive coaching intervention. Additionally, the participants in the control group (Group B) who did not engage in an executive coaching program were distributed surveys identical to the participants in the experimental group (excluding those that measure the executive coaching experience) at the same times (i.e., prior to and following the executive coaching intervention).
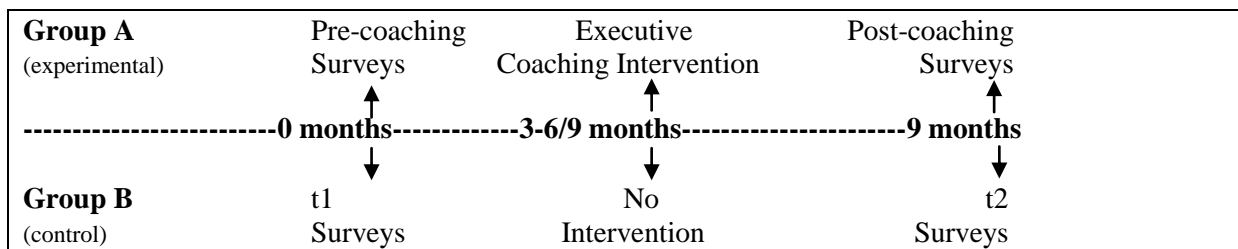
Group A (experimental)	Pre-coaching Surveys	Executive Coaching Intervention	Post-coaching Surveys
	↑	↑	↑
------------------------0 months-------------3-6/9 months---------------------9 months			
	↓	↓	↓
Group B (control)	t1 Surveys	No Intervention	t2 Surveys

Figure 1 - Experimental and Control Group Research Phases

Measures

Before considering the hypothesised relationships among the constructs of interest, the accuracy of the measures with respect to the data was examined. In order to test the hypothesis of interest in this study, measures of five distinct theoretical constructs via previously published scales were used to collect data relevant for the study. There are many advantages in using standardised instrumentation. For example, results of different studies using the same instrument can be compared, and replication is facilitated (Gay & Diehl, 1992). Another advantage of using instruments that have already been developed is that validity and reliability data are available. Detailed information on each instrument follows.

Coachee job performance was measured using Griffin et al's (2007) job performance scale (which is three subscales in their general job performance scale) designed to measure three sub dimensions of job performance. The measure consists of nine items. A representative item from this scale is: "How often you had carried out the core parts of your job well". All items are answered using a five-point rating scale ranging from (1)=very little to (5)=a great deal. The coefficient alpha of .70 was recorded for this measure in Griffin et al's (2007) study. In the current study, coefficient alphas of .83, and .91 as reported by coachee and direct supervisor respectively were recorded. Coachee supervisory-rated task performance was measured using Walumbwa et al's (2008) supervisory-rated task performance scale designed to measure the performance of followers as rated by their immediate supervisors. The measure consists of four items. A representative item from this scale is: "All in all, how competently does this individual perform the job?" All items are answered using a five-point rating scale ranging from (1)=consistently performs way below expectations to (5)=consistently performs way beyond expectations. The coefficient alpha of .86 was recorded for this measure in Walumbwa et al's (2008) study, and .91 in the current study. Coachee self-awareness was measured using Grant et al's (2002) self insight scale designed to measure the clarity of understanding one's thoughts, feelings, and behaviour. The measure consists of eight items. A representative item from this scale is: "I am usually aware of my thoughts". All items are answered using a six-point rating scale ranging from (1)=strongly disagree to (6)=strongly agree. The coefficient alpha of .87 was recorded for this measure in Grant et al's (2002) study, and .82 in the current study. Coachee job affective commitment was measured using Meyer et al's (1993) job affective commitment scale designed to measure commitment as an affective attachment to the organisation. The affective dimension of organizational commitment has been noted for its unique contribution, given it captures the employee's affective desire to remain with the organization versus a calculative conclusion (Frisch, 2001) and is often used as a single dimension in organizational research (e.g., Frisch, 2001;

Wycherley & Cox, 2008). The measure consists of five items which were a modified version of the scale reported by Allen and Meyer (1990). A representative item from this scale is: "I would be very happy to spend the rest of my career with this organisation". All items are answered using a seven-point rating scale ranging from (1)=strongly disagree to (7)=strongly agree. The coefficient alpha of .85 was recorded for this measure in Meyer et al's (1993) study, and .80 in the current study. Coachee career satisfaction was measured using Greenhaus et al's (1990) career satisfaction scale designed to measure the career satisfaction among black and white managers from three organisations. The measure consists of five items. A representative item from this scale is: "I am satisfied with the progress I have made toward meeting my goals for advancement". All items are answered using a five-point rating scale ranging from (1)=strongly disagree to (5)=strongly agree. The coefficient alpha of .88 was recorded for this measure in Greenhaus et al' (1990) study, and .84 in the current study.

