DProf thesis

An exploration of coachees' felt experiences of coaching, where the coachee has been marked out for promotion

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‘An exploration of coachees’ felt experiences of coaching, where the coachee has been marked out for promotion’

A project submitted to Middlesex University in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Professional Studies

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Abstract

In my research project I explore coachees' felt experiences of coaching where the coachees have been marked out for promotion (Executive Talent).

The purpose of the research is to help improve the effectiveness of coaching and the aim is to give the Executive Talent coachee a voice and platform from which we may gain a greater insight into how Executive Talent coachees feel about their coaching experience. This is driven by my dilemmas around how and for whom we value it.

Executive coaching is a fast growing international industry. Corporate organisations spend significant amounts of training and people development budgets on coaching their senior executives on route to, or following, a promotion.

The unique contributions this research makes to the field of executive coaching for promotion are: the insights are gained from the Executive Talent coachees' stories from their own perspectives; the stories are about their felt experiences; and are about coaching for promotion, three perspectives currently lacking in the literature.

This qualitative research used the method of individual conversations with 12 Executive Talent coachees to collect the data which I analysed using thematic analysis.

Major findings were: Executive Talent coachees feel more engaged and focused on the coaching when they: feel valued; feel supported by their employing organisation throughout the coaching engagement; and use the coaching experience to reflect on what is important to them from a holistic point of view and not just in respect of a potential promotion. Other findings included: Executive Talent coachees preferred structure with coaching goals, clear expectations, and an arm's length relationship with a coach who has knowledge and experience in their industry.

This research proposes a checklist for the coach, coachee client and organisational client to prepare for and set expectations for coaching for promotion.

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Definitions

For ease of reference in reading this thesis I have provided my explanations for some of the terms I have used.

CAQDAS	Computer assisted qualitative data analysis software
Chemistry session	A preliminary meeting between a potential coach and coachee to see if the two can work together (Kovacs et al, 2019)
Coach	Coaches are those individuals who provide coaching to other individuals. Coaches may be external, professional, formally qualified or not, internal, consultants, HR executives. In this paper, unless otherwise stated, I use the term coach to refer to any of the above.
Coachee	I am using the term coachees to apply to those individuals who are or have been coached. The term client is used by some practitioners, academics and researchers. In the psychotherapy literature, to which I will refer later in this paper, those individuals who receive therapy from a counsellor are called clients.
Coaching community	Unless otherwise stated, I have used the term coaching community to include all those who are in any way involved in the business of coaching. This may include coaches; coachees; coach training bodies, coach accreditation bodies, sponsoring organisations; researchers in the field of executive coaching.
Coaching supervision	The European Mentoring and Coaching Council define coaching supervisions as: "… the interaction that occurs when a mentor or coach brings their coaching or mentoring work experiences to a supervisor in order to be supported and engage in reflective dialogue and collaborative learning for the development and benefit of the mentor or coach, their clients and their organisations". (https://www.emccglobal.org/quality/supervision) Bluckert describes a supervision session as: "a place for the coach to reflect on the work they are undertaking, with another more experienced coach. It has the dual purpose of supporting the continued learning and development of the coach, as well as giving a degree of protection to the person being coached" (Bluckert, 2004).
Conversation	Talk between two or more people in which thoughts, feelings, and ideas are expressed, questions are asked and answered, or news and information is exchanged (https://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/conversation)
Covid 19	The Coronavirus strain which was first identified in 2019 and became a pandemic shortly thereafter and the World Health Organisation ("WHO") named it Covid 19

DProf	Abbreviation of Doctor of Professional Studies
EMCC	European Mentoring and Coaching Council – a professional membership organisation for professionals working in the field of coaching and mentoring. Established to develop, promote and set expectations of best practice in mentoring, coaching and supervision globally. It provides professional accreditation (www.emccglobal.org/about_emcc)
Executive Talent	For the purposes of this paper, I have used the term Executive Talent to refer to individual executives who were identified by their employing organisations as "identified successors to the board/executive committee/partnership" or "most likely to be promoted into senior executive positions in the next 2 – 3 years".
Fast track	Fast track is a term commonly used by senior management in organisations to describe those individuals who have been identified as most likely to assume senior positions in the organisation. Often, the individuals will have been observed and assessed and been placed on a development programme to identify and address gaps in their experiences, knowledge and behaviours
Felt experiences	Although there are various definitions of "felt" experiences, I am using the term to refer to the emotions, intuitions, feelings and affect. (Downing, 2000)
FTSE	The Financial Times Stock Exchange (FTSE) now known as the FTSE Russell Group is a company that researches and publishes thousands of indices tracking securities and other investment vehicles. A FTSE company is one that is listed by the FTSE index as having the highest market capitalisations (financial-dicionarythefreedictionary.com/FTSE
GROW model of coaching	Developed originally by Sir John Whitmore in the 1980s and succinctly described in his book Coaching for Performance (1992). GROW is an acronym for the four step model of coaching or rather a coaching conversation, devised by Whitmore. G is for goal, R is for reality or where you are now, O is for options or what can you do and W is two pronged "will" representing what will you do now and the motivation or will to do something.
ICF	International Coach Federation – a global membership organisation for trained professional coaches. It provides support, guidance and accreditation for best practice for its members. (www.coaching federation.org)
Lockdown	The containment measures implemented by governments around the world to mitigate the spread of COVID 19 https://www.collinsdictionary.com/dictionary/english/covid-19

Meyler Campbell Mastered Programme	Meyler Campbell was founded in 1999 as a global centre of expertise for training leadership coaches. The Mastered programme (formerly called Business Coach programme) is a programme which enables proven leaders and talented professionals to master the skills of business coaching. (https://www.meylercampbell.com/what-we-do)
Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI)	The Myers Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) is a psychometric assessment devised and developed by Katharine Briggs and Isabel Myers and is based on Jungian personality type. It was developed to enable individuals to understand and appreciate their own individual differences in personality to enhance harmony and productivity amongst diverse group (Myers et al, 2009).
Narrative	A socially and contextually constructed communication structure marked by temporality and causality, plot and purpose that enables meaning and sense making for those involved (Drake, 2018b, p. 132)
Narrative Inquiry	An interpretive relational inquiry for studying experience as story (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000)
Nvivo	Nvivo is one of the most commonly used CAQDAS used by qualitative researchers. It is produced by QRS International and can be used for collating and organising text, videos, audios for analysis.
Organisation	Unless otherwise indicated, reference to organisation refers to the participant's employing organisation at the point at which they were coached for promotion.
Story	An episodic form of communication within oneself or with others that has both conscious and unconscious elements. It has certain culturally defined properties and serves descriptive and/or interactive purposes. Sometimes people form longer stories from a related set of experiences. (Drake, 2018b, p.132)
Storytelling	The telling and sharing of stories with others (Drake, 2018b, p37)
Working Alliance Inventory ("WAI")	Genesis was in psychotherapy and described the mutual agreement between therapist and patient in relation to goals and tasks that need to be achieved and the bond between the therapist and patient (Bordin, 1979).
Worldwide Association of Business Coaches ("WABC")	A self-regulating membership body that sets professional standards, a code of ethics and integrity, definitions and competencies relating to business coaching that the WABC, its representatives, members and providers are committed to upholding. www.wabccoaches.com

1 Introduction

Purpose

The purpose of my research, grounded in ethical issues about valuing coaching and respecting subjective voices as being truths in themselves, is:

> "*to help improve the effectiveness of coaching executives for promotion".*

Aim

The aim of my research project, is:

> *"to bring the coachee's voice into the discussion and practice of coaching executives for promotion"*

I do this by giving the Executive Talent (see definitions) coachee a voice and platform from which the coaching community may gain a greater insight into how they feel about their coaching experience.

Objectives

I set about achieving my aims through the following objectives:

1. Undertaking knowledge landscape and literature reviews to provide the context, background and environment within which coaching for promotion takes place and my research inquiry resides;
2. Using qualitative research conversations with my research participants, who are Executive Talent, to obtain rich, subjective accounts of their felt experiences of coaching for promotion;
3. Analysing the verbal and non-verbal data from the research conversations using thematic analysis.

1.1 Choice of topic and my focus

My topic grew out of a broad interest concerning the extent to which coaching can support individuals on their journeys to senior positions as executive committee or Board members.

My practice and research reside in the world of Executive Coaching within corporate organisations. I am an Executive Coach. I coach predominantly in the business or corporate sector and my clients are senior executives. The subject matter of my research project is one in which I am a part, along with other coaches, coachees and sponsoring organisations. My experience of coaching has been built over more than 10 years as a qualified and accredited business coach (see appendix 1) whose practice has spanned international jurisdictions and different cultures. It is underpinned by over 25 years of business experience, variously as a lawyer, HR director and executive coach.

I have been engaged by corporate organisations to coach individuals described as:

> *"… identified successors to the Board/Executive team…"* or *"… most likely to be promoted into senior positions in the next 2 – 3 years…"*

Throughout my paper I refer to this category of coachees as Executive Talent (see definitions).

My positionality within my research, therefore, is an intimate one. I am engaged in it as a practitioner and as a practitioner researcher. I am also a recipient of coaching and have experienced coaching as a coachee. Whilst not unusual, many executive coaches have never experienced coaching. It is important to me to experience what coaching is about and how my clients experience it so that I can relate better to them and their experiences and be more credible to them for having done so. I also engage

in regular coaching supervision (see definitions) sessions. All of this helps to inform me about the current state of coaching and in particular coaching for promotion.

Common themes throughout my career, which continue to inform my coaching practice and my research on coaching, are first, the ethical issue around the wellbeing of the people I coach, secondly, curiosity and respect for and belief in different perspectives as being truths in themselves, and thirdly, the value, financial or otherwise, derived from the coaching. These are the ethical drivers that inform the purpose of my research which is to improve the effectiveness of coaching for promotion for executive coaching clients.

The issue of what executive coaching is, is fraught with difficulties. There is no single accepted definition of executive coaching, yet the industry is a rapidly growing one. According to the International Coaching Federation (ICF, 2016) over $US2.35 billion is spent on executive coaching in the US alone while the figure in Western Europe is estimated to be around $US898 million with these figures predicted to rise. Over the ten years I have been an executive coach, the percentage of my coaching clients who have been identified for promotion and are being coached towards the goal of promotion, has increased annually. According to the ICF (2018) much of organisations' budget for people development is spent on senior executives who have been identified by their organisations as their future senior leaders. Coaching to prepare leaders for bigger roles was estimated to constitute around 60% of the coaching spend at executive level and further, higher costs are incurred for coaching engagements at the 'top of the house' or senior executive level (ICF, 2018).

The ICF (2016) estimated that: coaches charge an average of $US288 per hour for coaching services, though executive coaches' charges can be significantly higher; there are more than 53,000 professional coach practitioners worldwide, of which more than 20,000 are in Western Europe; 81% of professional coach practitioners reported to have had training which was accredited or approved by a professional coaching organisation.

Notwithstanding this overall spend, many organisations who use external coaches are unable to answer the question about what they learn from the thousands of coaching conversations (CIPD, 2013) and are not evaluating coachees' engagement (ICF, 2018).

The growth in executive coaching is further evidenced by the increase in the number of coaches, coaching organisations, coaching accreditation bodies, coach training bodies and organisations who engage coaches (ICF, 2018, ICF, 2020). In the messy situation in which I find myself, this gives me pause for thought. The ethical dilemmas I am grappling with are around why so much money is spent on coaching, and why I, as a coaching practitioner, accept payment for my coaching services, without sufficient knowledge about how coachees themselves feel about coaching and what value they derive it. In this respect, I relate to what de Haan et al (2013) imply that there is an ethical issue about coaches collecting fees for their services in the absence of knowledge about coachees' experiences.

Notwithstanding this growth and the dependence on it from various stakeholders, or perhaps because of it, I remain surprised and disappointed that there is no single authority, regulatory body or set of standards that define and regulate executive coaching and I find this problematic as it puts into question how we know it is beneficial for executive coachees. This is relevant to my research inquiry because so much money is spent on it, reliance put on it by organisations who are developing their senior cadres, and executive coachees who are considering changes to their work and life and the wrong support could be damaging to the individual, their career and arguably other aspects of their life, as well as the organisation. One would not consider engaging an unqualified, unregulated psychotherapist and it would be unethical practice to do so, yet an unqualified, unregulated executive coach is often engaged at senior levels.

This all drives my purpose of improving the effectiveness of coaching Executive Talent for promotion through giving coachees a voice in the discourse on coaching for promotion from which we can gain further insights.

1.2 Reflection, reflexivity and critical reflection

I could not do any justice to my research inquiry without critically reflecting on executive coaching for promotion and why it is an important topic for me.

Reflection on its own is just remembering but with no reference to assumptions or what it is that informs how one chooses to think of something (Bolton, 2010).

Brookfield (2009) describes assumptions as:

> " *… the understandings we hold about how the world works, or ought to work, that are embedded in language and represented in action*" (Pg295).

Our understandings or assumptions are developed as a result of our upbringing, our influences and influencers, our education, our gender and our social position in society. In order to develop our understanding of a phenomenon, we are encouraged to challenge our assumptions by reflecting critically on them.

Bolton (2010) uses the term '*through the mirror*' (p.13) writing to enable both reflection and reflexivity. I found this to be a useful metaphor for my approach to my own research and writing to give it context. Reflection is about thinking back on a particular situation, action or even thought and examining it (Bolton, 2010). Reflexivity, on the other hand is:

> "*finding strategies to question our own attitudes, thought processes, values, assumptions, prejudices and habitual actions, to strive to understand our complex role in relation to others*" (Bolton, 2010, p13).

To do this, I needed to put my own experiences into the mix and question why I acted or thought as I did. In my own research, this has prompted me to consider the social, economic and professional structures within which I and my research participants operate.

Fook (2007) describes critical reflection as:

> "*unearthing and unsettling assumptions (particularly about power) and thus to help identify a new and theoretical basis from which to improve and change a practice situation*" (p.446).

Fook (2007) also talks about our reflexivity being determined by the knowledge we use and how that influences us. According to Fook (2007):

i) knowledge is mediated by the lens through which we view the world. In other words, our interpretations are based on how we position ourselves in our social environments and decide how to select and use information;
ii) it is created through our subjectivity;
iii) the knowledge we obtain is influenced by the processes we use to create that knowledge, and
iv) it is "interactional" - our own backgrounds will influence how we gather and process information (p443).

In Fook's (2007) terms, my knowledge is mediated by my social constructivist lens, my experiences and how I interpret those experiences and relate them to my research and its findings.

My knowledge is also mediated by my reflection on what I see and do. Schon (1984) acknowledges professional knowledge as both:

> "*technical rationality*" or understanding the rules and
> "*reflection in action*"

Reflection in action for me is what I learn in the process of coaching. I learn from the response of my coachee as well as listening to my own feelings of what is working in the moment.

Schon (1987) also uses the term:

> *"reflection on action*"

to refer to the reflection that takes place after one has done something.

Both reflection 'in' and reflection 'on' action help me to make sense of what I do and see in my practice. I may reflect 'on' action when I am writing in my coaching journal about what I learnt from a particular coaching session or reflecting on feedback I get from my coachee clients.

In my research, therefore, a large part of my analysis of the research data and subsequent knowledge creation, will be about recognising and acknowledging my own background, views and the context of my research and bringing those into my analysis.

Fook (2007) challenges me to critically reflect on my own actions and practice to learn from them and decide whether to make changes. So, when I am being reflexive, I ask myself what assumptions I made in making the decisions I did. How did I influence the situation and how did my preconceptions influence what I did? What power did I have and how did my beliefs about power affect what I did or chose to see?

My world view around coaching going into my research was that what coachees had to say about coaching would offer valuable insights from which I and the coaching community (see definitions) could learn and make changes to our practices.

Part of what I am aiming to achieve in my research, therefore, is to unearth different perspectives to problems. Einstein is alleged to have said:

> "*the significant problems that we face cannot be solved by the same level of thinking that created them*" (Einstein, undated a)

In this research, my own understandings and assumptions around coaching for promotion inform my positionality within my research.

2 Context

In this chapter I outline the context of my research and address what underpins the 'what, why and how' I have engaged with this study. I start with me as a person, which includes my personal ethics, and me as a coach and a researcher. I explore why my research topic and specific area of inquiry were important to me, my values and my coaching practice. I then address the organisational context within which I work and in which my research inquiry resides.

2.1 Personal context

I have been engaged in coaching Executive Talent for promotion in corporate organisations for more than ten years. My own personal and professional background has had an impact on how I view and approach executive coaching and coaching for promotion.

The key values that I take into my work come from my personal and professional backgrounds. Those values are around truth, honesty, authenticity and a quest for lifelong learning and development within an environment where I respect independence of thought and meaning making and each learning experience contributes in some way to the next. They inform how I work, how I approach my coaching and how I aim to create a personal, trusting and confidential space to enable the coachee to reflect, challenge and make decisions that are meaningful to them.

My own general assumptions and understandings are based on my upbringing in a traditional, white British family of 6, a grammar school and university education and career paths as a nurse, lawyer, business executive and executive coach. My various careers and places of work have all informed how I view the business world and the lens through which I see it. That lens constantly changes as I mature, grow, experience more and question my previous perspectives on what reality is.

I was brought up from an early age to value the privilege of education and learning, and responsibility, trust and respect for myself and others. In my first year at

university, I studied English literature, philosophy and Australian politics and history. Studying philosophy helped me to shape my own ideas and arguments in a logical, questioning and critical way. As I went on to study law, I developed my style further, so that every piece of writing and thinking had a beginning, a middle and an end, even if that end was just the beginning of another thought or question. As I have developed as a person, I increasingly regard the 'end' as a new beginning as it opens new avenues of inquiry and curiosity.

A few pieces of writing influenced how I began to shape my thinking in general. The first was a book (Stannage,1981) which focussed on Australian Aboriginal prehistory and relations between white settlers and Aboriginal or Indigenous Australians from 1800 It was written from the perspective of the indigenous Australians and I wondered whether the unstated values and assumptions of the researcher that helped shape his writing, were that the indigenous Australians had not been treated with respect or considered relevant, in as much as they had not previously been given a voice. Stannage (1981) put the indigenous Australians at the front and centre of the history and, in this respect, his approach was outside the cultural norm of the time. Stannage's approach encouraged me to broaden my own perspective and critically reflect (Fook, 2007) on what I was seeing, so that I began to look more closely at events and issues from as many points of view as possible.

Similarly, the writings of Berger (1972) and Barthes (1972) influenced me to look beyond just my own perspective, values and cultural background and challenge the prevailing paradigms. Berger focused on interpreting art through different cultural eyes, whilst Barthes focused on the signs that we see and what they tell us about things when looked at through certain prisms.

A later influence on the lens through which I choose to look at the corporate world in which I coach, came from Gratton and her work on putting people at the heart of corporate purpose and strategy (Gratton, 2000). This had a particular impact on the way I engage with my coaching clients through the quality and context of the coaching conversations (see definitions). In Gratton's (2000) terms, quality

conversations are those which are logical and rational, searching for 'truths' and 'fallacies'. They are conversations in which people can learn new things about themselves, or others, and come to creative and novel solutions to problems. (Gratton and Ghoshal, 2002).

In my professional coaching practice context, coachees are seeking their own truths about themselves. I recognise this is not in a vacuum and is underpinned by their own personal contexts such as family and their working contexts including the culture of the organisation in which they work. I did not immediately assume that I could start having quality coaching conversations as described by Gratton (2000), and nor did I assume that what I considered to be quality conversations would be considered so by other coaches, or those I was coaching. The truths and fallacies that Gratton (2000) referred to were different for me as someone who believes in multiple realities and by extension fallacies. The Oxford dictionary defines fallacy as:

> "*a mistaken belief, especially one based on unsound argument"* (Fallacy, 2020)

My interpretation of this is that provided one can clearly argue a position to support a belief, then it cannot be wrong. How one supports that belief depends on the person's reality.

As an Executive Coach, these early influences have invited me to be more open to different ways of looking at things and appreciating different realities, by challenging some of my own views and inviting coachees to challenge their own thinking in a way not dissimilar to Blackey and Day 2012, who advocate directly challenging the coachee to challenge their assumptions and bring about change. This directive approach contrasts with Kline (1999) whose approach is non-directive. A challenging approach need not be directive, however, (Scoular, 2011) but needs to be non-judgmental and well judged in timing. This aligns with what I am seeing in practice.

An example of when I engaged in reflecting on action (Schon, 1983), and then made a change where I challenged my coachee client more, occurred when I was coaching

a French finance director. The first coaching session had gone well, by which I mean that at the end of the session my client thanked me and said: “that was good”. I came away with a sense of achievement at having addressed and seen him progress on the coaching goal he had identified. I felt that we had engaged well with one another. The second coaching session did not feel right and, returning home after the session, I reflected on why I was feeling anxious and dissatisfied. I could not pinpoint it; I had followed a good structure, as my client had told me he liked structure; I had listened; I had followed his thoughts. I reflected that if I was feeling this way, perhaps he was too, so I sent him a message and asked how the session had been for him. He immediately responded and said he felt it hadn’t gone well because it hadn’t been concluded with a summary and actions for him to work on before our next session. He said it felt “too fluffy” and he had felt “underchallenged”. We talked and agreed the structure for the next session, which would include a written summary and action list and he gave me permission to challenge him and hold him to account.

What I learnt from that experience is how important ‘reflection on action’ (Schon, 1983) is, but only if it is then acted upon. I also learnt that my client and I were collaborating.

My coaching training was underpinned by the widely used GROW (see definitions) model (Whitmore,1992) and this influenced how I initially approached coaching. The GROW acronym sets out four simple steps to guide the coaching conversation and focus on the coachee’s goal. G is for Goal, R is for Reality, or where the coachee is in relation to the goal at the beginning of the coaching, O is for Options, or what can the coachee do to achieve the stated goal, and W is for Will which has two meanings - what will the coachee do next and does the coachee have the will or motivation to take actions. One of my assumptions, based on my coaching training and my practical experience, is that starting with the coachee’s goal is an effective way of beginning the coaching engagement, as it helps to set the framework for what the coachee is working towards. This is a model which encourages the coachees to challenge themselves through examining the reality of their situation. This is not an approach universally shared; according to Boyatzis (2020), starting a coaching engagement with

a goal is usually a negative place to begin as coachees will often bring a negative starting point. Scoular (2011) suggests that a goal is not a negative starting point but provides a useful focus for whatever it is the coachee wants to address and is seeking to achieve. This can be a positive position from which to start. This resonated with my finance director client, particularly as it incorporated challenges, within a structure and in a non-judgmental way. What my research participants say about this, or any other approach to coaching, will add to the debate.