Analyses Approaches

The first stage of the quantitative analysis involved descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics (univariate) such as frequencies and means were used to understand the structure and nature of the data. This approach also served the purpose of clarifying the most appropriate statistical methods to subsequently use. As Tukey (1977) suggested, exploratory data analysis can highlight aspects of the data that are unexpected. Descriptive statistics were used to describe and summarize the data to identify any patterns in the data distribution. Several procedures for examining the individual variable in this study were performed, such as measures of frequency and central tendency. Exploratory statistics (bivariate and multivariate) such as correlation analysis, analysis of variance, t-tests, and exploratory factor analysis were used to investigate the relationships among the variables. Hierarchical regression analysis and confirmatory factor analysis were used to examine complex relationships among the variables and to validate the study's scales.

Results

Coach Demographics

Coaches were asked to provide basic demographic information and coaching-specific information on the following: age, gender, level of education, employment background, executive coaching experience and training, and a description of their executive coaching engagement (e.g. length of program, amount and frequency of meetings, form of interactions). Table 1 presents descriptive information about the coach participants. All of the executive coaches (n=68) in this study resided in Israel. The sample of coaches consisted of 26 (38%) males and 42 (62%) females. These findings are consistent with previous research (Aiken & West, 1991; Spence, 2006) suggesting that coaching in Israel is currently predominantly a female profession. The highest proportion of coaches in this study was between 45-55 years of age, and the mean age was 45 years (SD=9.14). In line with previous studies (Aiken & West, 1991; Australia, 2010; Brooks & Wright, 2007; Judge & Cowell, 1997), most coaches in this study were university educated (83%). Seven coaches (10%) indicated high school as their highest educational level, five (7%) indicated a certificate/diploma, 27 (40%) indicated Bachelor degrees, and 29 (43%) indicated Masters degrees. These results are consistent with previous research and support the concern expressed in the literature regarding the variety of professionals identifying themselves as coaches (Australia, 2010; Feldman & Lankau, 2005; Grant & Cavanagh, 2007; Hall, et al., 1999; Judge & Cowell, 1997).

Demographics	n	%	Mean	SD
Gender				
Male	26	38.2		
Female	42	61.8		
Age			45.13	9.15
Education Level				
High-school	7	10.3		
Certificate / Diploma	5	7.4		
Bachelors	27	39.7		
Masters	29	42.6		
Professional Association Membership				
Yes	36	52.9		
No	32	47.1		
Training in learning and development				
Yes	30	44.1		
No	38	55.9		
Background in psychology				
Yes	41	61.2		
No	26	38.8		
Background in management				
Yes	60	89.6		
No	7	10.4		
Is executive coaching your major current profession?				
Yes	37	54.4		
No	31	45.6		
Does the coach work with a coaching firm?				
Yes	23	33.8		
No	45	66.2		
Employment status				
Full time	5	7.4		
Part time	7	10.3		
Independent	56	82.4		
Executive Coaching experience (years)			1.86	1.37

Table 1 - Descriptive Statistics of Coaches

The Executive Coaching program

The coaches (n=68) in this study were asked to provide details on the executive coaching program they provided, as presented in Table 2. The average executive coaching program in this study lasted 3.7 months (SD=0.7), with 88% of coaches working with their coachees for 3 to 4 months. The average executive coaching program included 6.8 face-to-face sessions (SD=4.6) of 80 minutes each. The average face-to-face coaching session lasted 1.3 hours (SD=0.37). The coaching session duration was from 30 to 120 minutes, and the mode (88%) duration of each coaching session was 60 to 90 minutes. This finding in relation to coaching sessions duration is similar to a mean of 77 minutes reported by a recent survey among 229 Australian coaches (Australia, 2010). In addition to the face-to-face coaching sessions, coaching over the phone or online coaching by emails were also widely practised among the coaches in this study with an average of eight non–contact engagements per program (SD=5.22). These data are in line with previous studies conducted overseas (Bono, et al., 2009; Brooks & Wright, 2007; Collings & Mellahi, 2009; Grant & Zackon, 2004; Gyllensten & Palmer, 2007; ICF, 2008; Spence, 2006).