At the beginning of my research journey, my assumptions around executive coaching, for promotion included:

i. coaching is a powerful development intervention;
ii. there are different reactions to coaching;
iii. the responses of the coachee to the coaching changes over time;
iv. the coachee is central to the coaching engagement;
v. what the coachee has to say about coaching offers insights for the coach;
vi. different approaches to coaching work in different circumstances for different people;
vii. coachees on a trajectory for promotion focus on the goal of promotion in their coaching sessions;
viii. the coachees' employing organisations share the coachee's goal of promotion;
ix. there is a general acceptance by the coachee that their employing organisation supports them (the very fact of coaching being offered could be interpreted as evidence of that);
x. a specific structure or process within the coaching session is not important to the coachee or to the outcome of the coaching.

I expected my research to challenge some of those assumptions.

My own practice and understanding of coaching has been developed through my own professional knowledge and experience of what works for me and my clients and

respect for my client' self efficacy. I have learnt from talking to others and engaging in the social and organisational structures within which I work. I have developed through the feedback provided to me by my coaching client. I have also learnt through understanding the organisational context in which coaching Executive Talent for promotion takes place.

2.2 Organisational context

Because my coaching clients are senior executives in corporate organisations, which for the purpose of my study includes professional service firms, I aim to be aware of the social and economic cultures and structures within the organisations in which I coach and how they affect the Executive Talent coachees' engagement and experience of coaching.

In this section, I identify some aspects of the organisational context of coaching Executive Talent for promotion which highlight concerns for me in the way in which the coachee's voice is largely absent from how we evaluate coaching for promotion.

Ethical issues that I have been grappling with have included: why do organisations spend significant amounts of money on coaching executives who have been marked out for promotion? Is the organisation's assessment of whether it is worth the investment the same assessment as the coachee's? Would it make a difference if the answer to that question was considered? Would it be ethical for coaches to accept payment for their coaching services, if there were no compelling evidence that it actually helps the coachee, or, if it were found to help the coachee but not the organisation, or if the goals of the organisation and coachee respectively were conflicting? Answers to these questions are relevant to our understanding and improvement of coaching services and the development of best practice in executive coaching for the benefit of the whole coaching community.

Whenever I go into a coaching situation, therefore, I am aware that there are things that affect me and the coachee and the lenses through which we operate. The

coaching does not exist in isolation from the coachee's situation and situatedness in their organisations, their family, their social contexts, their backgrounds and experiences. Nor does mine. I found it helpful to look at this and consider it in a positive, enriching way, by recalling the 7S framework developed in the 1970s by consultants from Mckinsey (Peters and Waterman, 1983). The Ss were:- strategy, style, skills, systems, structure, staff and shared values. Each of the Ss were independent, but interrelated, and only by all of them working together would the 'whole' organisation work.

One of the corporate organisational imperatives is to develop internal talent and to do so in a cost effective and measurable way. Coaching competes with other leadership development tools (Rekalde et al, 2017) such as a Masters in Business Administration ('MBA); short executive programmes usually through a university; and, increasingly, development plans focussed specifically on the individual's personal development requirement (Moldoveanu and Narayandas, 2019), which may have been identified through an assessment or test as part of the organisation's succession planning. Rekalde et al (2017) found that coachees regarded coaching as more successful than other development interventions in helping them to change their management behaviours, but HR managers were less confident, which the authors suggested might be more concerned with the cost of the coaching intervention compared to another more formal intervention such as a formal course. This brings to mind the concept of competing commitments (Kegan and Lahey, 2001) between the organisation's imperative to contain costs and demonstrate value of an intervention from a financial point of view against another less quantifiable measures such as behavioural changes or employee engagement. In most cases of Executive Talent coaching that I have been involved in, it is the employing organisation which pays for the coaching and therefore holds the power in terms of whether it goes ahead. A comprehensive comparison of executive coaching and other development interventions in preparing Executive Talent for promotion is beyond the scope of this study but is a potential area for future research.

In my coaching career, the social structure in which I have been engaged has predominantly been in international corporate organisations where there is a focus on success being measured from a financial point of view (Fillery-Travis and Cox, 2014). This is often described in terms of returning value to shareholders or an improvement to the bottom line. This may be wrapped up in language such as the 'full potential' of the executive, but it is about how that full potential will contribute to the organisation's bottom line and positively impact the share price, thus providing the shareholders with a measure against which to assess the company. Promotion is often based on the extent to which the Executive is seen as someone who has the potential to satisfy these criteria. This is the context of much of my experience of coaching Executive Talent. Coaching senior executives for promotion is seen, by many organisations, as evidence that they are investing in their Executive Talent to strengthen the management for the benefit of the organisation and enhance shareholder value.

One of the dilemmas for organisations, however, is how to demonstrate that the output from coaching positively impacts the share price or the success of the business and how that is judged and by whom. One of the main reasons for this is precisely because the output and outcomes are difficult to assess quantifiably (Athanasopoulou and Dopson, 2018). This makes it difficult to demonstrate a direct link between coaching and return on investment and improvement to the business's bottom line and reputation.

I have coached in organisations where the HR or Learning and Development (L&D) function, which typically manage the coaching contracts, are given annual development budgets to spend as they choose. Usually, they are required to demonstrate the contribution of the intervention. It is true that some businesses will measure the value in terms of engagement (Grant, 2012), behavioural changes (Perkins, 2009), wellbeing and resilience (Keil, 2020) for example, but more commonly it is measured from a financial point of view. This creates its own issue around how and on what basis coaching should be measured for its value and this can create competing commitments (Kegan and Lahey, 2001).

One reason the Executive Talent coachees' felt experiences of coaching for promotion is important to me is because in practice I have observed that most of the feedback on coaching executives comes from coaches and employing organisations and very little from the coachees themselves (Athanasopoulou and Dopson, 2018). This strikes me as problematic as one of my assumptions is that the coachee is central to the coaching engagement and their perceptions and felt experiences (see definitions) can inform us about what works from their perspective. This can provide valuable insights to the coaching community into what Executive Talent value in using coaching as a tool to support them in their preparation for promotion. This speaks to the social structure, power dynamics and context within the organisation.

A further aspect of the social structure and context in which I practice relates to how Executive Talent are introduced to coaching for promotion and how coaches are chosen. Some of my clients have been identified as Executive Talent following a succession planning exercise and coaching is proposed as one part of the development intervention to help them reach promotion. Others are offered coaching by their CEO as a mark of the high regard in which they are held. Others are proactive and propose coaching themselves. Most regard the opportunity to be coached as positive.

It is usually the HR or L&D function in the corporate organisation which chooses a selection of coaches to put forward to their Executive Talent colleague who has been selected for coaching. A common approach is for the organisation to engage a coaching organisation which has several coaches at its disposal. There is a 'no-one got sacked by using IBM' attitude to the selection of coaches in many of the larger organisations who will often choose larger coaching organisations from which a few coaches will be selected. This is making two assumptions: first that the organisation has a better idea of what coach would be appropriate for the coachee; and secondly, that a coach belonging to a larger more established coaching practice will necessarily be a better coach than one who is independent. Corporate organisations typically select coaches based on the perceived professionalism of the coach. One argument

in support of the HR or L&D function selecting a pool of coaches is that part of their role is to design and manage coaching within their organisations (CIPD, 2021). This may include assessing the qualification of the coaches against specific competency criteria, determining when it is appropriate to engage a coach rather than another development intervention, and evaluating the appropriateness of a coaching model (CIPD, 2021). The contrary argument is that the choices are based on tangibles such as qualifications, accreditations and background and not on the rapport between the coach and coachee.

The coachee then makes a choice from the shortlist provided by the organisation. This is often done in a chemistry (see definitions) session (Kovacs et al, 2019). It is sometimes the case that the selection of coaches is from the same coaching organisation often adopting the same coaching model or approach. This can be problematic as it limits the real choice for the coachee. Chemistry sessions are themselves potentially troublesome (Whycherely and Cox, 2008) because the coachee is required to make an assessment in a short period of time, e.g. half an hour or even 15 minutes which can be detrimental to the development of trust between the coach and coachee (Bluckert, 2005a). I once experienced a chemistry session where ten coaches sat at individual desks around a large conference room, and ten potential coachees from the client organisation went from one coach to another, at the sound of a bell, in ten minute rotations. There was no privacy, nor time to even start to develop a relationship and it felt unrealistic. It could not have been said to be an informed choice for the coachee.

With regards the criteria used by organisations and coachees in choosing the coach, in my experience, the coach's qualifications and accreditation appear to be more important to the organisation than the coach's experience, style and testimonials. This is not always the case. For example, I have had experiences with FTSE companies (see definitions) where my background as a lawyer and HR Director have seemingly been more relevant to their decision to choose me for inclusion in their panel of coaches than my coaching experience, qualifications, and testimonials. Likewise, some coachees have also told me that they chose me, in the absence of a chemistry

session or other meeting, because my business and legal background gave them confidence in me. Their confidence, they said, was that I had worked at a senior level in international organisations and therefore, they assumed, I understood their business context. This correlates with some of the literature which points to similarity (Bozer and Joo, 2016) and credibility as a result of having a similar career or industry background (Carter et al, 2016) as important factors in developing rapport between the coach and coachee. My experience can be differentiated, however, as the decisions to choose me, in the example I cited above, was based on what they read on paper and not what they experienced as a result of meeting me and there was no opportunity to start to develop rapport before the coaching started.

Increasingly, I have been concerned that a lot of coaching has become mechanistic and focussed on the 'doing' of coaching (Fillery-Travis and Cox, 2014) and therefore the coach, and not the experience of the coachee and what they claim to derive from it (Blackman et al, 2016). What the coachee has to say about their felt experiences of coaching is a rich source of data and knowledge for the whole coaching community to consider, not least those who make decisions and value judgments about the value of coaching for Executive Talent and why decisions to invest in it are made.

Another aspect of coaching in corporate organisations that I have struggled with is the concept, held dear to some organisations and coaches, that there is one model of coaching which will suit everyone being coached in their organisation. I have, in the past, been asked to coach using the employing organisation's own coaching model. My values, ethics and assumptions about different approaches suiting different coachees, have made me turn down those opportunities where I did not feel I could coach in my authentic style. I did not make those choices out of a sense that my approach was the right one, but because I have always tried to adapt my style and used coaching tools and techniques that I believed would suit the coachee's learning style and be most effective in helping them reach their goals. This approach is supported by De Haan et al (2013) who consider that the use of a variety of coaching techniques is more valuable to the coaching conversation than adherence to just one,. Kauffman and Hodgetts (2016) provide a caveat that being adaptable,

competent and knowing when to use the appropriate technique at any given time is important.

Another aspect of context that is important to me in engaging with my inquiry, is the question around whether coaching can be regarded as a profession and whether this has a bearing on the value placed on coaches' views on the importance of coaching and its effectiveness for coachees and how that impacts coachees' perceptions of coaching.

According to Lester (2015), the concept of a profession has changed over time but has its genesis from the Latin "to profess" as in making a commitment or vow or, in Lester's words joining a profession is a:

> "*commitment to acquiring its knowledge and skills and to adopting its ethics*" (p1).

From a traditional viewpoint, coaching is not seen as a profession in the way that socially constructed ideas about what constitutes a profession may deem that law, accounting or medicine, for example, are included. Reasons for this exclusion could relate to the absence of a nationally accepted standard and professional regulatory body, which is an outward indicator that an individual has reached an acceptable standard of safe and competent practice and abides by a shared code of ethics.

According to Belfall (1999) the following are essential criteria for being a profession:

> "*an assessment for entry; a body of knowledge shared by others in the occupation; a shared code of ethics and a professional association*" (p.2)

However, in Lester's (2015) view, Belfall's (1999) criteria excludes other occupations that are seen by some as professions such as the priesthood and teaching. It would also exclude more recent occupations that have come into existence because of our changing and developing environment, cultural and societal needs, e.g. occupations

in media or IT where much of the knowledge is gained through practice and experience. Lester (2015) argues that the concept of a profession and professionalism continues to change as our world and our needs in it change. It is no longer enough to have a qualification without the skills and knowledge pertaining to that qualification being up-dated in a formal fashion.

Further change to the perception of a profession has come through changes in the way in which we learn, which is becoming increasingly learner led (Spencer, 1999) with more reflective, practical, indirect and self-directed ways of learning which keep pace with the changing needs of the particular occupation. Part of that learning is gained from understanding how the service users, in the case of my research, coachees, experience it.

Coaching, therefore, may not be considered a profession under the old traditional definitions but it satisfies the key attributes of on-going learning, reflection in and on action and being adaptive to changing needs and environment. What resonates strongly with me, when considering if we can regard coaching as a profession, is how it is viewed by coaching and organisational clients and how that impacts their experience, how it regulates, assesses itself and holds itself accountable to accepted standards of respect, honesty, confidentiality and fairness through an ethical code. Part of that being held to account would include, for me, considering the service users which includes the coachees themselves. This brings me full circle back to why I consider the coachees' voice to be an important component of our evaluation into and valuation of coaching and on-going quest for best practice.

In summary, coaching for promotion is gaining in popularity and corporate organisations spend money on coaching executives. But coaching competes with other development interventions for a slice of the development budget and therefore coaches and coaching organisations must demonstrate the value to the employing organisation. Value is predominantly measured in financial terms and therefore coaches are required to demonstrate value in ways that the organisations can see translated into a financial value. Demonstrating professionalism through the

development and accrual of competencies, qualifications, accreditations and more sophisticated coaching models may go some way for some organisations, to suggesting value. Yet, the executive coachee who is being prepared for promotion to one of the most senior roles in the organisation, often a role which will contribute to the strategy and direction of the company, is relatively invisible when it comes to assessing, measuring and framing coaching. Why would an organisation which has identified an executive as capable of promotion to a more senior role in the next two to three years not want to hear from that executive about their coaching experiences? Why would a coach who makes a living from coaching some of the most senior and well respected individuals in the organisation not want to learn from the coachee?

2.3 Personal ethics

My ethical dilemma around what we know, and don't know, about executive coaching as a development intervention for Executive Talent further drives my purpose of my practitioner research inquiry. A constant question in my head has been: can coaching be trusted as an effective development intervention for those seeking promotion? The answer is important to me as a professional practitioner and researcher because I struggle with the ethics around being paid for services that are provided without all the relevant factors being taken into account. For me, one of those factors is how the coachees feel about the coaching experience. More insight into these questions is also important as I want there to be more clarity about what the benefits are and for whom and whose opinions have been sought and taken into account. What is known and what is explored depends on the perspectives and agendas from which the questions are being asked and answered. Practice and professional and academic literature all provide different perspectives.

Value is an important ethical aspect of my project. I am asking my participants to recount their felt experiences of coaching for promotion and implicit in their stories will be the value or otherwise of coaching for them.

In this chapter I have made some observations on what I am experiencing and observing in the world of executive coaching for promotion in corporate organisations. In the following chapter on knowledge landscape and literature review, I critically explore and engage with the literature and domains in which executive coaching for promotion exists and is experienced, to situate and contextualise my research inquiry within the current discourses. My exploration is not linear and at different stages of my research journey I observed and understood different things; with each observation and critical engagement with the knowledge I was developing, the picture of executive coaching for promotion expanded and each learning added to what had come before. This amalgamated picture allowed me to critically examine my own assumptions leading to some new realities for me.

3 Knowledge Landscape and Literature Review

"while knowledge defines all we currently know and understand, imagination points to all we might yet discover and create" (Einstein, undated b)

3.1 Introduction

This quote speaks to me about the continuity and imaginative and individualistic nature of knowledge; everything we do, experience and consider, adds to what we know or can know. Imagination is how the felt experiences of the Executive Talent participants contribute to our knowledge of coaching for promotion and how new knowledge is created in the same way that, in Jarvis's language, we build up knowledge by learning, doing, thinking and reflecting (Jarvis, 1999).

My definition of knowledge landscape is:

> *What is known in various domains that is relevant to executive coaching for promotion.*

It includes the professional and academic literature, the voice of the professional accreditation bodies and what is happening in practice. In the previous chapter on context, I discussed the practice and organisational context in which I work as an executive coach. This chapter focuses more on the literature.

My research inquiry is:

> **An exploration of coachees' felt experiences of coaching, where the coachee has been marked out for promotion**

The purpose of my research is to improve the effectiveness of coaching. Being open to change, through what I learn from the research, is one way in which I aim to

improve the effectiveness of coaching through my own practice and by sharing with others to add to coaching practice in general.

Although the specific focus of my research is on the felt experiences of Executive Talent, I consider the literature and knowledge landscape in coaching in general – what it is, why we do it and how it is assessed- to frame and contextualise my specific research inquiry.

As I went into this study, there were ideas and knowledge that shaped what I understood about coaching Executive Talent for promotion and how I approached my own coaching practice. These came from what my coachees were saying, what I was seeing and experiencing in the coaching community and reading in the professional and academic literature.

3.1.1 How I approached the knowledge landscape and literature review

My approach was to focus initially on what the literature and professional practice says about executive coaching for promotion. I could not find any specific literature on executive coachees' experiences, felt or otherwise, on coaching for promotion, so my focus turned towards executive coaching in general and its effectiveness as this reflected the purpose of my study to improve the effectiveness of coaching for promotion

I accessed on-line books, articles and journals using various search engines including: google scholar (scholar.google.com); ResearchGate (ResearchGate.com); The British Library Catalogues and Collections (www.bl.uk); Social Science Research Network (SSRN.com); Institute of Coaching (instituteofcoaching.org); Coaching-at-work (coaching-at-work.com); www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/latestresearch; www.adec.com/knowledge-bank; www.emccglobal.org/journal/journal_library; www.brookes.ac.uk/ccams; Sage journals (www.sagepub.com).

Most of the literature I identified focused on outcomes of coaching. Most used questionnaires (Grant, 2014; Blackman and Moscardo, 2012) or interviews (Lawley and Linder-Pelz 2016). I did not identify any research papers in which the coach or coachee's voice was heard unencumbered by assumptions evident within the questions being asked.

The remainder of this chapter is structured using the following headings because they provide a context and background to coaching in corporate organisations:

1. What is Executive coaching?
2. Effectiveness of coaching
3. The coaching triad and psychological contracts

3.2 What is Executive Coaching

This frames the research inquiry as how we interpret executive coaching, informs what we do with it and how it is experienced. My assumption was that if coaching is not considered to be effective, then organisations would not invest in it, coachees would not engage in it and coaching as a business would not thrive. Coaching is thriving and growing in popularity (ICF, 2016)

Originally, widely regarded as a remedial development intervention (CIPD, 2013), executive coaching is now seen an executive tool to help executives to develop their careers and an indication that they are highly regarded and valued by their organisations (Jacobs, 2020).

Executive coaching is considered a problem to define because it is approached and used in different ways by different practitioners. For example, there are practitioners who will never direct a coaching client, whereas others regard guidance as a legitimate coaching intervention (Ives, J, 2008). Coaching does not exist in one single paradigm or domain; it is a term used in different disciplines from sports to

psychology to business with subtly different meanings. Each domain develops and borrows from other domains. For example, executive coaches have borrowed the coaching model 'The Inner Game', which had its genesis in the sports coaching world (Galwey, 1974), and the Working Alliance Inventory (see definitions) (Bordin, 1979) a widely used and tested tool used in psychotherapy for measuring the therapeutic alliance between the psychotherapist and client.

A strong theme in many of the definitions of coaching is that it is a helping intervention. The following are two definitions to which I relate:

> "unlocking a person's potential to maximise their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them" (Whitmore, 1992, p.10)
>
> and
>
> ".. the coach works with the client to achieve speedy, increased and sustainable effectiveness in their lives and careers through focused learning. The coach's sole aim is to work with the client to achieve all the client's potential – as defined by the client…" (Rogers, 2009, p.7)

Both definitions emphasise the benefit of the coachee's performance through learning and unlocking potential through a facilitative and collaborative approach. 'Unlocking' (Whitmore, 1992) suggests the answer is within the coachee and the coach helps them find it. This could be described as a process of guided discovery in the sense of Socratic learning (Clark and Egan, 2015).

With regard to executive coaching specifically, Kilburg (2009) describes it as:

> " … a helping relationship formed between a client who has managerial authority and responsibility in an organization and consultant who uses a wide variety of behavioural techniques and methods to assist the client to achieve a mutually identified set of goals to improve his or her professional performance and personal satisfaction and consequently to improve the

> effectiveness of the client's organization within a formally defined coaching agreement*"* *(*p.65)

There are several elements to this definition: it is described as a helping relationship, the client or coachee has management authority and responsibilities in their organisation; and it addresses the intended outcome of the coaching, namely, to help the coachee achieve their goals, personal satisfaction and improve the organisation's performance. This final point lends support to the school of thought that the organisation is a second client of the coach (Kauffman and Coutu, 2009). I address this later in this chapter.

De Haan et al, (2013) define executive coaching as:

> "…a form of leadership development that takes place through a series of contracted one to one conversations with a 'qualified' coach [and] results in a high occurrence of relevant, actionable, and timely outcomes for clients. Coaching is tailored to individuals so that they learn and develop through a reflective conversation within an exclusive relationship that is trusting, safe, and supportive*"* (p.41)

This definition refers to the outcome but suggests that how it is achieved is bespoke to the individual coachee's needs, suggesting empathy is a prerequisite. It also implies that a qualification is an essential characteristic of the coach. It is not clear whether this refers to a formal qualification or a qualification in the broader sense of competency gained through experience, or both. I therefore looked at definitions provided by some of the professional accreditation bodies to see if there was any reference to the coach's qualifications. The ICF (2019) refers to a 'professional' coach.

> "… a facilitated one-to-one mutually designed relationship between a professional coach and a key contributor who has a powerful position in the organisation. The focus of the coaching is usually upon organisational performance, but may have a personal component to it*"*

It is not explicit whether 'professional' implies that the coach must be qualified, but the ICF (2021) and EMCC (2020a) focus on the coach's competencies as a signifier of safe and professional practice signposting that the coach is qualified or has the experience and skills to coach. The reference to a 'mutually designed relationship' (ICF, 2019) is also indicative of a collaborative, empathetic approach to coaching with an emphasis on organisational performance whilst acknowledging personal performance. The needs and benefits of the organisation are explicit as they are in Joo (2005) who regards the purpose of executive coaching as "enhancing the coachee's behavioural change through self awareness and learning, and thus ultimately for the success of individual and organisation" (p.468).

The EMCC (2020a) defines coaching (and mentoring) as:

> "…a professionally guided process that inspires clients to maximise their personal and professional potential. It is a structured, purposeful and transformational process, helping clients to see and test alternative ways for improvement of competence, decision making and enhancement of quality of life"

This definition emphasises both the helping nature of the process through the professional guidance of the coach, as well as the coachee's own responsibility in making their own decisions. It suggests that the coachee's engagement in transformational learning (Mezirow, 1990) arises out of the coachee being guided to challenge their own assumptions and come to new knowledge or worldviews as a result of critical reflection (Kegan and Lahey, 2001).