Variable	Means	SD
Executive coaching program duration (months)	3.66	0.68
Face to face meetings (number)	6.75	4.60
Face to face meetings duration (hours)	1.32	0.37
Non-physical interaction (e.g., phone, email etc)	7.63	5.22

Table 2 - Descriptive Statistics of Executive Coaching Program

Coachee/Peer Demographic Information

Demographic variables of coachee and peer participants (i.e., experimental and control groups respectively) are presented in Table 3. The study's participants were 101 executives (72 coachees and 29 peers) from Israel-based organisations who represented diverse professional specialities, including education, information technology, human resources, operations, finance and insurance, legal, marketing and advertising, and client services. The sample of coachees and peers comprised 53 (52.5%) males and 48 (47.5%) females. In terms of marital status, nineteen (18.8%) were single, seventy two (71.3%) were married, and ten (9.9%) were divorced/separated. Coachee participants averaged 4.02 years of experience in their current position. Similarly, peer participants averaged 3.03 years of experience in their current position. Twenty two (21.8%) participants in the coaches/peers groups were in some supervisory or team leadership positions, 31 (30.7%) were in middle management positions, 39 (38.6%) were in upper management positions, and nine (8.9%) were in top positions (i.e., CEOs or presidents). The average age of coachee participants was 41 (SD=10.19) compared to 34 (SD=5.6) among peer participants. Most participants in this study were university educated (81%) with almost a third of participants (32%) having a Masters degree. As the average age of the coachees was significantly higher than the peer respondents, it follows that coachees reported longer full-time employment (M=16.49, SD=10.3) compared to their peers (M=10.45, SD=6.43).

Demographics	Peer		Coachee		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
Gender						
Male	14	48.3	39	54.2	53	52.5
Female	15	51.7	33	45.8	48	47.5
Total	29	100	72	100	101	100
Marital status						
Single	8	27.6	11	15.3	19	18.8
Married	17	58.6	55	76.4	72	71.3
Divorced / Separated	4	13.8	6	8.3	10	9.9
No. of children						
None	18	62.1	31	43.1	49	48.5
One	2	6.9	11	15.3	13	12.9
Two	7	24.1	21	29.2	28	27.7
Three	2	6.9	9	12.5	11	10.9
Organizational level						
Top	2	6.9	7	9.7	9	8.9
Senior Management	13	44.8	26	36.1	39	38.6
Middle Management	6	20.7	25	34.7	31	30.7
Some supervisory or team leader	8	27.6	14	19.4	22	21.8
Organization size (no. of employees)						
50 or less	6	20.7	17	23.6	23	22.8
50-99	10	34.5	15	20.8	25	24.8
100-249	5	17.2	13	18.1	18	17.8

Demographics	Peer		Coachee		Total	
	n	%	n	%	n	%
250 or more	8	27.6	27	37.5	35	34.7

* p<.05   ** p<.01   *** p<.001

Table 3 - Descriptive Statistics of Experimental (Coachee) and Control (Peer) Groups

Supervisor Demographic Information

The sample consisted of twenty eight executives who were the direct supervisors of the coachees and peers who participated in this study. As presented in Table 4, 19 participants (68%) were male and nine (32%) female. Supervisors recorded a mean age of 44.18 (SD=5.38), with a mean of 5.79 years in their current positions. The highest proportion (n=14, 50%) of participants worked in large-size organisations with more than 249 employees, 12 worked in medium-sized organisations (100-249 employees), and two worked in small-sized organisations (under 100 employees).

Demographics	n	%	Mean	SD
Gender				
Male	19	67.9		
Female	9	32.1		
Age			44.18	5.38
Years in current position			5.79	3.70
Organization size (no. of employees)				
50-99	2	7.1		
100-249	12	42.9		
250 or more	14	50.0		

Table 4 - Descriptive Statistics of Supervisors

Testing the Research Hypothesis

The research question addressed by this study was "Does executive coaching have a positive influence on coachee performance as reflected in greater levels of individual outcomes?" Hypothesis 1 was related to Research Question 1:

H1: Coachee (experimental group) performance will be improved to a greater degree than peer (control group) performance as reflected in greater levels of individual outcomes.