In speaking to coaches and employing organisations, most implied some form of helping, learning and accountability as in the following examples:

> " … working with a business person to help them navigate their way through something that is troubling them or stopping them from moving on, especially when they are stuck…" (Scholes, 2020a)

> " .. an important part of the overall learning and development strategy …. we trust our high flyers to take responsibility for their own development and we simply give them the chance of taking time out and talking to someone who is neutral but will help them to push themselves as far as they can go …" (Scholes, 2020b)

A former client described executive coaching in helping and individual accountability terms:

> "I would define coaching as helping me to think through strategies and be accountable for what I do to get to where I need to get to…" (Scholes, 2020c)

To summarise, these various definitions and perspectives share the common elements of coaching being a helping, collaborative and facilitative learning intervention, with a suggestion that it benefits the organisation and the individual. What is absent is anything relating to the felt experiences and this leaves an unanswered question about what the coachee feels and experiences in the coaching. This informs my project as it suggests a limitation in the literature with respect to the coachee's felt experience.

3.3 Effectiveness of coaching

The effectiveness of coaching and how it is measured is a relevant area to explore for three main reasons:

I. Coaching in the modern sense is one of the fastest growing professions (Sinclair, 2020) and statistics (ICF, 2016) show the growth in the number of

coaches, coaching programmes and organisations engaging coaching services, which all suggests that coaching must be effective;

II. The effectiveness of coaching is a prominent topic in coaching literature (de Haan et al, 2013);

III. According to my own coachee clients, how they feel about their experiences of coaching affects what they get out of it including on an emotional level. This is directly relevant to my research inquiry into the felt experiences of Executive Talent.

There are three separate but related issues on the topic of effectiveness of coaching that are relevant to my study:

(i) what does effective mean in the context of executive coaching?;

(ii) what are the critical factors necessary for the coaching to be effective?; and

(iii) how is effectiveness measured or assessed?

3.3.1 what does effective mean in the context of coaching?

Effectiveness has been defined as: *"The degree to which something is successful in producing a desired result*" (Effectiveness, 2019)

In the context of my research topic, the '*something*' refers to coaching Executive Talent for promotion. The '*desired result'* will depend on whose interpretation of result we are considering, for example the coach, the coachee, the employing organisation, the professional accreditation bodies.

Coaching and psychotherapy

Before considering the literature on critical factors necessary for the coaching to be effective, it is relevant to say something about the relationship between psychotherapy and coaching.

Coaching research has borrowed heavily from psychotherapy, another profession said to be a 'helping profession' (de Haan et al, 2013). Literature on psychotherapy, looking at how and why counselling works, dates back to the 1930s (Wampold, 2001). De Haan et al (2013) make the assumption that if 'helping conversations' based on trusting relationship work in psychotherapy (Wampold, 2001), then they will also be helpful in coaching as coaching shares some similarities with psychotherapy (de Haan et al, 2013); they both help bring about change; help people understand how their emotional actions can interfere with change; both involve a relationship built on trust with a practitioner skilled in listening, questioning and raising awareness and approaches which help clients come to their own answers (Bluckert, 2005c). With regard to differences, Bluckert (2005c) and Hart et al (2001) agree that therapy helps the client to look at their past and develop insights and healing in non-work aspects of the client's life such as family. In contrast, they say, coaching, has a more forward looking focus on goals, the client's potential and linking awareness to action. They consider the most significant difference is that therapy clients typically present with troubled unresolved issues or some form of pathology. Hart et al (2001) goes further and says that where symptoms of pathology are present the coach should refer the client out of coaching.

According to Lambert (2013), one of the most compelling reasons for clients' perspectives on therapy to be heard is simply because they matter and they matter because they are part of the therapy and as such they interact with the therapist, offerings and contribute to the sessions. De Haan et al, (2013) agrees in respect of coaching suggesting that the coachee is a major beneficiary of the coaching, in the same way that the client is in psychotherapy. In professions such as medicine, where output is for the benefit of the patient, there is a requirement to obtain feedback from them as this will help to improve NHS services for all (NHS for England

Constitution, 2021). One could adopt this analogy for coaching. De Haan et al, however, offer a criticism of coachee self-reports as overestimating the outcomes (de Haan et al, 2013) and, they add, where coachees themselves are the only source of feedback the outcomes of the coaching engagements tend to be very positive. This latter comment surprised me as I find it difficult to accept that every experience in the coaching engagement will be a positive one for the coachee.

3.3.2 What are the critical factors necessary for the coaching to be effective?

de Haan et al (2013) begin with the assumption that coaching is an effective helping intervention. They conclude that the following "*elements common to all coaching approaches*" are considered necessary for coaching to be most effective:

- The quality of the coach/coachee relationship
- The coach's personality
- The coachee's or client's personality
- Common coaching techniques
- Coachee self efficacy

Those common factors and their interrelationship are shown in figure 1 below:

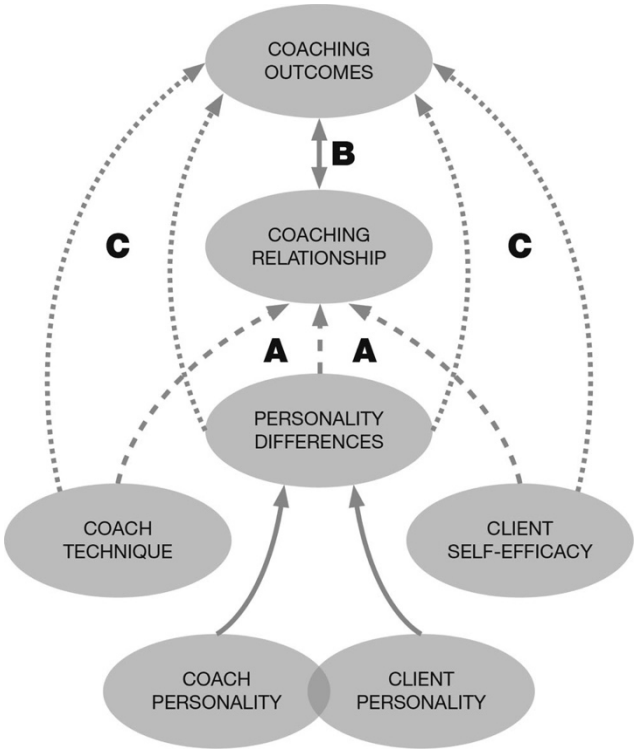

Figure 1 Graphical depiction of the various common factors studied as independent variables (de Haan, Duckworth, Birch and Jones, 2013)

De Haan et al's (2013) conclusion in relation to common elements could be because: i) the questions on which the participants, who were 156 coach/coachee pairs spanning broad and varied personal and professional backgrounds, were surveyed focussed on specific factors and participants were not given free reign to identify other factors which may have been important to them; iii) it was based on the assumption that, because psychotherapy research has identified these as necessary factors in evaluating the effectiveness of psychotherapy, they will be relevant to coaching.

de Haan returned to the theme of common factors (de Haan et al, 2020) and considered two separate studies in which 180 female global leaders and 66 internal coaches (study 1) and 105 business student coachees and 105 external coaches (study 2) respectively, were asked to rate the impact of various common factors, specified by the researchers, on the effectiveness of coaching. Impactful factors identified in all three studies (de Haan et al, 2013 and study 1 and study 2) included relationship, coachee self efficacy and coach's personality. New factors (de Haan et

al, 2020) included the coachee's perceived social support, goal achievement, resilience and stress reduction. The identification of these new factors could be because they were all specifically addressed in the hypotheses tested in study 1 and study 2 (de Haan et al, 2020) but not in de Haan et al, 2013. It could also relate to the career potential and high expectations of the coachees in studies 1 and 2 who were senior leaders and business students respectively. It is not clear what level of coachees were surveyed in de Haan et al (2013). Another differentiating factor could relate to how the business environment has changed since 2013, though this was not addressed in the literature.

The following paragraphs explore what the literature says about some of the common factors identified by de Haan et al (2013) and de Haan et al, 2020:

- The coaching relationship
- Coach and coachee's personality – addressed under the heading of *Pairing Coach and Coachee* and *Coach Characteristics, Attributes and Competencies.*
- Goals
- Coaching approaches and models
- Coachee's perceived social support – addressed under the separate heading of Coaching Triad and Psychological Contract

Relationship

Jowett et al (2010) define relationship as:

> *"A situation in which two people's feelings, thoughts and behaviours are mutually and causally interdependent" (*p.20).

De Haan and Gannon (2017) suggest there are various stages in a relationship and according to Jowett et al, (2010) this changes over time. There is support in the literature (Ianiro et al, 2015) that developing a positive relationship at the beginning of the coaching engagement is critical to its success, though, Cox (2010) contends that it should not be assumed that a good relationship at the beginning will

necessarily carry on throughout the coaching engagement without ongoing checking. Gan and Chong (2015) suggest that, equally, it should not be assumed that a poor relationship cannot develop into a good one. Ianiro et al, (2013) agree and argue for a heightened awareness of relationship behaviours and dynamics throughout the coaching to maintain a positive relationship and outcomes.

There are different views as to what features of the relationship are considered relevant to coaching effectiveness, for example, de Haan et al (2013) suggest that from the coachees' perspective, the quality of the relationship with the coach is the most important factor and mediates the impact of the coachee's self efficacy and coaching techniques on the outcome of the coaching. This supports Duckworth and de Haan (2009) who identify a correlation between the quality of the relationship and coaching outcome for the coachee. More recently, Birnie (2019) reached a contrary conclusion and reported that there was not a strong link between a good relationship and the impact of the coaching. Birnie's research can be differentiated from de Haan et al (2013) and Duckworth and de Haan (2009); first Birnie did not ask her participants to identify factors contributing to effectiveness in coaching but asked them how they experienced their role as coachee. Secondly, Birnie identified that what was shared with the coach by the coachee was limited by circumspect and caution because the relationship was a hierarchical one, suggesting that the relationships with the coach were not necessarily equal, which questions the quality of the relationships.

Trust and rapport are factors that feature in the literature on the impact of the coaching relationship and effectiveness of coaching. Boyce et al, (2010) suggest that rapport, associated with trust, helps to reduce the differences between people and build on the similarities, a finding supported by Gan and Chong (2015). Gan and Chong (2015) acknowledge that their findings of a hierarchical relationship within the coaching dynamic, which could have influenced the findings, might be specific to the Malaysian culture. Similarly, the coachees in the study of Boyce et al, (2010) were junior cadets and the coaches were senior military personnel and therefore in

a hierarchical relationship. By implication, the same study with, say, North American participants of equal standing might yield different findings.

Other authors (de Haan et al, 2011) consider that where the coach is seen as friendly and attentive, there is more likely to be a good relationship. In contrast, Tooth et al (2008) suggest that it is the coach's independence from the coachee's organisation which enables trust and a good relationship to be built between the coach and coachee. They go on to say that the coachees' organisation was not important to the coachees in the coaching intervention, other than paying for the coaching services. This suggests that the relationship with the organisation could be a perceived barrier in creating an initial rapport between the coach and coachee. This '*independence'* appears to be in stark contrast to what some commentators, (Fillery-Travis, 2015) say about the importance of a tripartite relationship between coach, coachee and organisation in a coaching engagement.

In contrast to Tooth et al (2008), Wilcox, (2010) suggests that an already established positive relationship between the coachee and organisation, may contribute to the coachee's view that the organisation's involvement is important in achieving a successful outcome. A potential limitation of Wilcox (2010) and Tooth et al, (2008) is the small participant sample. Additionally, the coachee participants in Tooth et al (2008) had only experienced one coaching session. Further limitations of Wilcox (2010) could be that the coachees were from the same company; the questions asked of the participants exposed a priori themes, e.g. questions around how the participants would describe their relationship with their coach which assumed relationship to be a factor in the effectiveness of coaching; and the researcher was known to the employing company. This could have been perceived as introducing potential bias resulting in a lack of openness in the participants.

Continuing with the theme of trust in the relationship, Gyllensten and Palmer (2007) consider trust emanating from the coach's professionalism, transparency, and confidentiality to be a vital part of the relationship. This acknowledges Wasylyshyn (2003), whose focus is on strong connection and the professionalism of

the coach as critical to coaching success. De Haan and Gannon (2017) also acknowledged trust, which emanates from an empathic understanding, associated with the person-centred approach of Carl Rogers (1957), together with transparency, formed the basis of the relationship and when that trust is no longer there, perhaps because of the imbalance of the power dynamics between the coach and coachee, the coaching relationship and ultimately the coaching engagement will fail.

Other researchers (Blackman and Moscardo, 2012) focused on coachees' perceptions of a variety of variables and found that similarity of the coach and coachee, in terms of belief, values and interests and the coach's consequent ability to empathise with the coachee, were perceived by coachees to be important to their relationship with their coach and contributed to the achievement of their goals. Blackman and Moscardo, (2012) identify the limitations of their study – small participant sample and limited terms in the survey, but it nevertheless highlights an area for further research.

Ianiro et al (2013) observed 33 coaching dyads during their first coaching conversation and analysed the affiliation and dominance of coach and coachee. They identified that, from the coachees' perspective, a relationship in which the coach was dominant in the first session**,** was more likely to lead to an effective coaching outcome which was identified as the achievement of the coaching goal. A potential limitation of this study is that only one coaching session was observed.

Grant (2014b) considered that a goal focussed relationship was a strong predictor of successful coaching, but a satisfactory coach and coachee relationship did not, in itself, predict a successful outcome. This suggests that a goal within a poor relationship may have reaped the same results in terms of goal achievement. This is another potential research topic.

Wilcox (2010) found that coachees' experience of coaching was adversely affected when coaching took place without a structure and a lack of follow up from their

organisation leading the author to suggest that building a relationship is easier where there is structure and the organisation is involved.

In summary, the literature supports relationship between the coach and coachee as being a significant contributing factor to the coachees' perception of the effectiveness of coaching, however, different authors suggest different features are important to the relationship.

Pairing coach and coachee

The literature indicates that relationship is an important factor in determining the effectiveness of coaching. How relationships are developed may be directly related to how the individuals are paired or matched and this is worth considering. Throughout this section I have used the terms matching and pairing synonymously.

Research, (Wycherley and Cox, 2008*)*, indicates that pairing is an essential part of developing a successful coaching relationship.

Whycherley and Cox (2008, p 40*)* describe a typical selection and matching process undertaken in organisations (figure 2).

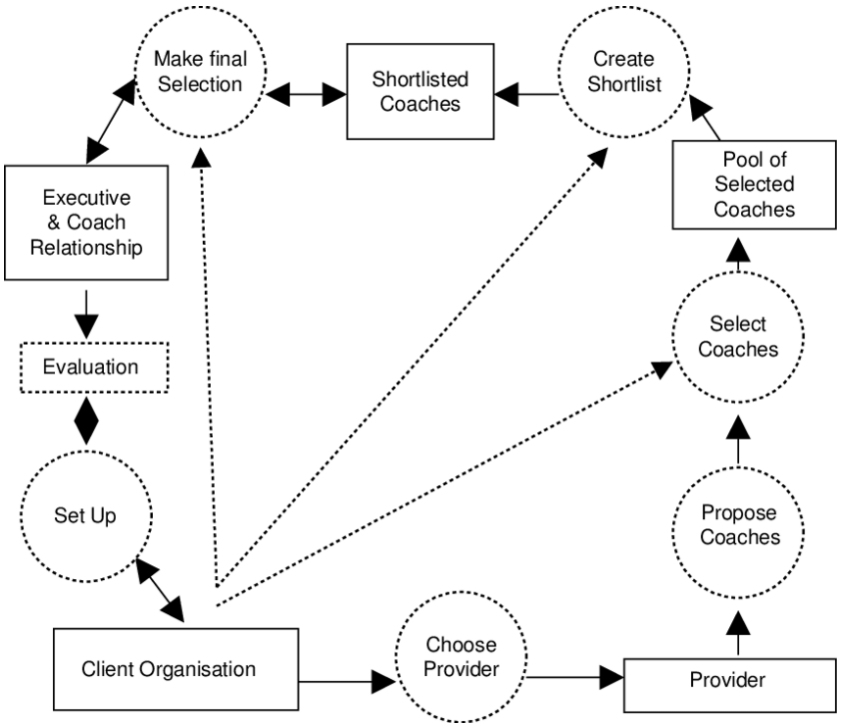

Figure 2 Selection and matching in executive coaching (Wycherley and Cox, 2008)

Typically, the selection by the employing organisation of a pool of coaches, or individual coaches, is based on criteria such as the coach's competencies, skills and qualifications (Wycherley and Cox, 2008). This corresponds with my own professional experience.

The authors (2008) say that coachees should have a role in choosing their own coach, a view shared by Jarvis (2004) who argues that the coachees should make the final selection of their own coach based on personal chemistry and what is appropriate for the coachee's perceived needs. Terblanche et al (2017) agree and say that being matched with someone with whom the coachee can relate is more likely to make the coaching effective.

In an implied criticism of the process many organisations go through to select a coach, Wycherley and Cox, (2008) warn against '*making ill informed matching decisions based on factors such as initial rapport*'. Bluckert (2005a) suggests that building

rapport over time goes to the basis of trust between the coach and coachee, suggesting that a short chemistry session, where the coach and coachee meet for say half an hour, may not give the coachee time to assess rapport or personal chemistry. de Haan et al (2013) on the other hand, suggest that first impressions of the coach, from initial meetings or trial sessions which helps the coachee to choose the coach, may be relevant to the success of the coaching. It should be noted, however, that the finding was not a direct one and the comment was made almost as an aside and in the context of setting aside any benefit of matching coach and client in terms of personality and focussing instead on the coach's qualifications, accreditation and supervision records.

Hodgetts (2002) also considers personal chemistry between the coach and coachee to be a relevant consideration in matching, but alongside gender, life experiences, socioeconomic factors and the following three coach attributes:

i. interpersonal skills demonstrating self-awareness, listening and empathy;

ii. trustworthiness and competence – as perceived by the client; and

iii. sufficient understanding of the business and organisational politics. (p208)

Hodgetts (2002) focusses more on the coach's personal characteristics and attributes than Whycherley and Cox (2008) and de Haan et al (2013) who encourage us to consider the coach's qualifications and accreditations in matching coach and coachee. Whereas, Boyce et al, (2010) consider that coach credibility and compatibility in terms of management and learning styles is relevant at the pairing stage as well as during the coaching engagement itself, and will produce better coaching outcomes, as evidenced by better leadership and increased satisfaction with the coaching. As previously mentioned, a potential limitation of this study may be that the coachees and coaches were all part of a hierarchical military service academy and credibility was related to the seniority of their military coach in the military context as well as more general credibility as a coach.

Bozer and Joo (2015) support the hypothesis that the coach's credibility is important. They identified formal training, experience, qualifications and insights gained, as well as the coach's general character as defining the coach's credibility, thereby acknowledging both Hodgetts (2002) personal attributes criteria and also the more tangible qualifications and training highlighted by Whycherley and Cox (2008).

Others look at the similarity of the coach and coachee, for example, gender matching which may facilitate the sharing of similar experiences (Cozza, 2006). This makes a general assumption that people of the same gender will have similar experiences and this suggests an obvious limitation in this point of view. Bozer and Joo (2015) also concluded that perceived similarity described as *"coach and I see things in the same way"* (p.45) had a positive effect on the coachee's self awareness, suggesting that an immediate perception of similarity can be the basis of a good rapport. Cox (2005) disagrees and says that it is usually not until some way into the relationship that similarities or coincidences are identified and therefore matching based on similarities is unnecessary and unhelpful.

Other authors looked at matching based on personality. The literature on personalities is contradictory. For example, Scoular and Linley (2006), found that where the coach and coachee had different personalities, as identified using MBTI (see definitions) profiles, the coaching outcomes were better. Bruas (2019) also suggested that pairing with a dissimilar personality might be more effective than matching similar personalities, though they did not specifically research dissimilar personalities in their study. Although the conclusions reached by Scoular and Linley (2005) and Bruas (2019) in respect of personalities were broadly aligned, different personality preference assessments were used in each study and Bruas' (2019) research was based on a two day workshop where the coach and coachee had time to get to know one another, which was not the case in Scoular and Linley (2006).

Duckworth and de Haan (2009) also used MBTI to determine personality types, but found that different combinations of personalities made no difference to the coachees' perceptions of coaching effectiveness. This finding was supported by de

Haan et al (2013) who acknowledged that the difference in results with Scoular and Linley (2006) could be partly attributed to the long term coaching relationships studied in de Haan et al (2013) compared to the short (30 minutes) relationship of the coach and coachee participants in Scoular and Linley (2006).

Critics of using personality as a criterion for matching (Wycherely and Cox, 2008) offer a caution about matching based on personality alone and say that personality types are only heuristics that allow us to make decision based on limited knowledge and therefore matching on this basis should be regarded cautiously or not at all.

What is implicit in the literature and practice, is that whatever criteria is used to make a match, it is underpinned by the question: is the coach trustworthy (Hodgetts, 2002). Some organisations and coachees judge the coach's trustworthiness based on their qualifications, accreditations and competencies which can be assessed objectively before the coaching begins. Others consider trustworthiness on the basis of experience (Whycherely and Cox, 2008). Jarvis (2004) recommends that a blend of skills, experience and personality and a final choice by the coachee based on chemistry, may be most helpful, but there is no consensus in the literature suggesting that any particular way of matching coach and coachee is guaranteed to produce an effective coaching relationship and outcomes.

Coach characteristics, competencies and attributes

The coach's characteristics, attributes and competencies were identified in the literature as relevant considerations in matching coach and coachee (Hodgetts, 2002). This led me to consider these in relation to the coaching itself.

The literature identifies the coach's characteristics, competencies and attributes to be relevant to how the coaching progresses (Carter et al, 2016). However, there are various definitions of these terms: the EMCC (EMCC, 2020a) defines competence as - '*A measurement of an individual's capability indicating sufficient knowledge and skills to complete specified tasks*'. The EMCC's glossary does not contain definitions of characteristics or attributes so I turned to the dictionary which defined them as

follows: Characteristic (2021): '*a typical or noticeable quality of someone or something',* Attribute (2021): '*a quality, or characteristic of a person, place or thing*'; Competency (2021): '*an important skill that is needed to do a job'*. Based on these definitions, I have treated characteristic and attribute as synonymous throughout this following section.

In the context of executive coaching, Boyatzis' (1982) defines competency as a characteristic of an individual that is causally related to effective performance. This definition combines aspects of the dictionary definitions of Characteristic (2021) or Attribute (2021) but in alignment with the EMCC's definition of competence it signifies that to be competent the individual must possess the relevant competencies.

Hall et al, (1999) provide a useful summary of differences in perception between how a coach and a coachee consider coach attributes and competencies (figure 3).

Coaches	Coachees
Honest, realistic, challenging feedback (positive and negative)	**Connecting personally, recognising where client is**
Good listening, sounding board	**Good listening, being a sounding board**
Good action idea, pointers	**Reflecting**
Clear objective	**Caring**
No personal agenda	**Learning, demonstrating trial and error attitude**
Accessibility, availability	**Checking back, following up**
Straight feedback	**Committing to client success and good organisational outcome**
Competence, sophistication	**Demonstrating integrity, honesty**
Setting a good model of effectiveness	**Openness, initiative of client coaching**
Coach has seen other career paths	**Having good coach/client fit**
	Knowing the "unwritten rules"
	"Pushing" the client when necessary

Figure 3 What Works Best in Coaching, Passmore and Theeboom (2016) adapted from Hall, Otazo and Hollenbeck (1999)

The authors (1999) identify that both coaches and coachees consider it useful that the coach is a good listener and sounding board. The coaches focus on their competences, model of effectiveness and having clear objectives for the coaching. The coachees have a stronger focus on the empathic character traits of the coach, such as reflecting, caring, checking back and following up, honesty and integrity. These are reflected in the competency models of the EMCC (2020a) and the ICF (2021) and speak to the personal element of the coaching relationship.