The operational definition of executive coaching effectiveness, for the purpose of this research study, is the extent to which individual outcomes are achieved due to participation in an executive coaching intervention. Executive coaching effectiveness was measured by the difference in scores between post-coaching and pre-coaching sessions. Individual outcomes refer to the behavioral, attitudinal, and cognitive benefits experienced by the experimental group (i.e., coachees) as a result of engaging in an executive coaching program and include increased levels of self awareness (Baek-Kyoo, 2005; Feldman & Lankau, 2005; Hall, et al., 1999; Luthans & Peterson, 2003), increased levels of job affective commitment and career satisfaction (Jarvis, 2004; Luthans & Peterson, 2003), improvement in job performance as reported by the coachee (Hall, et al., 1999; Olivero, et al., 1997; Smither, et al., 2003; Wanberg, et al., 2003), improvement in coachee job performance as reported by his/her direct supervisor, and improvement in supervisory-rated task performance (Luthans & Peterson, 2003).

Data were collected at the individual level of analysis. The analyses focused on individual-level changes in executive coaching effectiveness measured twice (i.e., pre-and post-coaching) over nine months (August 2008-April 2009). Reliability analyses were used to assess the internal consistency of the measures of the constructs in the hypothesised research model. Hypothesis 1 was examined by using two-way repeated measures ANOVA in order to examine differences in executive coaching effectiveness categorized by group (coachees vs. peers) and time (pre-and post-coaching intervention). The results are presented in Table 5.

Coaching Effectiveness Measures	Group(n=)	Pre test M	SD	Post test M	SD	F values Group	Time	Interaction
Self-reported job performance	Peer(28)	3.50	0.56	3.85	0.40	5.13[*]	20.1[***]	0.27
	Coachee(68)	3.74	0.58	4.02	0.45			
	Total(96)	3.67	0.58	3.97	0.44			
Self-awareness	Peer(28)	4.78	0.71	4.74	0.59	0.58	0.81	2.33
	Coachee(68)	4.56	0.81	4.72	0.79			
	Total(96)	4.63	0.78	4.73	0.74			
Job affective commitment	Peer(28)	5.89	0.90	5.84	1.05	8.16[**]	0.25	0.75
	Coachee(68)	5.00	1.34	5.16	1.55			
	Tota(96)	5.26	1.29	5.36	1.45			
Career satisfaction	Peer(28)	3.64	0.54	3.31	0.39	2.01	0.14	15.2[***]
	Coachee(68)	3.54	0.78	3.81	0.79			
	Total(96)	3.57	0.72	3.67	0.73			
Job performance reported by supervisor	Peer(27)	3.77	0.74	4.15	0.41	0	20.4[***]	0.01
	Coachee(25)	3.78	0.40	4.14	0.48			
	Total(52)	3.77	0.59	4.15	0.44			
Supervisory-rated task performance	Peer(27)	3.54	0.72	4.08	0.53	2.04	14.4[***]	5.89[*]
	Coachee(25)	3.96	0.49	4.08	0.70			
	Total(52)	3.74	0.65	4.08	0.61			

* p<.05   ** p<.01   *** p<.001

Table 5 - Means, Standard Deviations and F values of Coaching Effectiveness Categorized by Group and Time

As Table 5 indicates, there were statistically significant differences between pre-and post-coaching for the following measures: self-reported job performance (F(1,94)=20.15, p<.001, $\eta p2$=0.18), job performance as reported by direct supervisor (F(1,50)=20.41, p<.001, $\eta p2$=0.29), and supervisory-rated task performance (F(1,94)=14.40, p<.001, $\eta p2$=0.22). Scores of these measures were significantly higher among both groups (i.e., experimental and control groups) in the post-coaching measurement than in the pre-coaching measurement. For self-reported job performance, the post-coaching scores were higher (M=3.97) than the pre-coaching scores (M=3.67) for the two groups. For job performance as reported by direct supervisor, the post-coaching scores were higher (M=4.15) than the pre-coaching scores (M=3.77) for the two groups. For supervisory-rated task performance, the post-coaching scores were higher (M=4.08) than the pre-coaching scores (M=3.74) for the two groups.