In a more recent study (Carter et al, 2016), lent some credibility by the fact that data was collected from over 15,000 respondents from around the world, the following coach characteristics were considered to be important: empathy, listening and good communication skills. Coaches also cited objectivity and being personable as essential characteristics, whilst coachees identified knowledge of the coachee's industry as the third most important factor. This is not a view universally shared (Jarvis, 2004) though Jarvis concedes that whilst the coach's specific expert knowledge of the coachee's industry may not be beneficial to the coachee, because it may influence the coach to be more of a consultant and objectivity may, therefore, be compromised, some industry knowledge is useful.

Returning to professional coaching accreditation bodies there is a strong focus on the coaching competencies that a coach needs to provide safe, effective and ethical coaching. A recent report showed that 76% of coaches believed that organisations engaging coaching services expect their coach to be accredited (ICF, 2016). The EMCC (2020a) and ICF (2021) have their own coaching competency models, which coaches accredited by those organisations adhere to as both an ethical code and a minimum standard of practice. Whilst neither set of competencies include a specific competency requiring the coach to have specific knowledge of the coach's industry, the competencies are broad enough to suggest that the coach should equip themselves with knowledge and experience that is going to help their coachee learn e.g. competency 4 – Creating awareness (ICF, 2021) and this is broad enough to include knowledge of the coachee's industry.

Critics of using competencies as an indication of effectiveness, (Lawley and Linder-Pelz, 2016), say that measuring competencies, for example through observation of behaviours, is subjective and does not necessarily measure outcomes but instead measures adherence to a model. They found that the expert trainer rated the coach's competencies below the rating given by the coaches and the coachees, suggesting that different perspectives lead to different results. A limitation of this study was the small participant sample which included only one trainer, three coaches and six coachees. The authors suggest that competency assessment on its own may not be very valuable but may provide value if considered in conjunction with coachees' evaluation of their own experiences of coaching.

Duckworth and de Haan (2009) sought coachees' evaluation of coach's attributes in helping them to achieve their goals. A criticism is that it remains a subjective assessment because it is not possible to attribute the achievement of goals to just one intervention such as coaching.

De Haan and Gannon (2017) later looked at coaches' personalities as attributes and suggest that there is more likely to be a good relationship where the coach is friendly and attentive. Perhaps a caveat to the coach's friendliness is what Gyllensten and Palmer (2007) refer to as the need for professionalism in the coach's behaviours and attitude.

In summary, the literature suggests that competencies and coach attributes are relevant to how coaching is perceived both at the start and throughout the coaching engagement, though which competencies and attributes are relevant may differ between coaches and coachees and indeed amongst them. The literature suggests that assessments of behaviours demonstrating attributes or adherence to competencies as a measure of effectiveness of coaching, can be subjective and would be more valuable if used in conjunction with other assessments such as the coachees' assessment of their experiences of coaching.

Goals

Moving to another factor which is considered relevant to the effectiveness of coaching, I turn to coaching goals.

Some of the literature looked at the connection between setting goals and coaching outcomes or effectiveness. Scoular and Linley (2006) found that there were no differences in coaching outcomes between those who set goals and those who didn't. In contrast, Grant et al, (2009) found that those who set goals were more focussed on achieving an outcome. The difference between the two may be that Grant et al, (2009) looked specifically at coachees' assessments of their goal achievement, whereas, Scoular and Linley (2006) focused on different personality types and the achievement of goals. Possible reasons for differences in the findings could be attributed to the subtly different focus of the research in each case; Scoular and Linley (2006) focused on the effect of personality types on coaching effectiveness, whereas Grant et al, (2009) focused on the coachee's assessment of whether their coaching goals had been achieved. Grant (2017) –continued to show a correlation between setting goals and coaching outcomes but found that goals were now more aligned with organisational cultures and values in line with the changing needs for enhanced performance and wellbeing of coachees. Terblanche et al, (2017) stopped short of saying that goal setting leads directly to the achievement of coaching goals, but suggested that goals provide structure and may help keep the coachee accountable and focussed.

Grant (2014b) considered the effect aspects of the coach/coachee relationship had on the achievement of goals and found that a goal focussed relationship was more likely to result in an effective outcome, though the relationship on its own did not predict a successful outcome. This may suggest that the coachee's motivation is a more significant factor than the relationship per se. Others (Carter et al, 2016) suggest that setting properly defined goals help provide focus and say that unclear, underdeveloped or goals not agreed between the coach and coachee, were seen as

significant barriers faced by the coachees during their coaching. This also points to the coachee's motivation and accountability.

Critics of using goals to structure and measure the effectiveness of the coaching, for example Boyatzis (2020), say that goals may suggest a remedial approach to coaching as they focus on what is lacking and what needs to be done to rectify that gap. He argues that focusing on developing visions and resonant relationships between the coach and coachee is what results in a more effective coaching experience rather than setting goals. One could argue that developing visions and resonant relationships could be goals in themselves and setting a positive goal, such as achievement of promotion, is not starting from a remedial point but from a positive motivational point (Grant et al, 2009). It could be further argued that the causal relationship between coaching and a vision based goal, such as developing a higher level of consciousness (Kegan and Lahey, 2001) cannot be directly linked, but it can equally be argued that more tangible goals and their achievement cannot be directly linked solely to the coaching. Grant (2017) returned to the issue of goals and whilst not suggesting that setting of goals was unnecessary or unhelpful to the coachee, cautioned that in terms of focus, coaching is now seen more as a quality conversation rather than a goal focused manipulation.

In summary, the literature does not provide a consensus on whether goals in themselves contribute to the effectiveness of coaching, but suggests that goals may help the coachee to focus (Grant et al, 2009) and keep the coachee accountable (Terblanche et al, 2017) and a good relationship will help the coachee to focus on the goal (Grant, 2014), thus relating this back to the relationship.

Coaching approaches and models

Various terms are used around how the coaching will occur; in my coaching practice, organisational clients and sometimes coachees, ask what model, approach or process I adopt. They want to know how I will help the coachee to get from where they are to where they want to be.

The EMCC (EMCC 2020a) defines approach as a specific way of dealing with a situation, whilst a model is a set of concepts, possibly part of a theory, designed to explain and act on reality, and the overall process of coaching is a systematic series of actions directed to some end. It is the way a coaching conversation or session is structured. Downey (2003) talks about coaching being a relationship within which a conversation takes place, and the model is how that conversation is managed (Fillery-Travis and Lane, 2006).

De Haan et al, (2013) identified common coaching techniques or models as necessary elements for coaching to be effective. Kauffman and Hodgetts, (2016) agree, provided the coach is familiar with many different models and can adapt and use them to suit different clients and circumstances. Whilst many coaches consider specific coaching models to be important (de Haan et al, 2011), coachees find the coach's qualities of kindness, openness and flexibility more helpful, irrespective of the specific techniques or model used (de Haan et al, 2011).

There is a plethora of coaching models available and used (de Haan et al, 2013). Training courses sometimes use a specific model as the basis of the coaching training, as they help new coaches to remain focussed by providing structure to the coaching conversation (Robins, 2017). Kauffmann and Hodgetts (2016) consider psychological models are approaches to thinking and as such are important to the coach/coachee relationship and effectiveness of coaching, whereas Scoular and Linley (2006) consider that models that focus on goal setting and the consideration of coach and coachee personalities are beneficial.

Critics of coaching models (Robins, 2017) caution that strict adherence to a model may divert from the coaching relationship and the benefits and outcomes of coaching may be compromised but that stepping outside the model or flexing it, may aid innovation of thinking. This is aligned with Kline's 'Time to Think' coaching approach (Kline, 1999) and supports Bluckert (2005a) who asserts that if one accepts that relationship is the most important factor in achieving coaching

effectiveness (de Haan et al, 2013), then coach training programmes need to focus more on relationship building skills and less on specific coaching models. Terblanche (2017) considers that whatever model is used, it should include reflection (Schon, 1983) and active experimentation in between the coaching sessions.

Different models, or how the coaching conversation is managed, are derived from different approaches coming from various philosophical traditions, including the psychological tradition (Kauffman and Hodgetts, 2016).

A psychological approach which has lent itself to a few coaching models is the person centred approach (Joseph, 2006), built around the premise that the coachee is the best expert of themselves, as opposed to the medical model which regards the coach as the best expert of the coachee (Wampold, 2001). Developed for use in psychotherapy, the person centred approach has its foundations in humanist psychology (Rogers, 1957), and more latterly has been influenced by positive psychology (Joseph, 2018). Fundamental to the person centred approach is: the coachee's motivation to grow; the relationship and psychological contract between the coach and coachee; the coach's empathy and regard for the coachee and the belief that the coachee has inherent potential to grow and reach their own answers aided by the coach's respectful and non judgmental facilitation (Joseph, 2006).

Because my research inquiry is about Executive Talent coachees felt experiences of coaching for promotion, I have considered a few different models which adopt elements of the person centred approach.

GROW

GROW (Whitmore, 1992) is a simple, collaborative step by step framework which facilitates the coaching conversation and provides structure. It adopts the premise that the answer is within the coachee and the coach is the facilitator (Scoular, 2011).

The 'T model' (Downey, 2003) builds on the GROW model by adding 'T' for 'topic' an exploration of which is the first step in this model. This is a logical extension to the GROW model as it enables the coachee to talk about the context within which the goal resides putting the coachee central to the conversation.

Solution focused model

In contrast to the traditional medical approach (Wampold, 2001), the solution focused coaching model (Grant, 2016) is another collaborative approach adopting the person centred principle that the coachee is their own best expert. In contrast to GROW, its focus is on constructing solutions and not looking at the past and whys (Grant and Cavanagh, 2007). An implied criticism of it is that by focusing on the future and the organisational context, the coachee is not bringing their whole selves, that is their past, to the coaching (Whitworth,2007). Grant and O'Connor (2010) implicitly disagree with this criticism as they found that, when comparing a problem focused approach with a solution focused approach, both were effective in addressing and achieving goals but the solution focused approach was better at gaining an understanding of the problem or issue at the heart of the coaching, which may necessitate looking back to where the issue or problem arose.

PRACTICE

The PRACTICE model (Palmer, 2007) is another solutions based model developed from the therapeutic tradition. It blends aspects of the solution focussed model (Grant, 2016) and GROW (Whitmore, 1992); it is collaborative and facilitates and guides the conversation with the coachee. Like the solution focused model, PRACTICE is focussed on the future, but it also incorporates steps to enable reflection on how the problem or issue may have arisen and in that respect can be distinguished from the solution focused model.

At the heart of PRACTICE is the coachee's self-efficacy (Palmer, 2007). This supports both de Haan et al's (2013) finding that self efficacy is a key factor contributing to the effectiveness of coaching, and self determination implicit in the person centred approach (Joseph, 2006).

Co-active coaching

The 'co-active' coaching model (Whitworth, 2007) comes from a holistic approach in which the coachees are resourceful and bring their whole selves to coaching, thereby aligned with the person centred approach. In contrast to the models referred to above, this model centres around the skills a coach needs to facilitate the coachee's thinking.

FACTS

The FACTS model (Blakey and Day, 2012) moves away from models rooted in psychology and therapy, to one where the coachee is challenged by the coach in a more structured business focussed approach.

Summarising, there are numerous coaching models, some of which adopt the person centred approach which explicitly follows the coachee's agenda and line of inquiry and makes the coachee the central focus of the coaching and best expert of themselves. De Haan et al, (2011) suggest there is a dearth of literature looking at specific coaching models and their impact on coaching effectiveness, notwithstanding the growth in the number of coaching models in use.

3.4 The coaching triad and the psychological contract

I noted earlier in this section that de Haan et al (2020) identified a new factor contributing to the effectiveness of coaching, namely the coachee's perceived social support. I have addressed this new factor under the heading of the psychological contract, together with the coaching triad, because it addresses what the coachee expects from the coaching contract in terms of psychological or social support.

One of the aspects that differentiates executive coaching from other types of coaching is that the coachee's employing organisation is usually, though not always, the one paying for the coaching services (Scoular, 2011) and, as such, may be regarded as a second client (Coutu and Kauffman, 2009). Scoular (2011) argues that

understanding the organisational context, including the organisation's objectives, are an essential part of the coach's obligations in contracting the coaching engagement and continuing to coach an executive, whose goals are different from the organisation's, provides an ethical dilemma and would be wrong.

The EMCC's guidance on contracting (2020b) requires the coach, coachee and organisation to understand what is expected of them in the coaching. This implies the organisation is a client of the coach. Expectations are both tangible, e.g. agreeing the number and duration of coaching sessions; and intangible, e.g. expectations that the coachee will take responsibility for their learning and development and the organisation will support the coachee's development. This suggests a psychological contract between the parties to the coaching engagement. The EMCC's standard commercial coaching agreement (EMCC, 2020b) contains a clause requiring the coach to document objectives of the coaching assignment, as well as indicate how the benefits of the coaching will be measured. To complete this documentation in as ethical a fashion as possible would require the coach to engage with the organisation and the coachee to understand their respective needs and expectations, including their psychological needs.

Khoreva et al, (2017) describe a psychological contract as:

> "*reflecting the employee perceptions of the rules of the exchange relationship between the employer and the employee …* and *what the employees believe they owe to their employer and what they believe they are owed in return.*" (p.22).

The authors (2017) suggest that the psychological contract is around the unwritten and moral obligations and expectations each can expect of the other. The concept of a psychological contract applies equally well to coaching and is about what the coach and coachee hope for from one another on an emotional level: (Fillery-Travis, 2015).

> "*it is what happens outside the awareness of the coach and client – it is unspoken and is fuelled by hidden hopes" (p.7)*

Sherman and Freas (2004) suggest that the contracting stage of the coaching engagement is a good opportunity for the organisation to be engaged in goal setting, expectation setting and evaluation of the coaching. Transparency around goals and expectations is implicit in their suggestion and explicit in Fillery-Travis (2015) who suggests that a three way contract involving the coach, coachee and organisation is important to set expectations, obligations and responsibilities. As well as agreeing the logistics and goals, she suggests it is also about the psychological contract.

The professional bodies would appear to agree, for example, the EMCC's competencies (EMCC, 2020a) include one on contracting which requires the coach to understand what is required in the coaching and understand and agree parameters and logistics. There is within this competency an implicit expectation that the coach will understand what the coachee expects of the coaching.

The Literature (Khoreva et al, 2017) suggests that engagement in the psychological contract will impact how the employee feels about the development intervention, in this case coaching, and where the employee perceives the employer is vested in them they will be more engaged and motivated. Festing and Schafer (2014), go further and consider that an organisation's investment in coaching can represent a long term relationship with the employee which can also send strong signals to other talented employees in the organisation. Solomon and van Coller-Peter (2019) have shown that millennial coachees feel valued and regard a psychological contract as fulfilled where the organisation provides ongoing career support. This results in the coachee committing to their own obligations and performance as employees.

Another aspect of organisational support is '*sponsorship*' (Ibarra et al, 2010) where an individual has an internal sponsor or advocate who will actively support them by

increasing their visibility with influential players in the organisation, thus going beyond what is required of them and increasing their chances of promotion. In a few recent pieces of research, it is argued that sponsorship is critical to career advancement and works on the sponsor being well connected with access to networks from which the employee may benefit (Ayyala et al, 2019). In an Asian case study, Ang (2019) showed that sponsorship of women through the provision of time, resources and effort, enabled those being sponsored to prepare more effectively for leadership roles. El-Ramly and Dennis (2019) also considered that women who are matched well with internal sponsors, who will advocate for them, enhances their prospects of advancement in accountancy firms. Sponsorship is growing in significance and is seen increasingly as something that benefits both the person being sponsored and the sponsor as each works for the success of the other (Hewlett, 2019). This is an area worth researching further, particularly in respect of coaching and gender differences in perception.

To summarise, the literature and the coaching accreditation bodies consider that the organisation, coach and coachee are parties to the coaching contract and each has obligations, responsibilities and expectations towards and of one another. These include intangible obligations and expectations or what each believes they owe to one another and are owed in return. This is the psychological contract (Khoreva et al, 2017). This is an aspect of executive coaching that has had limited attention in the literature.

The literature suggests that the psychological contract and how each member of the coaching triad – coach, coachee and employer – behave can be seen to have an impact of the effectiveness of coaching, a topic to which I now turn my attention.

3.5 How is effectiveness measured?

There is no consensus in the literature on how coaching is, or should be, assessed or measured. Lawrence and Whyte (2014) suggest that employing organisations expect a business outcome rather than just behavioural change and suggest that financial

return on investment (ROI) can be a useful measurement but in conjunction with other, non financial evidence that coaching has been beneficial in supporting the business's strategy. Fillery-Travis and Cox (2014) agree that the paying organisations are asking what the ROI is on coaching. Grant, (2012), cautions against putting too much emphasis on financial measures, because they can blind us to other outcomes from the coaching as well as inadvertently increase stress. Grant suggests that a well-being and engagement framework provides a broader perspective on the outcomes from coaching. This supports Perkins (2009) who suggests observation of behaviour change leading to greater impact as leaders is a good measure of success. Some point to the achievement of the coachee's goals as a measure of success (Blackman and Moscardo, 2012).

Other less tangible assessments include how the parties to the coaching engagement respect and adhere to the psychological contract (Fillery-Travis, 2015) who says that buyers of coaching services are aware of the impact of coaching and have a greater understanding of what they can expect from coaches and using this as a measure of success. Professional associations, such as the EMCC (2020a) and ICF's (2020) use of competency frameworks and the importance they place on negotiating, reviewing and evaluating adherence to coaching contracts with the coachees and organisations or sponsors support Fillery-Travis (2015) and points to the coach's adherence to the competencies and contractual obligations as indicators of effectiveness.

Albizu et al (2019) looked at coachees' perceptions of effectiveness and considered predetermined factors – the readiness of the coachee; the relationship between the coach and coachee; the characteristics of the coaching process; and the organisational context, identified in de Haan et al (2013), to assess coaching outcomes. The researchers adapted and used the first three levels of Kirkpatrick's training evaluation model, namely reaction, learning and behaviour (Kirkpatrick and Kirkpatrick, 2016). Holton (1996), a critic of Kirkpatrick's evaluation model, argues that it does not account for other variables that might be relevant to the outcome. This is a criticism that could be levelled at most tools or measures of coaching success. Phillips (1996) expanded the Kirkpatrick model to include ROI as a measure by

comparing the cost of the intervention with the financial benefits. Subsequently (Phillips,2003) included intangible measures such as employee engagement.

In summary, the literature around how effectiveness is measured highlighted the following things: first effectiveness may be measured as an outcome, such as the achievement of a goal or return on investment; it may also be measured in terms of how it is provided, for example, adherence to the coaching contract, or compliance with specific competencies or by observation of behavioural changes. In other words, the literature does not indicate that what is being measured or how it is measured is the same thing for everyone. This means that only general observations and not specific conclusions can be made about measuring the effectiveness of coaching. This is an area worthy of further research.

3.6 Reflections on the knowledge landscape and literature review

What I derive from this knowledge landscape and literature review on how we determine effectiveness in coaching and how we measure it, is that it depends on who is asking the question, the question itself, and from whose perspective it is being considered.

The literature review has revealed two main things: first, assumptions are made that coaching is effective and certain common factors constitutes effectiveness with relationship being the key factor (de Haan et al, 2013) and much research is focussed on supporting those assumptions (Grant, 2014). Secondly, what I have been unable to find is the visceral aspect which comes from the coachee's ability to express their felt experiences.

de Haan et al (2010b) describe some limitations of coaching outcome research as:

> "*reducing the whole of coaching intervention to only a number … outcome research has to be silent on what happens within a coaching relationship: the many gestures, speech acts and attempts at sense-making that make up the whole of the intervention. At best it can tell us in a statistical manner how the*

full sum of all those conversations taken together may contribute to the effectiveness of coaching. At worst it may not even tell us that" (p110).

This suggests that we could be learning more about how the coachee feels about coaching for promotion, which is a valid measure of the effectiveness of coaching; if the coachee feels negatively or indifferently about the coaching experience then it begs the question about its value, financial or otherwise.

Fillery-Travis and Cox (2014) similarly observe that there is little research into the 'coaching interaction' itself. This is relevant because the interaction is what happens between the coach and coachee during a coaching session, such as emotions, process, empathy, beliefs and individual contexts and assumptions and how these affect outcomes. This gap in coaching literature is one that I have said, in an earlier chapter, is worthy of exploring from the coachees' point of view.

With regards who measures effectiveness, Wilson and Syme (2006), in the context of therapists, consider that a therapist's observations may reflect their own assumptions and this is a limitation of only having the therapist's observations. This caution could apply to only having coachees' opinions and perspectives on the effectiveness of coaching especially where the coachee is the sole source of feedback and the outcome tends to be very positive. (de Haan et al, 2013). Equally, it could apply to organisations and accrediting bodies who will all bring their own assumptions to bear (de Haan et al,2013).

The literature highlights surveys and Likert scales as modes of measuring effectiveness of coaching (Grant, 2014; de Haan et al, 2020). – Thalheimer (2016), argues that Likert scales are imprecise, especially when respondents can't differentiate between say 'agree' and 'strongly agree' and they do not address learning.

4 Research Approach and Design

The aim of my research is to bring the coachee's voice into the discourse on coaching for promotion.

In this section I address how I considered what research approach and design would be optimal for satisfying my aim. I am using the terms approach and methodology interchangeably.

I found Cresswell's definition of research design helpful in coming to a decision on my own design:

> "*the entire process of research from conceptualising a problem to writing research questions, and on to data collection, analysis, interpretation and report writing*" (Cresswell, 2013, p.5)

My research design incorporates identifying the research topic to determining what data I needed, where I would obtain it and which methodology and methods I would use.

A Doctor of Professional Studies (DProf) is undertaken by experienced professional practitioners who want to focus on developing the area in which they practice. Broadly, it includes some of the elements of practitioner research or action research (Coghlan and Brannick, 2010) in that in Elliott's words:

> *"it is the study of a social situation with a view to improving the quality of action in it*" (Elliott, 1991 p.69).

This is relevant to my approach to my DProf research as both a practitioner and researcher in coaching Executive Talent for promotion.

In considering what methods, study design and data would be most beneficial to achieving the aim of my research, I am reminded of what Maguire said about putting ourselves in our research and creating a piece of work that represents our authenticity. Engaging in research is about the ethics of personal and professional integrity and particularly so where the research is about people (Maguire, 2017). I obtained my data from people. Underpinning all my choices in research design, methodology and methods was personal and professional authenticity and ethics, reflecting my ontology and epistemology and considerations of not causing any harm (Alderson and Morrow, 2004).

4.1 My Epistemology and Ontology

My ontological and epistemological position, is a relativist one; I believe that truths are subjective. We interpret what we are experiencing based on our own previous experiences, backgrounds and contexts (Brookfield, 2009). Cresswell (2013) defines a social constructivist researcher as someone:

> "…*seeking understanding of the world in which they live and work. They develop subjective meanings of their experience … these meanings are varied and multiple, leading the researcher to look for the complexity of views …*". (p.24).

I claim to be a social constructivist researcher; I believe that one's assumptions, values, cultural background, social norms and experiences determine how one views reality. It is from this position that I approached my research.

The methodologies that resonated with me were approaches which required me to look at myself and reflect on my assumptions and look at my own profession of coaching and its significance to those we coach, through the eyes, ears and tongues of coachees. Jarvis (1999) refers to professionals continuing to learn through reflection by reaching back and questioning our assumptions and motivations. I did this throughout my research.

4.2 From research topic to research design

My first step was to identify a research topic and question that was: worthy of being researched; had a legitimate purpose of furthering the academic and practical discourse on my topic; and would be of practical value to the coaching community. I am defining the coaching community to include coaches; coachees; those engaging coaching services; learning and development and HR functions; coaching providers and trainers; coaching accreditation bodies and practitioner researchers interested in furthering the knowledge about coaching.

I was surprised at how difficult I found it to settle on a topic that would satisfy not only the above criteria but would sustain my interest and be capable of being researched within my research time frame and the resources available to me. I was reassured that the time I spent on considering my area of inquiry would be valuable, by a quote attributed to Einstein:

> *"If I had an hour to spend on a problem, I would spend 55 minutes thinking about the problem and five minutes thinking about solutions". (Einstein, undated c)*

This speaks to me as a reflector.

A good starting point, which helped me to develop my initial research proposal, was to adopt and adapt three of the four 'P' questions that Sutton raised as a result of his own research into the valuation of learning programmes in corporate environments. Sutton suggests the following four 'P' questions are good to ask before progress on research can be made: Purpose – what are we evaluating; Perspective – from whose point of view is the evaluation being made; Process – how effective is the process; and Payback (Sutton, 2006).

I found my research topic and design using an iterative process, and, encouraged by my supervisors, by constantly asking myself qualitatively different questions with

each iteration. The following questions influenced my thinking on developing my topic and methodology:

- What is the purpose of my proposed research – what interests me, personally and professionally, and why?
- Is there validity in my topic for the wider coaching community?
- Do I hope to create a new body of knowledge**,** or bring more clarity to a current body of knowledge? I am using the term knowledge to mean *'facts, information, and skills acquired through experience or education; the theoretical or practical understanding of a subject … awareness or familiarity gained by experience of a fact or situation'* (Knowledge, 2021)
- What area of practice do I hope to influence and in what way?
- Could there be a practical benefit from the outcome of my research?
- From what ontological and epistemological position will I be approaching my research?
- What sort of data do I need to gather in order to help with my research inquiry?
- Where and how will I get that data? What barriers might present themselves? How might I overcome those barriers?
- What time and resources will be available to me as I go through my doctoral journey and how will that impact how and where I obtain my data?
- How will my own practice help me in my research?
- What potential approaches to my research would engage me most and least? This was important as my research journey would be over a period of 3 years and I needed to mitigate against choosing a question and research approach which would not sustain my interest.

My topic grew out of a broader interest concerning the extent to which coaching can support individuals on their individual journeys to senior executive positions. I am conscious of the financial and time commitment employing organisations invest in coaching their executives, and the expectations they have of the coaching, which is

to help the coachee be ready for the promotion and benefit both the organisation and the coachee. It also developed out of my observation that little attention is paid to what the coachees say about their experience of coaching and this struck me as problematic if one accepts that the coachee is the recipient and the primary beneficiary of coaching. Secondary beneficiaries are the employing organisation. Other beneficiaries might include the shareholders, owners, coaches, coaching training organisations and accreditation bodies.

These observations informed my final choice of research topic. I have said that I am an executive coach who works predominantly in the corporate sector. As a coach, I have been engaged by many corporate organisations to coach Executive Talent. My research topic, reproduced below, therefore relates directly to my own coaching experience:

> *'An exploration of coachees' felt experiences of coaching, where the coachee has been marked out for promotion'.*

I narrowed down my subject of inquiry to senior executive coachees who had been marked out for promotion because this is the group of coachees with whom I most often work. It also provided a common denominator amongst the coachee participants and is a class of coachees who receive significant investment for coaching from their employers.

In my research, I am seeking knowledge from a collaborative interpretive exercise with my research participants. I believe there is an element in which our knowledge is not developed through reason alone but through our cultural and sociological lenses. When I embarked on my research I did not know where my inquiry would lead and I expected to be surprised by what came out of my participants' stories. Their knowledge would inform my own and help develop it. Together we are discovering our own truths and knowledge. In a sense it shares some of the attributes of guided discovery (Clark and Egan, 2015): I am collaborating with the participants to discover new things.

My choice to research the felt experiences of coachees, rather than just experiences, was because I wanted a subjective account of what the coaching felt like for them emotionally. I am talking about the "being in being coached"[1] I wanted a research methodology that would enable participants to tell their stories about their experiences of coaching and how they experienced it emotionally and intuitively, in their own way and, as far as possible, unencumbered by structure and researcher bias.

My research participants' accounts are their stories, bringing with them their own assumptions, personal, professional and political agendas, and their organisational experience which also helped them to process what was going on in the coaching engagement and how that had an impact on them as professional executives. Whilst I invited them to talk about their felt experiences, I did not set a rigid framework of questions. As I was part of the conversations, I had a role in co-creating and analysing the data as my own assumptions came into my interpretation and analysis of what they told me. Their felt experiences of coaching are deeply embedded in the real world of executive coaching. How they processed, whose values, assumptions, life experiences, organisational values, context and culture in which they work and the environment are part of who they are and view the world in which they operate. Had they experienced their coaching during the Covid 19 pandemic, for example, their actual and felt experience would likely have been different.

[1] This phrase was coined by Professor Kate Maguire during her feedback to me on my doctorate mid-term progress presentation on 9 April 2020.

4.3 Methodology/approach

It is useful to define what I mean by methodology, approach and methods in my research and for this I adopt the definition used by Maguire (2017):

> "*Methodology is that which encompasses the rationale for the choice of methods which includes the paradigm, which conceptual or theoretical basis being drawn upon and how the methods relate to the conceptual, theoretical, paradigmatic choice and how the methods relate to each other to achieve the evidence and reliability required to contribute to existing knowledge. Methodology is the coherent link between all aspects of the research …. the methods are the data gathering tools and the type of analysis employed"(p.6)*

The methodology for undertaking my research also emerged over time and had numerous iterations; initially, I did not fully appreciate the myriad of options available to me to decide the best way to proceed to produce the best research, nor which would be most appropriate to satisfy my research aims and objectives. It had to be ethical, credible, valuable, worthy of being called professional research and bring about insights and greater understanding of the practice and thinking about coaching Executive Talent for promotion.

My research aim is worth repeating at this stage:

> "*The aim of the research is to bring the coachee's voice into the discussion on coaching executives for promotion*".

The decision to undertake a qualitative piece of research was a straightforward and uncontentious one. The more difficult decision was which qualitative method or methods would do most justice to my research inquiry. I knew that I wanted to put the coachee at the forefront as coachees' own specific experiences, told in their own words, can give meaningful additional insight into what works in coaching. A qualitative approach enabled me to critically reflect on my own assumptions and

inquire into the research participants' assumptions through their reflections and stories and challenge my worldview of coaching.

In looking at qualitative methods I kept in mind two additional things: first, I wanted to do research with my participants rather than on them and in that way my participants would be co-creators and collaborators in the research. Etherington (2004) uses the term co-constructed as in co-construction of conversations between people. Corrie and Lane (2010) refer to co-creation of knowledge as a result of the research. In this thesis I will use the term co-creation with regards my own research as I am co-creating knowledge by engaging in conversation with the participants and facilitating their reflections and our interpretations of those reflections to build on what we currently know (Jarvis, 1999).

I did not set out to create but just to interpret. I reflected on this position and concluded that I did in fact want to be a co-creator of the story (see definitions) through the conversations as not to do so would ignore my positionality in the research topic. My part in that co-creation was being part of the conversation with the participant as well as the interpretation and analysis of the stories.

My chosen research methodology is qualitative and emic, by which I mean that I take a subjective approach to reality; I interact with my research participants in a collaborative way to get their subjective reality. The truth or meaning of the data is a double hermeneutic, or interpretation (Gadamer, 1976) of the stories I invited the participants to tell about their felt experiences of coaching. I used the method of conversation to enable the participants' storytelling (see definitions) and analysis. The double hermeneutic is first, the participants' interpretations of their own stories, followed by my interpretation, as researcher, of those stories.

Cresswell (2013) talks about a qualitative approach to research being about having an open mind. I had identified a problem, namely that the coachees' voice was missing from the narrative (see definitions) on coaching for promotion and, therefore, by extension, the thinking on coaching. An approach which would allow

those voices to be heard, and to be their own, would open my mind to some new things and I was ready to embrace that. This was appealing to me. I considered interviews and case studies, which I refer to later in this chapter, but finally settled on collecting my data through conversations with my participants and then analysing them through thematic analysis.

Cresswell (2013) says that qualitative researchers begin with their own assumptions and those of their participants. What this means to me is that my participants provided their stories in their own words, contexts and through their own interpretations, overlaid was my reflexivity and positioning of myself in the research as a coach, engaged in the practice of coaching for promotion. In this way, I am there in the research. I believe this is what Cresswell refers to as an emerging qualitative approach.

My research project and approach were less about asking a question and more about probing into the coachees' felt experiences of coaching. It was exploratory and inductive. I wanted to allow meaning to come out of the data which could add to what we understand about coaching Executive Talent for promotion. I was uncomfortable with various aspects of what I was seeing in practice and this included the lack of the coachee's voice in shaping the development of coaching for promotion. It was important to me that I give coachees the platform from which their voices could be heard.

Before settling on conversation as my method of choice for collecting data, I had considered the following questions, which I repeatedly came back to in determining the methodology and methods I would use:

i) what phenomena was I exploring in my research;
ii) what data did I need to address in my inquiry;
iii) what was the best way to obtain that data;
iv) what was the best way to make sense of the data.

In my project proposal I said that I wanted to explore what Elliott (2005) described as critical analysis. In the context of narrative inquiry (see definitions), Elliott (2005) said that critical analysis is a way of putting the researcher into the participants' stories through reflexion on the nature of the research and the ability of both the participant and the researcher to reflect on the stories and their contexts. I believe this sits comfortably with the goal of an **i**nterpretivist approach to research - to understand and interpret the meanings of human behaviour rather than generalise and predict causes and effects (Neuman, 2000). This resonates with my own final choice of gathering data through the method of conversations with twelve individual participants who were Executive Talent coachees.

At one stage, I wondered whether my approach was a series of 12 case studies. One of the aspects of Flyvbjerg (2006) that I found appealing was that he blows away assumptions and misunderstandings about case studies lacking validity necessary for a critical piece of research. He argues that a case study can be closer to real life situations, which is important in understanding human behaviour. An advantage for me of a case study would that as a professional doctoral candidate whose aim is to bring about some insights and noticeable positive change in coaching practice, the concept of using a case study to demonstrate human behaviours in actual practice would be a way for me to engage more closely with the subject matter.

I ultimately dismissed case studies as a method for two reasons: I perceived a disadvantage in not being able to offer any generalisations, although with twelve case studies to compare I could make some generalisable insights. A case study is meant to be a very in-depth study of an experience and I did not think I could do justice to twelve participants' stories using a case study method in the time I had to complete my research project and within the word count. Secondly, I felt strongly that I would not be a co-creator and collaborator in the story and its sense making. Using this method, I would not be a collaborator in the story and its sense making.

Chosen method of data collection and analysis - Narrative inquiry through conversations and thematic analysis

Having considered various approaches, I was drawn towards narrative inquiry (Clandinin and Connelly, 2000) using the tool of conversation to help me to gather the richest source of data for my research and thematic analysis to analyse the data.

I was influenced by the work undertaken by Hickson (2016). Hickson blended a narrative approach to gathering stories from her participants with critical reflection on those stories for her analysis. She conflated the two approaches to create what she called a "critical narrativist" approach. As Hickson (2016) states, much of narrative inquiry approach comes from the work of Mishler (1991) who advocated that listening to the stories of participants is a legitimate way of seeking to understand the context of the stories and how they are constructed and presented. Mishler (1991) suggests that conventional methods of interviewing tend to suppress the participants' stories. He advocates a different way of gathering the participants' stories through narration which, he said, is much more natural. It was this naturalness and boundaryless of storytelling that I wanted to get from my participants through conversations and a critical analysis of what they told me.

It is relevant to mention that I had considered collecting the data from my participants through interviews, described by Maccoby and Maccoby (*1954)* as:

> *"…a verbal interchange, in which one person, the interviewer, attempts to elicit information or expressions of opinion or belief from another person or persons" (p.9).*

This description seemed to encompass what I was imagining would take place between me and the participants as a vehicle for their stories to be told. I thought about the interview as a qualitative tool which facilitates the achievement of a deeper understanding of how people think about the subject matter under investigation (Trochim, 2006) and in my research I wanted to develop a deeper understanding of coachees' felt experiences of coaching for promotion. I felt conflicted between my

desire to be a co-creator but not wishing to dictate or lead the participant's story. I wanted to create an open, non-judgmental, non-directive and confidential environment for the stories to be told. I accept that an unstructured interview where both the interviewer and interviewee follow the thread of the interview and become co-creators and collaborators in the sense making might have been acceptable. Nevertheless, a criticism of interviews as a qualitative method for collecting data is that the way in which a question is worded can demonstrate researcher bias and influence and invite the interviewee to bias their story and highlights the power dynamics within the researcher and participant relationship (Cresswell,2013). I concluded that even in an unstructured interview, any question I asked may contain within it a clue as to what I was hoping to get out of the question and potentially lead the participant in a direction that was not necessarily one they would take undirected. Had I been a researcher with no involvement in the phenomenon I was researching and had I not been a practitioner in the field, I might have considered an interview as an appropriate method for my research. I am, however, a practitioner with experience and knowledge in coaching Executive Talent and that is a significant aspect of what I contribute to the sense making process as I bring those experiences, knowledge and assumptions into the interpretation. I wanted to relinquish as much control in the story as possible to enable the participants' stories to be authentic, but at the same time I wanted to be part of the conversation. Some researchers consider a conversation and an unstructured interview to be synonymous (Etherington, 2004). For the purpose of my research, I differentiate them by considering Mishler's (1991) characterisation of an unstructured interview as a *"flexible strategy of discovery …its object is to carry on a guided conversation …"* (p.27) and Braun and Clarke (2013) consider that even in unstructured interviews the researcher asks the questions. My intention was not to ask questions or even guide, although I accept that my body language, smiles, acknowledgments of what the participant was saying may have been interpreted by them as guidance. I accept this as a limitation on my part.

A further criticism of interviews as a qualitative research tool, is that there is a sense that we are still trying to keep the researcher interviewer's view or voice out of the story and the interviewer researcher's voice is the powerful, objective one and as a

result the real presence of the researcher is minimised (Cresswell, 2013). I did not and could not keep my voice out of the research; I am part of it.

Chase (2003) advocates that in qualitative research it can be helpful to ask detailed, structured questions ahead of the interview or conversation. Corrie and Lane (2010) raise a concern with this approach, namely, that this might influence what the participants talk about. Their response is to provide some structured questions but with the proviso that the purpose is to elicit themes. They say, questions could be discarded at any stage as the participants and researchers saw fit. In this way they are building into their research some protection against bias. I could see merit in this approach in terms of containing the research, however, I discarded early ideas about containing and limiting the research too tightly to gender or ethnicity or any other specific aspect relevant to coaching and was excited about opening it up to whatever emerged from the participants. Fritzen et al (2019) suggest that there is a place for questions in a semi-structured interview or focused interview where part of the research requirement is to evaluate predominantly a priori research objectives as well as identify new themes. I had not set out to evaluate or validate a priori themes but only identify themes arising.

Considering my concerns, I did not consider that an interview would be the optimum vehicle for my research.

Another researcher (Elliott, 2005) talking about narrative inquiry contends that critical analysis of the narrative inquiry is a way of putting the researcher into the participants' stories through reflection on the nature of the research and the ability of both the participant and the researcher to reflect on the stories and their contexts. My research participants were able to do that by reflecting on their experiences prompted by our conversation. Reflection was an integral aspect of the participants' accounts.

I was assisted in my own analysis of my approach by Cresswell (2013) who explored five different approaches to qualitative inquiry. My own approach included a blend

of two of them: emic and narrative. Emic, in the sense that I was looking at the experiences of a group of people within a group (Executive Talent) who I observed, listened to and engaged with in conversation. I also video recorded the conversations so that I could listen and watch repeatedly to what they had said and elicit themes that came out of their stories. I used conversation as my method of obtaining the data from my participants. In a conversation, a form of storytelling takes place as both the research participant and the researcher are in the conversation and shape that conversation and the direction of it as it is developing. However, as Drake (2007) makes clear, our narratives are our stories told from our backgrounds and worldview which create our meanings and realities.

From that I took a simple message that applied to my research context; the participants would tell their own stories, to make sense of their felt experience of coaching for promotion. Those stories are told in the context of their backgrounds, beliefs, assumptions and what they were experiencing in the coaching engagement. This provided rich powerful data for me to analyse.

Cresswell (2013) says that a social constructivist's goal in research is to:

> "…*rely as much as possible on the participant's views of the situation. Often these subjective meanings are negotiated socially and historically. In other words, they are not simply imprinted on individuals, but are formed through interaction with others … and through historical and cultural norms that operate in individual's lives*" (p.24)

This felt like a very comfortable fit with my ontological and epistemological position in relation to my research; there would be an extent to which the research conversation took form and shape as the participants were reflecting and recounting their stories within their own historical, corporate, societal and family contexts. Their coaching experiences would be the result of how others related to them during the coaching as well as how the participant and I related to one another during the conversation. Different coaching experiences in environments where they did not

feel valued or supported or perhaps did not achieve their coaching goal might result in a different story to one where they had felt supported or had achieved their goal. It brings to mind a coaching engagement with a client who had enjoyed a clear career path in which she had been regularly promoted and was now a director in one of the divisions in the business. She had felt comfortable with the promotions and had never questioned whether they were warranted in terms of her ability, experience or aptitude for the role. At our first coaching session her body language of arms crossed, eyes not meeting mine and being fairly monosyllabic, suggested a certain resentment towards me, or the process, or both. It was not a comfortable coaching session as she did not want to engage. By the second session, she talked very openly about what she perceived as a bad relationship with her boss. She had talked with her husband and as a result had decided to take advantage of the coaching session to think about a role outside her current organisation. What was interesting was that because she had a positive and supportive husband whose opinions she trusted and valued, she continued the coaching in a very positive frame of mind. At the end of our six sessions, she fedback that she had felt initial resentment towards me because she had associated me with her boss who had engaged me, but that resentment disappeared once she came to realise that she could benefit from the coaching in a different way. Part of my reflection on the coaching engagement was that had I coached her with a clear agenda on preparing her for promotion it would not have been a positive experience or outcome for my client.

Returning to research design, Braun and Clarke (2013) talk about designing an interview plan with set questions. I had rejected interviews as my method of data collection and didn't have a long formal conversation guide, as I had only one inquiry which was asking them to tell me about their felt experiences of coaching for promotion. I was, nevertheless, guided by Braun and Clarke's (2013) plan of questions they used to monitor the validity of interviews, in asking myself ethical questions about the validity of my own research and approach. Those questions were: '*what am I trying to get out of it'* '*will it generate data'* and '*does this question help answer my research question'* (p.85). I considered them worthy of acknowledging and using myself in the conversations.

I had provided the participants with a Participant Information Sheet (appendix 5), which set out the purpose of my research and what I was seeking from them in terms of their involvement and the topic I wanted them to talk about. I did not devise a list of questions because I wanted to make the conversation as open and authentic as possible and let them engage in their own reflections about what the experiences were for them. I did not want to overtly bring in my own biases and experiences.

I knew that the participants' stories would not be available to me just through the conversation transcript. For example, if I had decided to ask the participant to record their story without me being present and then send the recording to me, the result might be a different story. Similarly, if they told it to someone else and not me then it might be very different. Neither of these approaches would invalidate their stories but they would remove me from it and as I intended this research to be co-created the outcome would have lacked that element. It is neither richer nor poorer for my involvement, but it is different, and it concerns my positionality within it. As a coaching practitioner, I am creating new knowledge all the time with my coachees and I wanted to create that same sense of co-creation with the research participants.

I considered that in order to give the participants their freedom to tell their stories, I would be setting the scene for them and then providing them with their audience for them to develop their story. An analogy might be an improvised play where the two actors are given the scene but not the script and it is up to them and their interaction and relationship with one another to create meaning. If I take the meaning of co-creation as one in which the researcher and participant both participate in the activity of the research, then what results is also co-created. In inviting my research participants to take part in a conversation and tell their stories, they were doing so because they had been invited by me to take part. I accept that the stories could be told on a recording without me being present but that would detract from the conversational element of the story. The story is being told, prompted by an enquiry from me, the researcher, about their felt experiences of coaching for promotion. I have, therefore, created the situation for the participant to participate and, in this respect, it is also part of the co-creation.

It would be wrong to say that the conversations were completely non-directive as even though I hadn't set out a list of questions for the participants to answer, I had given them the context of the inquiry; their felt experiences of coaching for promotion. That in itself was directing them to talk about something specific. My approach to the research conversations was akin to how I typically coach in a non-directive way. The difference, however, is that the topic for exploration in the coaching sessions comes from the coachee, whereas the topic for the research came from me the researcher. To get as rich a body of data as possible, I reiterated that what they talked about within that topic could be as broad or narrow as they chose to make it. This could include the use of metaphors or visual representations of what they wanted to disclose.

In one respect, I was directing the participants to what I wanted them to talk about as I gave them the project title and, at various stages I asked them to develop their story if there was something that appeared to me to be of particular interest to them. I had chosen conversation as a method to gather the stories as it can be less proscriptive (Mishler,1991) and allows the researcher to understand their experiences and the meaning they give to their experiences (Etherington, 2004). Having read the conversation transcripts, I realised that I had spoken very little. I reconciled my approach that notwithstanding the fact that I had interrupted very little, I had been very present in the conversation through mirroring, responding in a nonverbal way and actively listening.

Not only did I intend to be a co-creator and collaborator at the data collection point by being part of the conversation with the research participant, but I was also a co-creator and collaborator in the analysis of the research by engaging in my own reflection and interpretation of the participants' stories in light of their contexts and my own.