When ANOVA results indicated a statistically significant interaction, a Bonferroni procedure was applied to examine the source of the interactions. As shown in Figures 2 and 3, there was partial support for hypothesis 1, with career satisfaction of coachees exceeding that of their peers post-coaching ($F(1,94)=15.20$, $p<.001$). In comparison, peers recorded a higher level of supervisory-rated task performance compared with coachees post-coaching ($F(1,50)=5.89$, $p<.05$). For both groups, significant improvement by time (i.e., pre-post-coaching) was recorded in self-reported job performance ($F(1,94)=20.15$, $p<.001$, $\eta p2=0.18$), job performance as reported by direct supervisor ($F(1,50)=20.41$, $p<.001$, $\eta p2=0.29$), and supervisory-rated task performance ($F(1,94)=14.40$, $p<.001$, $\eta p2=0.22$). These three executive coaching effectiveness measures were significantly higher post-coaching compared to the pre-coaching measurement.
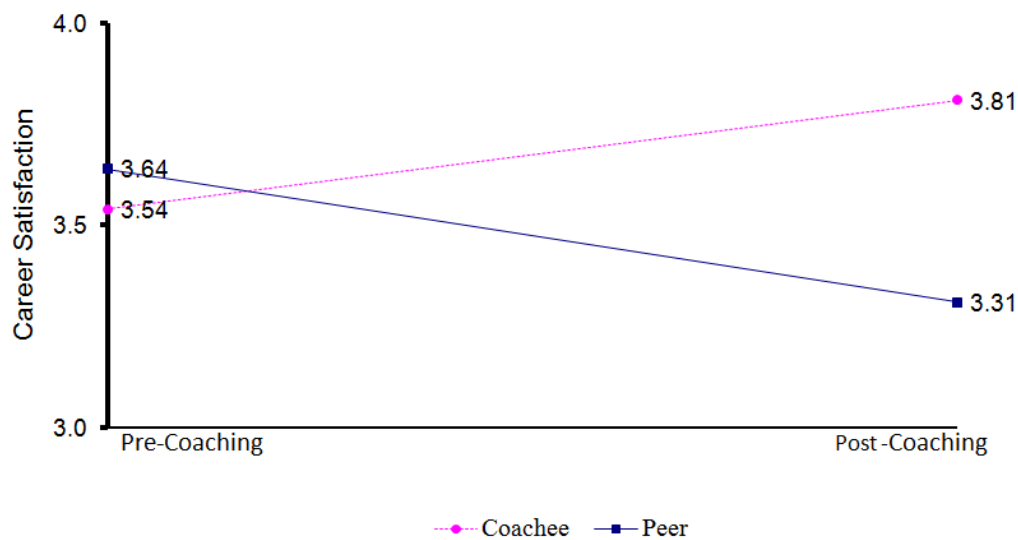

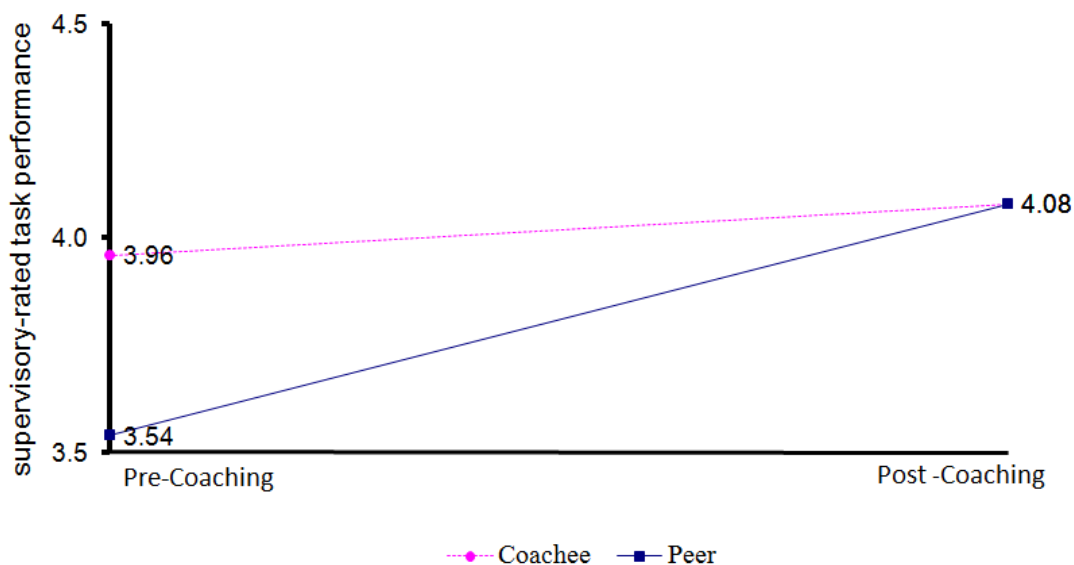**Figure 2 - Interaction Effects of Pre- and Post-coaching Intervention on Coachee Career Satisfaction**