Thematic Analysis was not my first choice of method for analysing the research data. I had spent many months considering the use of Interpretative Phenomenological

Analysis ('IPA'). Like thematic analysis, IPA takes a phenomenological approach to qualitative research. It assumes the reflective nature of people which provide the data required to analyse. Both the participant and the researcher engage in an interpretative exercise. If I accept the definition of IPA as expounded by Smith (2011), that it is concerned with "*a detailed examination of personal lived experience, the meaning of experience to participants and how participants make sense of that experience*" (p.9) then it sounded like this could be an approach that would enable me to analyse the stories of my research participants and make sense of them. As IPA is a hermeneutic process, the stories the research participants told would depend on their own context, assumptions, depth of reflection and interpretation of their own experiences (Gadamer, 1976). Overlaid with that would be my own interpretation of their stories.

I chose not to use IPA for three reasons: first, the idiographic aspect of the IPA would mean that I couldn't make generalisable insights from each unique individual story. This would detract from what I was seeking in my own research which was to provide some insights from the participants' stories that would be helpful to me and the coaching community. Secondly, IPA has a proscriptive approach to both the data collection and analysis side of doing research and I did not want to be constrained by a structure that would limit the flexibility of approach and possibly dilute the authenticity of the participants' voices and my analysis. Thirdly, one of the appeals, but perhaps also one of the concerns for me of IPA for my research, was that the analysis of the felt experiences, as narrated by the participants, is done from different levels of interpretation considering different parts of the narrative. Whilst this would provide multiple, interesting perspectives, I concluded that it might detract from a free form storytelling and coachee interpretation and risk introducing too much researcher bias through too early an interpretation.

A further potential disadvantage of IPA is that the themes that I, the researcher, would identify would be themes that spoke to me and not necessarily those that spoke to the participant or other readers, as I would analyse the interviews through my own particular lens; a lens that incorporates over 10 years of executive coaching

experience. I see that as a criticism that could be levelled at other methods such as case studies and thematic analysis. I actually considered it to be an advantage in a DProf research where the voice of the researcher is critical to the analysis and sense making of the data.

I acknowledge the debate in the literature about Thematic Analysis and whether it is an approach to research or an analytic tool in in its own right (Braun and Clarke, 2006). Its position as a tool only for analysis is one I adopt.

Thematic analysis can fit various theoretical frameworks (Braun and Clarke, 2006), but it is important that the researcher makes apparent her own epistemology and therefore the perspective from which the interpretations are being made. I have made a claim for adopting a social constructivist approach to my work, life and research and, therefore, my analysis is underpinned by my ontology and epistemology; I implicitly acknowledge the social constructs within which I practice, and the research participants are coached, in how I make sense of their accounts.

Braun and Clarke (2013) describe two different approaches to 'doing' thematic analysis. The first is 'theoretical' thematic analysis which actively looks for themes that are in that area of theoretical interest. Grounded Theory (Corbin and Strauss, 1990) would fit into this category. The second approach is 'Inductive' thematic analysis which requires iterative readings to see what themes become apparent. Braun and Clarke (2013) say inductive thematic analysis:

> "*aims to generate analysis from the bottom (the data) up; analysis is not shaped by existing theory (but analysis is always shaped to some extent by the researcher's standpoint, disciplinary knowledge and epistemology" (p. 175)*

My analysis approach was closer to the inductive approach; I had not posed a research question but had inquired into what the felt experiences of coaching were for my research participants. This became my data, which I then analysed for themes

in order to provide insights. I was also clear about my epistemology, assumptions and background. I had not analysed it based on existing theory or concepts.

A theme captures something in the data that relates to the research question or exploration (Braun and Clarke, 2013). The first part of my analysis was analysis of the participants' stories to identify patterns and themes. The second part entailed me looking at the themes from the participants' stories alongside themes that I had identified in my literature review and the knowledge landscape of my own practice and to then look at the literature again in light of the themes that I had identified in the data. The reason I decided to undertake a part of my literature review after my analysis of the research conversations was to avoid actively looking for the themes in the literature in the research conversations and potentially missing other themes that arose. I had done a general literature review at the beginning of my research project so that I had a sense of what had been addressed and what hadn't.

Braun and Clarke's six step approach to Thematic Analysis

Notwithstanding the flexibility in thematic analysis, I needed to be clear about how I conducted every aspect of research. Being a novice qualitative researcher and user of thematic analysis, I chose to adopt Braun and Clarke's (2006) step by step guide to doing thematic analysis. I expand on this in my chapter on project activity. First, it is a logical, iterative process that enabled me, as the researcher, and the reader, as the validator of the credibility of my research, to see how I progressed though the analysis and the steps I took to reach the insights that I did. It addressed, for me, one of the ethical issues in qualitative research clearly articulated by them:

> *"if we do not know how people went about analysing their data, or what assumptions informed their analysis, it is difficult to evaluate their research, and to compare and/or synthesize it with other studies on that topic, and it can impede other researchers carrying out related projects in the future…"* (p80)

Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach made sense to me in the context of what I was trying to glean from the data provided by my participants. Their six step approach appealed to me for its simplicity, flexibility and the thoroughness of analysis. It provided me with a framework for my own analysis adopting the following summarised steps:

1. Familiarisation with the data;
2. Generating initial codes;
3. Searching for themes;
4. Reviewing themes;
5. Defining and naming themes;
6. Producing the report. (Braun and Clarke, 2006 p.87).

I added to the framework by including additional steps for reviewing the transcripts and video recordings of the conversations at different times and comparing codes and themes that I had identified when reading the transcripts and watching and listening to the recordings.

As I followed the steps, I continued to ask myself the questions around validity of research. What was I trying to achieve and demonstrate?

My research analysis was about meanings and, in the context of my research, they were first the meanings attributed to them by the participants relaying their stories and then secondly by me as the researcher through the various stages of analysis. Even though I had originally wanted the data to speak for itself to a large extent, my own context, assumptions, cultural background and active presence in the research conversations would mean that I saw things in my data that another researcher coming from a different background, bringing with them different experiences and assumptions would interpret differently. I was, therefore, bringing subjectivity to bear on my analysis. As Braun and Clarke (2013) put it:

> *"subjectivity basically refers to the idea that what we see and understand reflects our identities and experiences – the contexts we've existed in…" (*p21)

I went back to Braun and Clarke's approach (2013) which offered me flexibility and also suited my epistemological and ontological positions as it allowed different themes to be identified based on the perspectives, social constructs and realities of the people creating and analysing the data. I knew that I could never remove researcher influence entirely from my research and as a practitioner researcher, being clear about where I am in relation to the research gives an indication to the reader of my positionality in the research and how I have incorporated it into the analysis. This is a part of qualitative analysis that is absent in quantitative analysis. Braun and Clarke (2013) articulate it thus:

> *"… in contrast to the positivist/quantitative ideal of being able to obtain 'uncontaminated' knowledge, with all biases removed, qualitative research recognises that these exist, and incorporates them into the analysis…"* (p. 21)

Even though I was giving the coachees a voice in my research, my analysis involved choosing extracts of the conversation transcripts to support the themes that I identified, as well as my arguments to support my analysis and findings. In other words, how and what I interpreted from the conversations would be different from another's interpretation of the same data.

4.4 An ethical approach to the research

At each step of my research, I was cognisant of my ethical obligation to engage in my research in an ethical manner. I have said that I wanted my research and my approach to it to do no harm (Alderson and Morrow, 2004). Harm could come in the form of wasting the time of the participant, the reader, other researchers and practitioners. As well as wasting time by taking longer than necessary for the conversations and engaging with the organisations and participants, it would also be wasting time if my research was produced in a way that is not ethical and therefore not worthy of being called research capable of being considered, relied upon or developed.

The following are steps I took to avoid this risk of harm and to ensure an ethical and transparent approach to my research.

Sense checking

An important part of my ethical approach to my research was to have a random selection of my data analysis sense checked to determine how intrusive my own assumptions and bias were in my analysis. I sent two anonymised, unmarked transcripts to two trusted coach supervisors, having spoken to each of them and obtained their consent. I did not give them any indication of my interpretations because I did not want to influence their thinking consciously or subconsciously. Whilst I could have asked them to review more than two transcripts, or even asked more people to read the transcripts, which would have provided a broader sense check, this would have been a big imposition on their time and good will. I also decided that two transcripts would be sufficient. The transcripts that I sent to them were anonymised further and saved in password protected documents. Each then fed back to me what they had taken from the conversation transcripts and the themes or things of note that they noticed.

Obtaining these insights from these two people was another opportunity for me to stop and revisit my own sense making and challenge myself to question the judgments and interpretations I made. Mezirow (1990) suggested:

> "*we use others to aid the interpretation .. to seek a consensus, we turn to those we feel are best informed, least biased, and most rational to critically assess the evidence and arguments and arrive consensually at the best judgement*" (p.3).

The specific details of, and the reasons for choosing the individuals that I did can be found in appendix 4.

Each time I re-read and re-visited the video recordings, I searched for hidden meanings in the data or meanings that I had missed due to my own assumptions and biases on initial readings. We read and interpret according to our own contexts, biases and backgrounds. The reason I read and viewed the interview video recordings and transcripts over and over was for the same reasons I asked my coach supervisor and peer coach supervisor to read example transcripts. It was to ensure that my bias wasn't making me see only specific themes that were relevant to my own practice of coaching or what I expected to see.

My research techniques, quality and outputs benefited from constant quality engagement and critical feedback from my doctoral candidate colleagues, supervisors and coaching supervisors. They operated as my ethical compass.

What would participation in the research involve?

I gave each of my research participants the same introduction and Participant Information Sheet (Appendix 5).

Why 12 participants?

I originally proposed obtaining data from approximately 20 coachee participants from four or five UK businesses. 20 appeared to be a large enough sample to be capable of being compared. More than 20 participants would not be manageable in terms of my time and resources. My choice of using a selection of businesses and sectors was to provide diversity and generate a breadth of views, and to avoid bias in any given organisation; no two coachees were coached by the same coach and different coaching providers were represented. This also served to demonstrate diversity of thought amongst the participants. I ultimately obtained rich data from 12 participants, having satisfied myself that their stories were broad and covered areas that were being repeated. Each participant was an Executive Talent coachee working in a corporate organisation, which included professional service firms. The coaching assignments had lasted between 6 and 12 months.

The common denominator in my group of participants was that they were all Executive Talent. None of them were my own coaching clients. In terms of diversity, they were not limited by age, gender, ethnicity, discipline or use of internal or external coach.

Time commitment

Each research conversation lasted between 45 and 90 minutes. During the conversation, the participant was invited to tell their story of their felt experiences of coaching for promotion. With the participant's consent, I video recorded the conversation which allowed me to be involved without taking copious notes and distracting the participant and disrupting the flow of the conversation.

Compliance with legislation, regulations and ethical codes

Throughout my whole research journey, I complied with various ethical codes and legislation relating to ethics, including:

- The Middlesex University's ethics and academic codes and regulations.
- The Worldwide Association of Business Coaches (WABC – see definitions) professional Code of Business Coaching Ethics and Integrity and, as a solicitor of England and Wales, by the Solicitors Regulation Authority (SRA) Standards and Regulations 2019
- Data Protection Act 2018 and the General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) May 2018.

Informed consent

I obtained informed consent from: i) the participating organisation, where relevant, and ii) the participating coachees. The informed consent made it clear that: i) participation was voluntary, with an option to withdraw at any stage with no penalty to them; and ii) the data they provided would be confidential, anonymous and would only be used for the purpose of my research (Appendix 6 and 7).

Confidentiality

I discussed with, and sent to, each of my participants and where relevant their employing organisations, written communication, on official University letterhead, outlining my research, its intended purpose, its intended publication, role of the participants, voluntary nature of the participants, rights of participants to withdraw their consent at any stage before publication of my project, how I would deal with their responses, where and how I would store, delete and use their information and who else would have access to that information (appendix 6). I explained that my academic supervisors would have access to some of the information, but I reassured them that those supervisors would not be privy to their identities; only I would have that information. I received signed consent from all participants and employing organisations. A copy of each individual signed consent form was kept by me in a locked filing cabinet.

I was conscious that some of the information that the coachee participants provided during their storytelling may be critical of their employing organisations or reference personal and confidential matters. It is a critical piece of me demonstrating an ethical approach to my study that I reassured both coachee participants and employing organisations that they would be anonymous, and I would not use any of the information obtained for any other purpose than my doctoral research project.

Another area that could have been an issue in relation to data collection and ensuring confidentiality was my use of video images of the participants' conversations with me. I considered this and in my project proposal I said that I would make video images optional for the participants, which I did. I also explained how video recording the research conversations would be useful to me as a researcher as I would be able to study body language, tone of voice, facial expressions which would provide a fuller picture and richer data for analysing participants' 'felt' experiences of coaching. Each video recording was separate from the typed transcripts. They were stored in my recording device with an electronic access code to which only I had access. The visual recordings were only for the purpose of my analysis and will be deleted once I have completed my analysis, write up and final assessment. Neither the video recordings

nor any part of them have appeared in my final written project. I told the participants that they could refuse to have our conversation video recorded and this would not affect their inclusion in my research project nor have any impact on their opportunity for promotion. In the event, the research participants consented to the video recordings.

Sensitive issues arising out of the conversations

I was conscious that in talking about their felt experiences of coaching for promotion, there was a possibility that their storytelling experience might bring to the surface emotional issues for the participants as they reflected on their experiences. With this in mind, I reiterated to the participants the purpose of my research before the research conversations began. I reassured them that they could talk about whatever they felt comfortable with and if, at any stage, they wished to stop or not talk about something, that was their prerogative. I also reiterated that I was engaged in the conversation with them as a researcher and not as a coach and there may be aspects of their storytelling to me that they would like to share with their own coaches or other professional support.

Finally, to provide further reassurance to the participants, I confirmed that at all stages I would be abiding by ethical standards set by my university, as well as my professional coaching body and would be taking part in regular professional supervision sessions with my supervisors to ensure continued ethical approach to my research and participants.

Withdrawal from participation

Participants were given the right to withdraw their consent at any stage prior to publication of the research.

Validity of my research

Qualitative methodology or approach requires a rigorous approach to ensure that it is valid, trustworthy and the reader can follow the steps, thinking and linkages made by the researcher (Nowell et al, 2017). These are important ethical aspects of the

research which I needed to satisfy to make my study something that could be called rigorous research. Unlike quantitative methodology, where the numbers speak for themselves, I needed to set out:

i. The steps I had taken
ii. The methods I had used
iii. The rigour with which I had analysed the data in detail from different angles
iv. Why I had taken them and made the choices I did; and
v. How I had reached the interpretations and meanings that I did, so that readers could believe in those interpretations and the findings.

Goodman (2008) describes four types of validity useful in a quantitative research paradigm: construct validity; internal validity; external validity and ecological validity Construct validity concerns whether the data collected measures that it sets out to measure. External validity asks whether the results of the research can be generalised or applied more widely than the relatively small participant group, whereas internal validity asks whether what is found in the research study are 'caused by the variable' in the study. Ecological validity is concerned with whether there is a relationship between the research and the real world.

Notwithstanding that the model outlined by Goodman (2008) for checking validity relates to quantitative research, as an exercise I went through the four categories to see if they had any relevance to my qualitative research. For example, with regards construct validity I wondered whether I could argue that in my research I did not set out to prove something, but to gather the coachees 'felt experiences' of coaching and offer insights. I facilitated the participants' voices so that what was being recounted was their experience, in their own words, expressing what they felt was relevant to their felt experience. Whilst not a quantitative measure, my thematic analysis of those conversations provided subjective outputs which is what I set out to provide.

The method of conversations, that I used to collect my data was a method which would interfere, bias or influence the participant least whilst still retaining my voice

as researcher, co-creator and collaborator. However, I was not surprised that I felt uncomfortable using these headings for validating quantitative research once I read what Denzin and Lincoln, (2011), had to say about validity in the constructivist paradigm. They say that in the constructivist paradigm, a relativist or multiple reality paradigm is assumed with the "knower and responder" co-creating understandings which are generally presented in grounded theory or patterns and terms such as credibility, transferability and dependability replace the positivist criteria of internal and external validity, reliability and objectivity. (p. 13)

Guba (1981) proposes that instead of adopting the more positivist and quantitative model for assessing validity in research, the following four criteria could be considered by qualitative researchers in their quest to validate their study. This fitted more comfortably with my qualitative approach.

- Credibility (instead of internal validity)
- Transferability (instead of external validity or generalisability)
- Dependability (instead of reliability)
- Confirmability (instead of objectivity)

Shenton's (2004) suggestion of a way that qualitative researchers can use Guba's (1981) criteria assessment is one that I used in undertaking a self-validation of my research and one that the reader may similarly adopt to undertake their own assessment of my work (see figure 4 below).

Quality Criterion	Possible provisions made by the researcher
Credibility	Adoption of appropriate, well recognised research methods Development of early familiarity with culture of participating organisations Random Sampling of individuals serving as informants Triangulation via use of different methods, different types of informants and sites Tactics to help ensure honesty in informants Iterative questioning in data collection dialogues Negative case analysis Debriefing sessions between researcher and superiors Peer Scrutiny of project Use of "reflective commentary" Description of background, qualifications and experience of researcher Member checks of data collected and interpretations/theories formed Thick description of phenomenon under scrutiny Examination of previous research to frame findings
Transferability	Provision of background data to establish context of study and detailed description of phenomenon in question to allow comparisons to be made
Dependability	Employment of "overlapping" methods In-depth methodological description to allow study to be repeated
Confirmability	Triangulation to reduce effect of investigator bias Admission of researcher's beliefs and assumptions Recognition of shortcomings in study's methods and their potential effects In-depth methodological description to allow integrity of research results to be scrutinised Use of diagrams to demonstrate "audit trail"

Figure 4 Provisions that may be Made by a Qualitative Researcher Wishing to Address Guba's Four Criteria for Trustworthiness (Shenton, 2004, p73)

To make it easier for the reader to follow my rationale in validating my research, I have taken each of the four criterion and summarised and signposted below using Shenton's model:

Credibility

- Methods - I outlined my research approach choice, including methods, and rationale for my choices in my chapter on Research Approach and Design.
- Familiarity with culture of participating organisations – Although neither the participants nor their employing organisations were or had been my clients, they were in the sector of corporate organisations in which I coach, I was therefore familiar with the general cultures. I also met each of the participants prior to the research conversations and the employing organisation's senior sponsors and through those meetings gained insight into their cultures. Further insight was obtained during the research conversations themselves.
- Tactics to ensure honesty in informants (participants) – The tactics that I used to invite honesty from the participants revolved around building trust with them. I did so in several ways: first, I was honest about the purpose of my research and how their accounts would help me to develop some insights that may be useful to all those in the coaching community; secondly, I demonstrated that I was interested in them and what they had to say. I did so by listening to them, giving them control over the venue and length of the conversation. I gave them reassurance that their accounts would be confidential; they would be given code numbers, their video recordings would be stored securely on my laptop and removed once I had completed the write up and submission of my research.
- Random sampling of individuals serving as informants (participants) – none were my clients. Some were introduced to me through my coaching network, others approached me, having heard about my research inquiry. No two participants came from the same organisation or had the same coach.
- Iterative questioning in data collection dialogues – This is discussed in my chapter on project activity. The conversations were open and relatively unstructured; I gave them the topic of my research and asked them to talk about their felt experiences of coaching. The participants were at liberty to do that in whatever way felt most comfortable and meaningful for them.

- Debriefing sessions between researcher and participant – I did not undertake debriefing sessions or provide any other feedback to opportunity to respond to the participants. I have addressed this and the potential limitation in my chapter on my reflections.
- Peer scrutiny of project – throughout my research journey, I engaged with my academic supervisors. I also engaged with other doctoral candidates researching other disciplines, during which we challenged each other which made me scrutinise what and how I was engaging and undertaking my research.
- Use of "reflective commentary" – throughout, I used a journal which was both reflective and reflexive. I discuss this further in my chapter on my reflections. I also comment throughout this paper on areas that I found difficult, challenging, surprising and discomforting.
- Description of background, qualifications and experience of the researcher – in my chapter on Context, I provide the reader with my personal and professional context, indicating my ontology, epistemology and positionality in my research.
- Member checks of data collected, and interpretations/theories formed – I did not set out to provide any theories but rather insights and therefore I did not have any theories to be checked. Earlier in this chapter I discuss why and how I asked two coach supervisors to sense check two random research conversation transcripts.
- Thick description of phenomenon under scrutiny – in my introductory and context chapters I provide a description and commentary on the phenomenon under scrutiny in my research, including the current state of it, why it is important inquiry to me and, I believe, the wider coaching community.
- Examination of previous research to frame findings – I consider this in my chapter on Knowledge Landscape and Discussion of Findings.

Transferability

- Provision of background data – my chapter on Context provides the background and context of my study and my positionality in it. I also address the common denominators amongst my research participants, namely they were all Executive Talent; they had all been coached with the ostensible goal of preparing for promotion; their coaching took place while they were employed in corporate organisations. This provides the reader with criteria with which to determine for themselves whether the insights from my research might be applicable to their specific contexts.

Dependability

- Employment of "overlapping methods" – my choice and use of methods is covered in my chapters on Research Approach and Design and Research Activity.
- In depth methodological description to allow study to be repeated – I set out in detail a description of my methodology and the steps I took in my research in the chapters on Research Approach and Design and Research Activity.

Confirmability

- Triangulation to reduce effect of investigator bias – One aspect of triangulation I used to reduce the effect of researcher bias was to invite two coaching supervisors to read two randomly chosen participant conversation transcripts and provide their interpretations.
- Admission of researcher's beliefs and assumptions I am clear about my ontology and epistemology and assumptions and the basis for each, which I outline in more depth in my chapter on Context.
- Recognition of shortcomings in study's methods and their potential effects – I recognise two main shortcomings in my methods, and they are: that I did not give my participants the opportunity to read the transcripts or watch the videos and one of the potential effects of that is that I limited the collaboration between them and me as researcher. It also meant that in this respect I put my own voice ahead of theirs. This was particularly so given that at least two of my participants told me that having an opportunity to review

a coaching session would give them further opportunity for reflection and understanding. There is a potential, therefore, that I removed the opportunity for them to reflect further on their experience of coaching for promotion and that may have provided some richer data to analyse.

- In depth methodological description to allow integrity of research results to be unscrutinised – set out in my chapters on Research Design and Approach and Project Activity.
- Use of diagrams to demonstrate "audit trail" – where possible and where I thought it would assist the reader to follow my journey, I have included diagrams, tables and appendices.

I would add a further criterion of my own and that is that the research is overlaid with criticality. Kincheloe (2011) says critical research can be understood best in the context of the empowerment of individuals. To be critical, he says, the inquiry must be an attempt to confront the injustice of a particular society or aspect of society and that no subject or area is beyond enquiry and questioning. In my own research, part of the rigour or validity of the research comes from the inquiring and listening. In Kincheloe's (2011) context of education, that listening is to students. In my own case, it is listening to my participants, giving them the space and platform and following and engaging with their self-reflection and challenges. It is also "listening" to what is going on in my world of executive coaching through observing, participating, reading and critically reflecting on the environment and cultures within which executive coaching takes place. (I use the term listening in its broadest possible sense to mean anything that my senses take in whether that is visual observation, practical experience or listening to what others have to say). The credibility, therefore, of my research must come from the participants' own stories which cannot be measured quantitatively, nor deemed right or wrong nor true or false in a universally considered context because they are the felt experiences of those individuals and therefore true to them. As to whether they can be considered transferable by those who read this research paper, the insights I gained from the data I gathered and shared with the reader are transferable in the sense that they add to what we can consider might be helpful when we coach Executive Talent.

In my research, I aimed to adopt rigour through listening to my participants, interpreting their stories, considering and interpreting not only their individual and professional context within which coaching is taking place, but also the organisational, societal and economic contexts. To ignore them would, for me, be leaving out a major part of their story

Kincheloe (2011) argues that in research adopting bricolage, a step by step method of research cannot be defined or followed and this makes validity testing of the research methods more difficult. However, he says, the products of the research in bricolage can be evaluated using inquiries and analysis. Although I have not claimed to have used bricolage in my research, my research is multidimensional and, like bricolage, I engaged with hermeneutics and multiple levels of analysis. I constantly tested the rigour of my research through adopting two methods of thematic analysis, namely manual and through Nvivo (see definitions). Secondly, I asked independent coach supervisors to 'sense check' some of my analysis of my research data. In this way, I sought to obtain validation that my approach to analysis was professional and ethical. Thirdly, I constantly revisited the data and reviewed my analysis based on what new things I was seeing, reading and hearing. Fourthly, my review of the knowledge landscape, with insight into social, cultural, organisational contexts within which the participants' coaching and their subsequent reflections on the coaching took place, and my literature review, added to the scrutiny with which I approached my research. I constantly tested myself and my interpretations.

My study is not deductive, and I have not set out to prove a case. What I sought to do was gather data on the same topic from a group of participants who have in common three factors: they were all coached; the purpose of the coaching was ostensibly to help them to prepare themselves for possible promotion; they were all identified by their organisations as capable of promotion within a 2 – 3 year period. In addition, they were each engaged in the research conversation by the same person, namely me as the doctoral researcher, using the same minimally directive

process. The output of those conversations and my interpretation of them through thematic analysis was inductive in nature.

In the context of my research, the real world is the world of executive coaching and specifically where it applies to executives who are coached because they have been marked out for promotion. My own experience of coaching Executive Talent made me curious about what it felt like for the recipients of the coaching because their voices had been quiet and what they have to say is valuable in helping the coaching community understand another dimension in the coaching engagement. I have said that I was interested in that because organisations spend significant amounts of money on coaching Executive Talent. Indeed, much of my own income earned through coaching over the past 10 years has been derived from coaching Executive Talent and, from an ethical point of view, it was important to me that what I do as a coach has value from the coachees' perspectives. If it were shown not to have any perceived value, then I would not only question what I am doing, but also raise that question more broadly in the coaching community.

I believe the insights from my data collection and my analysis of it will provide a benefit to me and the coaching community by providing some insights from coachees' perspective of how coaching for promotion is experienced.

4.5 Summary

Braun and Clarke (2013) talk about experiential qualitative research which:

> '*validates the meanings, views, perspectives, experiences and/or practices expressed in the data*…' (p 21).

These meanings are those given by the participants through the data they provide, their perspectives and interpretations. The primary intention was that the participants would tell their own stories, in their own words, with little interference or prompting from me and they would interpret the experiences they narrated in their own ways as a result of reflection. The conversational method of data collection

that I adopted facilitated their narration and our co-creation. I was also conscious that participants would choose to tell me what they wanted and not what they didn't want to share. The data I had to analyse, therefore, was filtered at various stages, including at the stage of the participant telling the story.

It might be argued that a limitation of my methodological approach to my research might be that as a researcher, I brought into the process my own lens, assumptions and philosophical values, as well as my own experiences of coaching individuals who have been marked out for promotion. Other readers might see my approach as a benefit and not a limitation. Readers' perspectives will depend on their own underlying epistemologies. In the chapter on context, I gave a summary of my professional and personal background so that the reader can take those into account in reading my research insights and my development of themes in my analysis, in considering those insights.

5 Project Activity

In this chapter, I talk briefly about the steps I took in my data collection and analysis and then focus more in depth on why I made the choices I did and how they contributed to my project.

Figure 5 below, sets out the steps I took in my project:

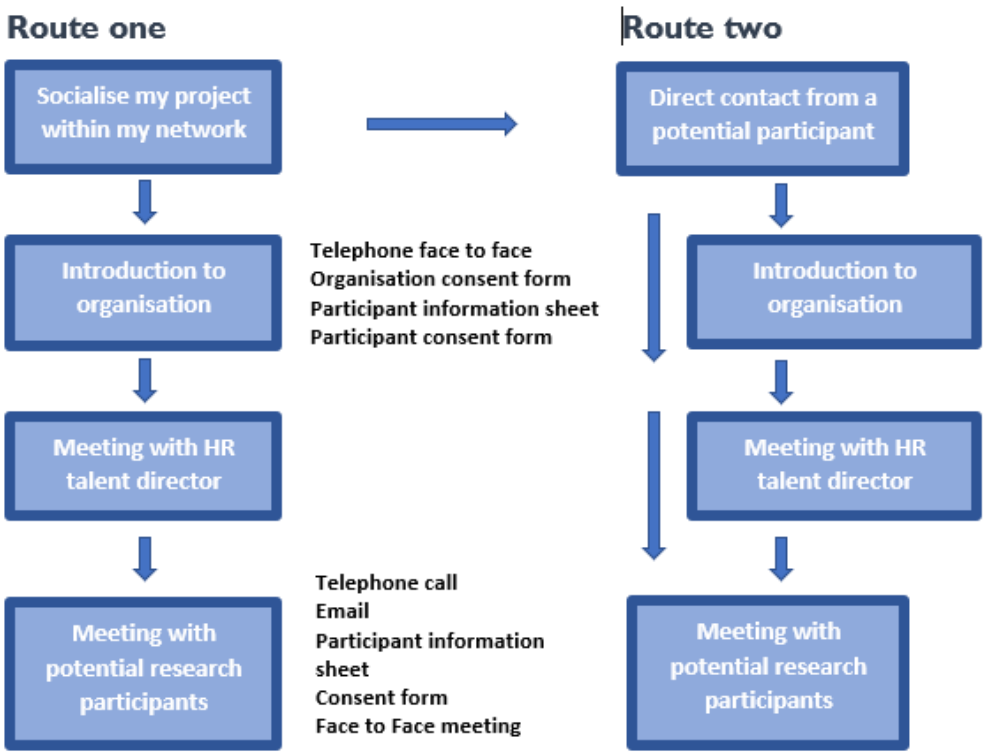

Figure 5 Identifying and recruiting research participants

5.1 Why two groups of research participants

My original intention was to have just one group of research participants with whom I would have conversations at the beginning of their coaching engagements and then after 6 months. I chose 6 months as it is halfway through a typical executive coaching engagement. My own coaching engagements tend to be for 12 month periods. The impetus for choosing these two points, was that it would allow me to hear whether the felt experiences of coaching differed with the lapse of time which was also

manageable in the time framework of my doctoral research. These became Group A participants. In my proposal I had suggested having an additional conversation at the end of the coaching engagement. This did not eventuate as the practicality of procuring that third conversation was difficult given the changing work priorities of the participants. I also found that the data from the two points was sufficiently rich for me to feel comfortable with my decision to restrict my conversations to two each.

Ultimately, I chose to have conversations with a second groups of research participants, who I called Group B. The catalyst for engaging with Group B participants was something that happened, that took me by surprise, and opened a wonderful opportunity for me which enriched and diversified the research data I was able to collect. The opportunity presented itself while I was in the process of socialising my project. Socialising an issue was a term I became familiar with when working with an American CEO. It was his shorthand way of saying he talked to stakeholders about something he was considering implementing, to get a sense of whether it would gain any traction, or if his ideas needed to be reconsidered, based on feedback from stakeholders. I was having conversations with my network of coaching colleagues, former business colleagues and indeed ad-hoc conversations with my general network of friends, about the fact that I was embarking on DProf degree and was focusing on exploring coachees' felt experience of coaching. I was delighted at the interest and in principle support most people gave to me. I was also receiving comments such as:

> "*I was coached a few years ago and would love to talk about it with you. Nobody has really asked me how I felt about it before, and I would love to share some of my recollections and reactions with you. Some are positive and some maybe aren't"* (private conversation).

It struck me that coachees who could talk about their felt experiences of coaching from a few years ago, would bring to mind what they could remember about the experience at the time, as well as how they now felt about the coaching experience with the benefit of reflection and the passage of time. Their accounts would have a

reflective dimension to them but from two different time frames. Whilst Group A participants would also be providing accounts at two periods of time, they were times which were closer together and were both when the coaching engagement was still in progress. One way I looked at it was that with the two groups, A and B, I would have stories that reflected coachees' felt experiences at three points in time.

The potential disadvantages in incorporating conversations with Group B participants into my research study included:

1. I would not be comparing like for like in Group A and Group B participants;
2. Group B participants might 'mis-remember' emotions, feelings and events of the coaching. In other words, their recollections or reflections could be coloured by their experiences and the passage of time since they were coached. The lens through which they see the world may have changed and their perceptions be informed by that. That said, the lenses through which Group A participants see the world could also change over six months.

Whilst I acknowledged potential disadvantages to having research conversations with coachees whose coaching experiences had been a few years ago, there were benefits that I considered would outweigh the disadvantages. The main benefit would be the potential richness of the participants' stories from different perspectives borne out of recollections and reflections in different time frames. Those perspectives could be: i) recalling a feeling that was so strong at the time of coaching that it had remained with them; ii) a feeling that was evoked as a result of the participant reflecting on past experiences through their current lens. As one participant put it:

> *"Sitting down and talking to you now about coaching from a couple of years ago is prompting further thoughts and memory"* (Denise)

and

> "*Some of what I have said, particularly some of the questions, were my memory of my reflection at the time. Others such as the relationship being*

important at the time, is me reflecting now on why I continued and what it gave me. I don't remember having reflected on that previously" (Anita)

5.2 My research participants were not my own coachees

I was conscious that one advantage in using my own coachees as research participants, would be a readily accessible group of participants who are already known and trusted by me and I am already known and trusted by them. It would certainly have been more efficient, in terms of time, as I would not have had to socialise my project with my broader network to the same degree. I would still have needed to obtain consent from their employing organisations.

I wanted to achieve a balance between putting myself in the research and allowing the participant's subjective voice to be heard. I could not take myself out of the research as I was positioned in it as a coaching practitioner and coachee and my experience meant that I had assumptions and biases that would be hard to remove entirely. I could, however, make the participants' subjective voices the dominant ones and remove my influence, actual or perceived, as much as possible. This was one reason I chose not to use my own coachees as participants. Additionally, I believed there was a bigger risk that my own coachees would tell me only positive things about their coaching experience because, consciously or subconsciously, they might not want to criticise my coaching, or they might have felt uncomfortable doing so. As a result, their accounts might not have been as open and transparent as those from participants who were not my coachee clients. From my perspective, I might also read into my own coachees' accounts things I thought they were saying based on my impressions of our coaching sessions.

Wilson and Syme (2006) say, in relation to asking therapy clients for their own opinions, that: " … *clients may wish to please or praise their therapists*" (p.82)

This could apply equally to coachees wishing to please their coaches.

5.3 Socialising my project with my network

I wanted to find out whether what I was proposing to research was something that other coaches, organisations who employed coaches and former business colleagues, considered to be valuable, relevant to them and worth exploring; was the coaching 'problem' that I had identified, a problem for anyone else in the coaching community. This was important to me because, from an ethical point of view, I did not want to waste anyone's time. Undertaking professional doctorate research on something that only I considered to be an issue to be addressed, or which would have limited or no value to anyone else, had limited interest for me. It would not, however, be entirely without interest because, if what I learnt from conversations with my participants had a positive impact on my own coaching practice, then it would be valuable to me. Almost everyone I talked to about my project expressed the view that my research topic and inquiry were important if we are to have a greater knowledge of coaching.

Socialising my project had the additional and unexpected benefit of unrelated individuals, who I hadn't approached directly, contacting me and asking if I would consider using them as research participants, as they wanted to tell me about their experiences. Each of them had been recipients of coaching for promotion. Each of their coaching experiences had been between 18 months and 3 years previously, apart from one whose experience had been more than three years earlier. The 5 individuals had learned about my project through their own networks. For example, a coach who I knew well, was very supportive of my proposal and had shared it with some of his former coachee clients, one of whom contacted me. This coachee wondered whether her coaching for promotion experience, which had been two years earlier, would be useful data for me. This was like a gift because it made me think about how one's thoughts, accounts and perceptions can change and have different meanings over time. In my own experience as a coachee; I knew that things I had not appreciated during the session itself, came to have meaning to me some time later. Sometimes that was when I was confronted with a similar issue to one on

which I had been coached and I was able to bring back to mind some of my thoughts from my coaching sessions and put into practice some of my learning from them.

5.4 Meeting with organisations and their HR/Talent Directors

Another experience, which occurred around the same time, involved a Group HR director of an international company. I had not coached in this organisation but had met the HR Director at a networking event some years previously. He had struck me as innovative and interested in coaching research. He had established an internal coaching programme for 'high potential' employees on track for promotion to executive positions. I thought this programme might be an excellent source for my research participants. I approached him and asked if his organisation would take part in my research by providing potential coachees to be research participants. He said no, immediately. The reason he gave was that he coached many of the individuals on the programme and part of the assessment of the programme was to get feedback from the coachees and how they had experienced coaching. He said that he had all the data he needed and did not want to 'waste the time' of these coachees by asking them to get involved in another assessment. I learnt something about myself and the style I had adopted when talking to organisations seeking their involvement in my research. My approach had been too soft. I had assumed too much and had not pre-empted and therefore addressed, practical and philosophical concerns the organisation might have. I was fortunate that these two experiences occurred early in my research journey and I was able to reflect on what I learnt from them and adapt my style going forward. So, what did I learn and do differently? The biggest concern for me was that, almost without exception, most people I spoke to said they agreed that the coachee's voice had been missing from research and also from organisational decision making about coaching. They also agreed that seemed odd, given that coaching is as much for the benefit of the coachee as it is for their employing organisation. It was my impression that the bigger the organisation and the more formalised the coaching programme was, the less external involvement they wanted. Notwithstanding that my research was independent, non-judgmental, confidential,

would anonymise the names of participants and their organisations and their coaches, there appeared to be a reluctance to allow someone external to have access to internal matters. This concerned me and it reinforced in my mind that there was value in hearing what coachees felt about their coaching without them feeling obliged to say what they thought their employer would want to hear, or without the risk that what they had to say would not be anonymous. It also reinforced my decision to collect the data through conversations rather than a more structured interview as a conversation would be a platform for more open, fluid, subjective, unencumbered reflections and stories. I had initially only approached the larger organisations because I thought they would be the ones with the coaching programmes for Executive Talent. Indeed, some of my participants did come from some of these larger employers but not all of them.

5.5 Meeting my research participants to gain their trust – starting the conversation

My preparation for the research conversations was critical in gaining the trust of the participants which was essential to the success of my research. According to Jones (2012) a relationship of trust happens when a person has somehow invited that trust and the person making the invitation is worthy of being trusted.

I invited trust from my participants partly by giving them control over the venue and over what they talked about within the context of my research inquiry, but most importantly by being really present for them, listening to them and being interested in them and their stories. People are more likely to be open, transparent and provide a full story where they trust the person who has asked to hear the story and is listening to it as it is being told (Mishler, 1991; Bluckert, 2005b). I was not known to most of my participants and so it was even more important for me to put time and effort into making them feel comfortable, trusted, respected and interesting to me so that they would be more open in their narratives and provide richer data. For this reason, I had either a face to face or telephone or skype conversation with them to

introduce myself and my project prior to the actual research conversation. This gave them an opportunity to tell me a little bit about themselves, if they chose to, and ask me questions. As a coach, I have generally found that having a chemistry session with a potential coaching client before starting a coaching assignment has the added benefit of starting to build trust and rapport which then means that the first coaching session is more effective and gets into the substance of the coaching session more quickly. In the same way, meeting one another before meeting for the research conversation, broke the ice. It was only after this initial meeting that I sent the participant the participant information sheet and consent form as the information within those documents would make more sense having first discussed them.

5.6 Gathering the data

Once I had undertaken these preparatory steps and obtained the signed consent forms from the participants and employing organisation I proceeded to collect the data.

The data that I collected was the stories the participants told in the research conversations. Figure 6 shows how I obtained the data from my research participants and what I did with them.

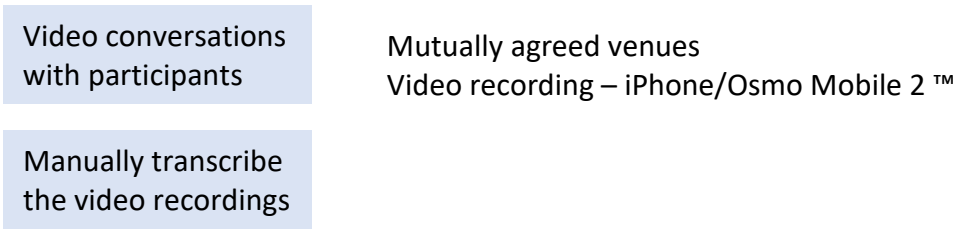

Figure 6 Collecting the data

I had two categories of research participants, all of whom: i) had been marked up for promotion within a 2-3year period; and ii) were coached in preparation for potential promotion. At the point of the research conversations –

Group A participants – were in the process of being coached when they participated in the research

Group B participants – had been coached between 1 and 5 years before they participated in the research

To ensure anonymity, I allocated a pseudonym and unique code reference to each of my participants. That code was made up of my initials "CS" followed by the letters "DP" which was a shortened abbreviation of Doctor of Professional Studies, then a number beginning with zero followed by the letter A or B to signify which category the participant was in. Finally, in the transcripts, the number 1 or 2 was added to the unique code of category A participants to identify whether the transcript related to the first or second conversation. An example of one of the full codes is: CSDP016A (1) (see appendix 8).

In the chapter on Research Approach and Design, I discussed why I chose the method of 'conversations' with my research participants and why it would be preferable to an interview. I found Feldman's (1999) four characteristics of a conversation in a research project helpful:

1. *It occurs between or among people*
2. *It is a co-operative venture*
3. *There is a direction to the conversation*
4. *A new understanding arises through the conversation.*

Each of my conversations were between me and the research participant and so satisfied the first of Feldman's (1999) criteria. Secondly, I was in the conversation. Thirdly, the direction of the conversation was towards a reflective account of the felt experiences of coaching of each of the participants. Fourthly, the conversations led to new understandings in several ways: the participants expressed how their reflections made them look at the coaching experience again from different perspectives; and my analysis of the conversations, was from my perspective and led to new understandings.

Setting up the conversations and video recording

Each conversation took place in a quiet confidential setting of the participant's choosing where they felt most comfortable.

I explained to the participants that, with their consent, I would like to video the conversation, but they were at liberty to decline to be videoed. I reiterated the reasons why I wanted to record them in this way: it would leave me free to focus on them and be part of the conversation; I would be able to watch the video subsequently and note their body language, tone of voice, pace of speaking and voice patterns which would be part of the meaning making process in the analysis. Every participant agreed to be video recorded. A number of them commented afterwards that they felt more involved because I, as the researcher, was focusing on them and not making notes. Some of them said that they were going to suggest to their coaches that they video record their coaching sessions so that they could be reminded of what took place in the session. As one participant remarked at the end of our research conversation as I was about to switch off the recording:

> "… video recording my coaching sessions would be so helpful to me. My conversations with my coach are brilliant and I know he gives me a copy of his notes following the session, which are great, but just think if I could go back and watch the session again it would remind me of what we talked about. But do you know what, I think I would also see and hear different and new things that I didn't see or hear at the time. It would be like having a second coaching session (laughs)" (Joe)

I wanted the process of video recording the conversations to be as unobtrusive as possible. I used my iPhone camera, which has a video setting, to record the conversations. I placed it on a small tripod which had the capacity of enabling the camera in the iPhone to move in response to the movements of the person it is recording. In this way, the participant was able to move around the room, stand up or sit down without feeling they had to remain in one position to be recorded. I

positioned the tripod where it could record the participant but wasn't in the participant's line of sight, distracting them and I could engage with the participant and be present in the conversation. One thing I would do differently in the future is to video record myself as the researcher, as well as the participant. The additional data that would give me to analyse would be my reactions, how I engaged in the conversation and how the participant responded to my presence and involvement. That would be putting myself in the middle of the research.

An additional consequence of using the tripod was that while I was setting it up, the participant and I talked generally, often about the devise, and this helped to create a relaxed environment and made the participant feel more comfortable. This was evident by their relaxed body language, smiles and ease with which they conversed. I appreciated that all my participants were senior executives who had experienced coaching where they were invited to talk about themselves and they had told me that they were comfortable having a similarly open and honest conversation with me as part of my research.

I invited the participants to tell their story about their felt experiences of coaching by reiterating what I was exploring in my research, namely coachees' own perceptions of their felt experiences of coaching where they had been marked out for promotion.

5.7 Transcribing the conversations

It was important to me to transcribe the conversations manually, because in the process of listening I was beginning to immerse myself in the data and get a sense of some of the stories I was hearing in the conversations. Had I used a professional service to do the transcription, I would have lost out on the wonderful overall impression of the conversation that I got from simply listening and typing what I heard. An additional reason I chose not to use a professional transcription service was because I did not want to risk a third party interpreting the conversations and inserting grammar, which may have then meant that when I read the transcripts, I

was reading what the professional service was hearing as opposed to what I was hearing. A simple example of this was one of my participants said the following: (I have omitted to include any grammar markings).

> *" I would characterise my experience with her true or false the fact I believe it to be the case gives it relevance of she well prodded me with questions…"*

Without grammar markings this could have several different interpretations. For example, the participant could have been asking me as the researcher to verify whether what he was saying was true or false, or questioning himself about whether what he was about to say, or had said, was true or false or whether the actual experience with the coach was true or false, whatever he interpreted that to mean. The reference to "she well prodded" could mean she prodded me well or could be an indication that he is pausing or hesitating or emphasising. Without grammar markings there is no indication.

I transcribed each of the conversations within 24 hours of the conversation having taken place. I also watched the video within the same time frame and noted in the margins of the transcripts what I was observing. For example, where a comment was made in a joking way, I made a note that the participant was smiling or laughing or made a note of their body language, tone of voice or whatever signified meaning. Where there were pauses and silences, I noted these in the margins. For example, a nod with a smile was an indication for one of my participants that she was speaking ironically.