Figure 3 - Interaction Effects of Pre- and Post-coaching Intervention on Supervisory-rated Task Performance

Discussion

The primary purpose of this study was to empirically investigate how effective or beneficial executive coaching is as a development tool for individuals and the organisations in which they work. This study addressed the research question "Does executive coaching have a positive influence on coachee performance as reflected in greater levels of individual outcomes?" Hypothesis 1 was related to Research Question 1:

> H1: Coachee (experimental group) performance will be improved to a greater degree than their peers (control group) as reflected in greater levels of individual outcomes.

Hypothesis 1 was partially supported, with coachee (i.e., experimental group) career satisfaction improving to a greater degree than their peers (i.e., control group). It is fair to note that the evidence for executive coaching having a positive impact on work-based performance was weak. However, research about executive coaching is slowly beginning to point to the fact that most executives who have engaged in executive coaching do find it beneficial in a range of areas (Dawdy, 2004; Hall, et al., 1999; Judge & Cowell, 1997; Wasylyshyn, 2003), from stress management and satisfaction to self-regard and leader development and performance (Jones, et al., 2006; Passmore & Gibbes, 2007).   Our finding regarding the coachee's improvement in career satisfaction is in line with Luthans and Peterson (2003) who reported a significant improvement in managers' work attitudes (including job satisfaction) as a result of 360-degree feedback combined with coaching. Through executive coaching, executives can focus on professional development areas as they face a succession of career challenges (Marshall, 2000). Brown and Hockman (2004, p. 42) stated that "from senior executives to up-and-comers, people who hire coaches are learning how to set better goals for themselves, and develop strategies that improve their overall quality of life." Similarly, two-thirds of the participants in Blackman's (2006) study indicated that executive coaching had offered them the best way to achieve their goals. The participants in Evers et al's (2006) quasi-experimental study indicated satisfaction with the improvement in their effectiveness, in particular, in the domain of acting in a balanced way and goal setting. These results suggest that executive coaching may be a mechanism by which executives could be helped in improving and maintaining a high level of career satisfaction. Career satisfaction is an outcome toward which future studies of executive coaching can turn when considering a broader class of outcomes beyond performance in evaluating executive coaching effectiveness.

Conclusions and Implications

Much of the existing coaching literature considers executive coaching as a relatively new and promising discipline related to growth and development, but empirical evidence in support of these observations remains limited (Bono, et al., 2009; Feldman & Lankau, 2005; Finn, 2007; Hall, et al., 1999; Levenson, 2009; Passmore & Gibbes, 2007). However, when it comes to a real, measureable improvement of coaches that can be directly attributable to their engagement in coaching results are much more sporadic (Haan & Nieb, 2011).This study provides some support for the conclusion that executive coaching has a beneficial impact on executives. Specifically, the career satisfaction of coachee participants in this study improved to a greater degree when compared with their peers. The information from this study should assist in designing more effective executive coaching programs, and enable individuals and organisations in making informed decisions about implementing, and measuring executive coaching programs. These outcomes are important for the development of healthy individuals and organisations, and are essential to the long term success of executive coaching as a solid evidence-based field.

This study has filled some of the gaps in the executive coaching literature. Methodologically, this research adopted a quasi-experimental design that drew on experimental and control groups in its data collection and analysis. The use of a quasi-experimental design allowed the examination of causal relationships in a complex field setting, and the ability to eliminate alternate explanations of the effects reported. In addition, unlike many previous studies in the area that have relied merely on self-report assessments of executive coaching effectiveness, this current study drew on multiple raters in its collection of data, namely coaches, coachees, direct reports, and supervisors, and utilised a control group.

In terms of advancing research in this area, there are only a handful of extant studies that empirically examine the outcomes of executive coaching interventions. Within this set, the bias has been to use short term affective reactions as outcome measures, and to ignore coachee learning, behavioural changes and organisational outcomes as effectiveness indicators (Feldman & Lankau, 2005; Kombarakaran, Yang, et al., 2008). In order to redress this gap, this study improves our understanding of executive coaching outcomes by using established, reliable and valid measures to examine pre-and post executive coaching performance. This study provides evidence for the impact of executive coaching on individual outcomes, improving executive coaching practice, and assisting in identifying the individual outcomes of effective executive coaching. This is an important contribution as much of the previous executive coaching research could not delineate the effects of executive coaching from other developmental interventions, such as training programs, 360 degree feedback, environmental factors, or prior exposure to coaching (e.g., Kampa-Kokesch, 2001; Luthans & Peterson, 2003; Olivero, et al., 1997; Saling, 2005; Smither, et al., 2003; Thach, 2002). In contrast, the design of this research, though not without limitations, facilitates a better understanding of executive coaching outcomes distinct from other developmental interventions.

There are only a handful of extant studies that empirically examine the outcomes of executive coaching interventions. Within this set, the bias has been to use short term affective reactions as outcome measures, and to ignore coachee learning, behavioural changes and organisational outcomes as effectiveness indicators (Feldman & Lankau, 2005; Kombarakaran, Yang, et al., 2008). In order to redress this gap, this study improves our understanding of executive coaching outcomes by using established, reliable and valid measures to examine pre-and post executive coaching performance.

Finally, it should also be noted that the intervention study presented in this dissertation was specifically designed to reflect certain "real-world" realities or, as described by Hall et al (1999, p. 39), to identify what really happens in executive coaching "behind closed doors". As such, this study was conducted with an adult business community sample, delivered by several executive coaching firms across an extended timeframe (9 months), and used executive coaching methods that allowed coaches the flexibility to tailor the executive coaching context to meet the coachee's needs and circumstances. These decisions regarding the nature of the study were taken to ensure that the research did not become overly sanitised. The findings of this study should provide a useful agenda for future theoretical and empirical research on executive coaching as an emerging form of management development, as well as providing clearer guidelines and benchmarks for practitioners and consumers of executive coaching. Without a strong theoretical foundation backed by empirical research, executive coaching runs the risk of becoming a passing fad like many other forms of consulting in business.

Future Research

Given the early stages of executive coaching research, there are many avenues for future research arising from this study.

The present study provided some support for the conclusion that executive coaching has a beneficial impact on executives' individual outcomes. Specifically, the results of this study suggest that executive coaching may be a mechanism by which executives improve their career satisfaction. Career satisfaction as an outcome of executive coaching should be examined beyond standard performance measures when evaluating executive coaching effectiveness. As empirical research on executive coaching outcomes is limited, much more rigorous research is needed to improve our understanding of whether executive coaching really does make a difference to long term improvement in coachee and organisation performance. These results suggest that executive coaching may be a mechanism by which executives could be helped in improving and maintaining a high level of career satisfaction. Career satisfaction is an outcome toward which future studies of executive coaching can turn when considering a broader class of outcomes beyond performance in evaluating executive coaching effectiveness.

This study provided longitudinal data through a pre-test-post-test design which assessed the effects of executive coaching over time (before coaching and immediately after coaching was completed). It is now recommended that future research assess the long-term progress made by executive coaching on individual and organisational performance to understand the sustainability of executive coaching benefits. Data should be collected at various intervals after executive coaching is completed (post-test measurement) and involve three longitudinal follow-ups for both experimental and control groups. In particular, future research should collect post-coaching data immediately after coaching is completed, six months after coaching is completed, and then one year after coaching is completed. This is an important design feature that enables tracking the impact of executive coaching at multiple points in time, and thus examining the long-term effects of executive coaching on individual and organisational outcomes. Furthermore, long-term indications of executive effectiveness will ensure that executive coaching dollars are well spent.

This study was limited by the collection of questionnaire-based data and the analysis of quantitative data. It would be useful to collect qualitative data to triangulate the research and investigate some of the questions raised by this study. As noted by Greene, Caracelli, and Graham (1989), multiple methods research designs strengthen the validity of research findings. Through qualitative research, richer information about executive coaching can be obtained from executives, their supervisors, their peers, and coaches, and provide further insight into how executive coaching is associated with psychological and behavioural effects. The less structured nature of the qualitative research would also provide the opportunity to identify additional factors which are important in the success of executive coaching. Qualitative data would broaden the theoretical base of executive coaching, and potentially contribute practical strategies to maximise its benefits.

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