It took me some time to complete all the transcripts as the conversations had taken place over a period of a few months. For each transcript I used a whiteboard to note down initial thoughts in the form of individual words that came to my mind as I was reading them (see appendix 9 for an example). Once I had completed transcribing all the conversations, I re-visited the videos and re-read all the transcripts in one 8 hour stretch, making notes of my impressions on a large piece of paper. Again, these notes took the form of single words or comments, alongside which were ticks, indicating

the frequency with which that word or comment had come to mind when I was reading each transcript. (A small section of that spreadsheet is at appendix 10). In this way I was reading the transcripts intuitively and not thinking too deeply about them but just allowing immediate thoughts to come to mind. I then re-read each transcript, re-watched the corresponding video, and marked down my impressions and thoughts on a spreadsheet.

5.8 Analysing the data in the conversations

Figure 7 below shows the steps I went through to analyse the data in the research conversations.

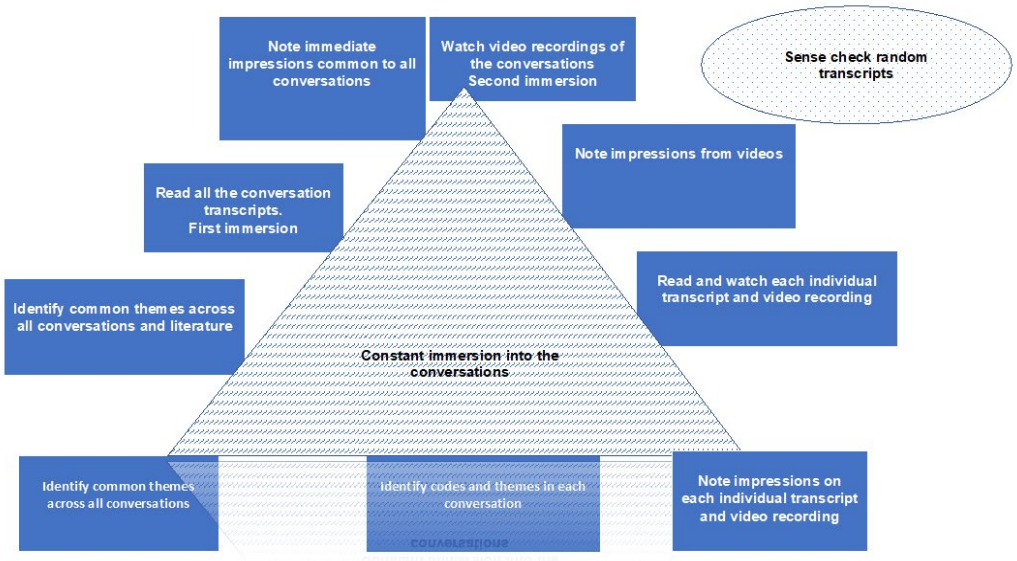

Figure 7 Steps in analysing the research conversations.

The process of analysis in my project was not linear. Whilst some steps were precursors to other steps, mostly the process was iterative and went back and forth from reading to watching and listening to the videos. The use of the triangle and putting it in the centre of the larger diagram I wanted to indicate to the reader that iteration was a part of every step in my analysis and this is why I have the shape overlaying the rest of the diagram. Whilst I read each individual transcript separately and spent hours focusing on each conversation, there were times when I went back

and forth from one conversation to another as I was identifying things of interest in one conversation and wanted to revisit other conversations considering that particular finding. Each iteration made me think more critically about what I was reading, seeing and hearing.

The oval shape containing the words 'sense check random transcripts' also had relevance at different stages of my analysis. I had asked my two chosen coaching supervisors to read two transcripts shortly after I had started the process of analysing the conversations for themes. I told each of them what I had asked of my research participant and then asked them to read the transcripts and comment on what they were seeing as themes. I went back to the notes and comments I received from them at various stages and this is why the triangle is in the middle of the diagram.

The manual analysis was conducted alongside analysis using Nvivo

I had not set out to use both tools of analysis, and was initially opposed to using a software tool but, ultimately, the combination of the two helped to provide a deeper insight into the data which was the subject of the analysis.

Using both manual and Nvivo in parallel, facilitated getting more immersed in the richness of the data. I was also able to use them as tools to help validate my analysis; there was something qualitative about the personal interaction with the data that I got from slowly, manually reading, making notes, seeing patterns and themes in the transcripts. The process of filling a huge piece of paper with words, against which I placed numbers or ticks or colours to indicate the quantity of times a particular word or phrase or idea came up in the research conversation was like a jig-saw puzzle. The more I looked, the more I found. I used Nvivo as a trigger for getting into the data more deeply and extending my involvement in it. Had I used Nvivo from the beginning, I would not have understood how to use it most meaningfully for me and consequently I would have accepted everything that it offered. My assumption was that it would do the thinking and analysis for me, it would be very time consuming

and I would become immersed in it and accept what it produced without questioning how it had produced it. But like me, Nvivo is a tool for analysis.

Before embarking on Nvivo, I considered the pros and cons of using a computer programme to assist me in my data coding, which are helpfully summarised by Braun and Clarke (2013) (see appendix 11).

The benefits I obtained by using Nvivo included:

1. giving me reassurance that I was being more rigorous in my coding and analysis and undertaking a sense check on my own manual process (see appendix 12 for a Treemap of early coding using Nvivo).
2. A logical, accessible and retrievable way of storing my data in an on-line filing system
3. Every time I felt myself getting distracted by the capabilities offered by Nvivo, e.g. over coding, I metaphorically stepped back and asked myself the question whether an additional code would enhance or detract from my positionality in my research. I reminded myself that Nvivo is not a method of analysis but a data management tool.
4. Adopting Nvivo and manual analysis also sat more comfortably with the concept of inclusivity and, adopting one of Shenton's strategies for ensuring trustworthiness in my research - it was a way of enhancing the credibility of the data analysis through triangulation via the use of two different methods of analysis (Shenton, 2004).

I concluded that it was not a question of manual or Nvivo for my qualitative coding and analysis, but I could use both in parallel and use each to challenge and as a starting point for the other. It did not replace the analytic knowledge and skills required of the researcher but are simply tools to help the researcher analyse and code the data (Braun and Clarke, 2013).

Why I didn't send the transcripts from the conversations to the research participants

Some of the research I found suggested that in research that is co-created, providing the transcript to the participant is important as it provides an opportunity for the participant to indicate whether this was what they meant to say (Mero-Jaffe, 2011) though caution should be exercised:

> "*On the one hand, giving transcripts to the interviewees is an act of empowerment that suggests that the researcher respects the experience and contribution of interviewees, but on the other hand, this action enables the participants to control the transcript and, by so doing, also the data*" (p.239).

The hermeneutic element of my analysis would have a third layer to it as the participant would have a further opportunity to reflect on what they had said and then provide another perspective.

Ultimately, I did not share the video or the transcript with the participants. Part of my rationale was also a pragmatic one and one that spoke to my values; it would be time consuming for me but more importantly for the participant and I was already conscious of the time they were already giving to me voluntarily. I did not want to waste their time and destroy the good will. Having asked two of my early participants if they would like to see the video and transcript and comment, they both politely declined the invitation. Both said that they were happy to have had the chance to share their thoughts but were "*quite busy*" at the moment and didn't know if they would find the time.

The second reason I didn't want to give my participants the video to watch or read the transcript was that by doing so it would give them a chance to reflect on what they had said and maybe change some of it in light of their reflections at that stage. The point of having a conversation with Group A participants at the beginning of the coaching engagement and then again half way through, was to get reflections of their felt experiences at two specific points in time. Commenting on the video and potentially changing parts of what they said would remove that first reflection.

I felt conflicted about the fact that I have made a claim that I was co-creating and collaborating with my participants in my research. In Heron and Reason's (2006) terminology, I aimed to do research "with" rather than "on" people. In my decision not to give my participants the opportunity to watch and listen to the video or read the transcript of the research conversation I was not truly practicing research with my participants. I have reflected on whether I would make a different decision in future research. A few of my participants commented that they would find it useful to have their professional coaching sessions videoed. These comments were a challenge to me. I had not shared the video of our conversation with them, yet the very nature of a recording resonated with them. So, if reviewing notes or video footage from coaching sessions was something they saw as valuable for getting the most out of a coaching session, perhaps watching the video recording of our research conversations might have been valuable to them in the context of providing the best research data to me. It was a personal challenge to me and I now wonder if I were doing further research using similar methodology and methods and focusing not just on what I would get out of it, but also what the participant would gain from it, whether I would share the video and transcript. It would require building in more time in my project. I would also incorporate the step in the Participant Information Sheet so that all participants were given the transcript and video. This might be more aligned with a collaborative, co-created approach and for that reason I would consider doing it.

6 Project Findings

6.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the findings from the research data.

I remind the reader that: the participants were senior executives being coached for promotion and the findings relate directly to this; the two categories of participants were: Category A – those who were in the process of being coached for promotion when they took part in my research project; and Category B – those who had been previously coached for promotion.

I had two research conversations with each of the three Category A participants - the first at the beginning of their coaching engagement and the second between four and seven months later. I had one research conversation with each of the nine Category B participants. In total this resulted in 15 transcripts. Throughout this chapter I refer to the participants by their pseudonyms I chose for them (see appendix 8)

I briefly present the themes I identified, diagrammatically (see figure 8), followed by my presentation of the participants' stories from the conversations. I then return to the themes in more detail.

When I looked for themes in the data, I was looking at what spoke to the participants emotionally, or what moved them and affected their coaching experience.

Five major themes

From these conversations I identified the following five major themes and subordinate themes shown in the diagram below. These are themes that evoked notable feelings in the participants as expressed in their words and non-verbal language:

Themes		***Subordinate Themes***
Being valued by my coach	→	Coach's background Relationship between coach and coachee Coach's coaching style
Being valued as a person	→	Person centred Motivation and accountability of coachee Context – coachee's and overall context of the coaching engagement
Goals excite and provide a focus	→	Goals were different from the organisational goal or changed to a personal goal No goal or goal not specific enough
Lack of structure wastes time	→	Structure within the coaching session Post session actions
Being valued by my employer	→	Little or no involvement from organisation The importance of the organisation's support and interest

Figure 8 Themes and subordinate themes

6.2 Participants' stories

In keeping with the approach I took to obtaining my data through conversations, I have presented a view of the participants' stories to support the themes I identified. In presenting their stories I wanted the reader to feel our presence and hear our voices in the conversations (see appendix 13 themes and sub themes identified and appendix 14, selected quotations from the research conversations).

The conversations took place either at the participant's place of work or a venue chosen by them. All the participants had indicated their willingness to take part and the conversations were open, sharing and honest; they were reflective in nature, particularly Category B participants and the second conversation with Category A participants.

Of the 12 participants, all of whom were Executive Talent working in corporate organisations, which included professional service firms, three were introduced to me by a mutual business associate or coaching peer; six approached me directly, and the three category A participants were recruited as a result of my direct approach to the HR Director of their employer.

The coaching engagements were between six and twelve months in duration.

<u>Category A participants</u>

Dara's story

Dara was a senior lawyer in a law firm which ran a coaching programme for its senior lawyers on track for promotion. Dara was a coachee on the programme.

Dara told me she was ambitious for promotion to partnership and had been told by her senior partner that she would be promoted "*shortly*". Because of the competitive nature of her organisation and legal profession, she wanted to put

herself in the optimum position for promotion, so had approached her line manager who suggested coaching.

First conversation

At our first conversation, Dara had completed two coaching sessions over two months. Initially tentative and hesitant, Dara relaxed as our conversation progressed.

She began by focussing on the purpose of coaching, her expectations, goals and motivation to be coached. She had no previous experience of coaching and said she did not really know what to expect of it. She implied that there wasn't a specific goal but more of a direction to the coaching chosen by her line manager, which Dara went along with as she appreciated her line manager's interest and shared goal of promotion. This suggested that she felt valued by her line manager:

> "My line manager knew I wanted to do all I could to get a promotion to partnership ..well no specific objectives (pause) I suppose I just wanted what my line manager wanted to get out of it…I just appreciate the support of someone to help move things along"

Dara's own motivation and reason for being coached seemed to be relevant to her and she compared it with a previous experience. She also emphasised that she now had a choice of coach and this spoke to being valued by her organisation.

> "I had coaching before but it was development coaching which was imposed on me so not of my volition and it didn't really go anywhere because I didn't really want it. Now I do and I have had some sort of choice".

Dara returned to the theme of personal choice and motivation and acknowledged that both her boss and coach appeared to understand the context of the coaching and areas she needed to develop, suggesting to her that they valued her as a person.

> " – Have I got areas to develop? Absolutely – my boss is good at picking out those areas, so is my coach…You get more out of these things if you do them of your own volition, but I really wanted to do this so it was good. So we (organisation) were totally aligned …"

Dara also recognised her own engagement with the coaching:

> "… I don't think I would want to hide any of my thoughts or emotions from the coach. The way you get the most out of it is by being open".

Dara talked about how she was happy with her organisation's choice of coach because of the coach's knowledge and experience in her business:

> " … I had the option of going with a coach who works pretty extensively with my organisation so I went with that person… their understanding of us is helpful and they can guide me. So no, I didn't have a choice but I am happy with their choice"

In terms of the coach's style, Dara talked about how the coach adapted her style to Dara's specific needs at different stages and brought her own experiences to bear on the coaching, demonstrating empathy with Dara.

> "I am pretty relaxed person and my coach was a pretty relaxed person. We talked about different things: the first session it was more about getting some skills honed around, uum, public speaking and I suppose that was relevant because as a partner I would have to do more of that, and she gave me some good tips and it felt more directional. They are good at public speaking themselves and as a business person too it is a good combination… The second session was challenges around my behaviours and my frustrations. Yes, the second was how to manage people, my team, and my coach asked me things and got me to think"

Dara said that she had only had two coaching sessions which were good, but implied that what she had to say was based on limited experience and she expected the relationship and her learning would develop:

> " I am sure with these things there is a development of the relationship over time as you get to know one another better. … over time I feel like it will improve and we will be more aligned, there is still lots of learning to do, more evolution than revolution is how I see it"

Dara picked up the theme of how important it was that the coach understood Dara as a person and what she was grappling with.

> "She knows me, she asks lots of questions about me and yes, lots of different ways of thinking and asking …"

In the context of what would make a bad session Dara indicated that empathy and her coach's experience and her own motivation and accountability were important to a good coaching experience, but models in themselves were not:

> "if I felt there was a lack of understanding on their part of what I was grappling with (small laugh) yes, yes, that would be a bad session. But my coach seems to be on the right track, doesn't use a theoretical coaching model, but brings psychology into the conversation, but it is more about exploration of situations and contexts. My coach asks me before each session what I would like to talk about … The onus is more on me to bring something to the session. … If it started to verge into some other coaching model (laughs) I would be frustrated. It is not really advancing anything, it is a waste of time. I think also that important bit about bringing experience into the conversation and using that as a leverage to bring in more insight is good"

Dara added:

> "…it is important to keep coaching as a qualitative conversation which helps to explore a situation and shine a light on it. I wouldn't want my coach t*o use a model that boxed me".*

Dara referred to structure in her work and her own comfort with it, but was undecided about whether she wanted structure in her coaching:

> "It's good to have some sort of structure because that's what we are comfortable with, well (laughs almost to herself) particularly lawyers, but I guess that's our heartland or how we operate around structure but does that mean we need to come with structure to coaching and with coaching it is about looking at things and so less structure to help themes pop up (pause) on balance it feels right not to have structure as it is not pre judging things, (pause) I'm not sure though, perhaps I do (emphasis on the word 'do') need that structure thinking about it".

Dara closed our conversation by saying that she felt coaching was helpful, including dealing with her own stress levels, but didn't credit it with stimulating her:

> "…it doesn't stimulate more than anything else. Coaching doesn't leave me feeling as if the think tank is empty. It is helpful. I feel great and have clearer paths and slightly less stressed"

<u>Second conversation</u>

Our second conversation took place 7 months and 5 coaching sessions after our first. Dara was relaxed, smiled, spoke quickly and more excitedly, as evidenced by her more animated body language and tone of voice.

Dara began by talking about her goal of promotion to partnership and the coach's style in broadening the coaching conversation by being more challenging and inspiring Dara to challenge herself. Dara was also quite animated when she spoke about her coach being female, a fact that resonated more with her on reflection:

> "…(it) is still around my ultimate goal of partnership but much less task focussed and more strategic. Previously, I had preconceptions about what I need to make partnership. Coaching has helped me to look at it more broadly and realise that so much of it has to come from me and my attitude to it. I feel that my coach helps me to explore it.
>
> The biggest difference between how I feel now and how I felt six or so months ago is that my coach is helping by challenging me and helping me challenge myself. I suppose I feel more comfortable with her. She knows me better and I know her better (pause) it has just occurred to me that even though I didn't choose a female coach, or a coach at all (laughs) I had never really thought about it before but maybe, you know, well I have never felt left behind before because I am a woman, so it didn't occur to me .. but maybe there has been a subconscious element to why I accepted the choice of coach because she is a woman and I feel comfortable with her"

In the first conversation Dara had talked about developing her skills. Now she talked more about coaching in the context of changing behaviours and being more accountable and motivated. Her coach's collaborative style helped her to have more strategic conversations around her goal of promotion:

> "Our sessions are much less structured now and we talk more about how I am dealing with things … in my quest to be promoted. We are looking much more at the qualitative aspects of promotion. We have moved away from the technical aspects … the skills I need, and are looking much more at the expansive qualitative aspects"

Dara was comfortable with the venue and environment for the coaching sessions and credited her coach with understanding her need for a quiet venue:

> "our sessions have been in the office. What is important … is that the environment is quiet and we cannot be overheard. My coach gets that … We talk for about two and a half hours and that feels like the right time to get into a deep conversation and switch off from the daily aspects of work and focus on what I need to do for my future"

Dara moved on to talk about her line manager's collaborative role in supporting her:

> "Shortly, I will be having a threeway feedback session with my line manager, coach and myself. It will be around where the coaching is going and what benefit I feel I am getting out of it. I am so comfortable with that. I am glad about it. We are in this together".

Dara brought our conversation to a close by returning to the issue of her coach's authenticity and the developing and collaborative nature of their relationship, making Dara feel more motivated:

> "I feel more relaxed in the relationship. I am more receptive to it. A lot is down to me and my engagement but the coach has to be engaged too and mine is. It is fundamentally important for my coach to have an inquiring mind and I feel my coach has that and it benefits me, she is open, engaged and interested and authentic… over six months we have had time to develop that relationship and have deeper conversations"

Jade's story

Jade's employer was a UK subsidiary of an international industrial business, which had a coaching programme for 'high potential' employees. Jade was on the programme. She had been working for the company for less than a year when she was identified as a potential future Managing Director. She was offered coaching when an opportunity to promote her to a director's role came up. Jade's coach was also her line manager.

Jade had had three coaching sessions over a three month period when we met for our first research conversation. Our second conversation took place nearly six months later. Both conversations took place in Jade's office. In both conversations Jade appeared relaxed, smiled a lot, looked at me and spoke fluently and naturally.

First conversation

Jade began our conversation by saying how she came to be coached and felt valued by her:

> "… I am relatively new when it comes to … coaching. … my coach has really taken me under her wing … I really value her as someone who cares about my work practice. .. I was told she would be my coach as soon as I joined the company and it was almost (laughs) well not really (laughs again) a condition of me joining, well certainly developing me for the next step"

With regards her coach's style, Jade spoke about her experiences in Jade's industry which she found empowering:

> "Having someone with more experience who has coached others and knows a lot about my area of business, she can advise, no not advise (laughs) I mean ask the right questions and it is really an empowering experience"

Jade highlighted how her coach focussed on Jade as a person by asking about her, and this was the start of a relationship of trust and equality:

> "her questions weren't the standard 'who are you and what have you done' but it was about 'what makes you' (little laugh) and she was looking at what connects people from a deeper level and it made me think and feel positive about myself … the moment I felt I could really (emphasis on word really) trust her was when she opened up about herself and things she wouldn't share with others and I felt she really put her trust in me and that one thing made me think we were on an even keel"

Although Jade expressed positive feelings about her coach being an internal colleague, she was, nevertheless, aware of boundaries within the coaching relationship:

> "having her as a coach takes the relationship beyond just being a boss… so for me it has been interesting to see where the boundary lies This is not a negative thing, just something different …"

Jade talked about how her coach cared about her work but differentiated this from her role as a line manager:

> "She doesn't tell me what to do and give me daily targets on my day job … but gives me the platform to push me and reflect on my own practice and that's something I have never done before …"

Jade also differentiated her relationship with her coach from one she would have with friends and suggested a preference for a coaching relationship with professional boundaries in which care was evident:

> "…we don't need a rapport like I would have with someone I would go out with … , but that doesn't mean to say I don't respect and value who she is and having that friendly rapport that we have, we eeer, there is still that bit of distance but that is good because, you know, being able to speak to each other on a kind of deeper meaningful basis that is important and to do that I think you probably need to have a bit of distance …It is right for me".

Jade reflected on what she was getting out of coaching, namely a focus on what she was good at, but also expressed what she felt was lacking, which was a focus on her areas for development, on which she now wanted to be challenged:

> "So far, she has focussed on what I am good at … but I would now like to focus on what I'm not good at or even (emphasis on word even) what I am not aware I am not good at. So I have asked her if we can focus on my failures ... I have never felt safe enough to discuss in depth my weaknesses but she has given me the voice and platform and we are collaborating"

Jade said she felt able to raise this with her coach because of the trust and care that had developed between them. This contrasted with initial concerns Jade had expressed relating to her coach's dual role:

> "Initially, I felt it was a real challenge to open up to someone, I felt as if I didn't know where the barriers were and how honest I could be and how much I could trust her. There was certainly an element where I was constantly questioning – questioning her motives, questioning how much I could say, questioning if I could trust her. But that has changed so quickly as we have built up trust during the sessions. We are very different people and I didn't get her at first, but I now know more about her style and I know how much she cares about me, about the business and my progress".

Before bringing our conversation to a close, Jade returned to her need to be challenged more by her coach:

> " … I feel like the conversations I have with her could be a bit more adversarial to be pushed and challenged, otherwise I might end up taking liberties with her and going back to what I said earlier, I respect her too much for that ... now the conversation needs to evolve and I am excited but at the same time terrified (giggles) … as she will bring to the table things I haven't thought about which is good"

This tied in with Jade's preference to have structure and focus in her coaching sessions. Her apologetic tone, in the following quote, implied that whilst this was

something that would improve the coaching experience for her, she was reluctant to criticise her coach in view of the immense trust she had in her:

> "Well, sometimes it can get in the way as it is not the focus of the conversation I want to have so it can be a bit frustrating as I want the time coaching for a practical effect sometimes and being a bit more disciplined in our approach, well…"

Second conversation

Jade said that there was no longer a need to spend time developing trust with her coach because it was now well established. She suggested that it was because of the trust that they were able to address areas where she wanted to be challenged:

> "looking back, it was really helpful to build that trust, reflecting back there was a lot of engagement but we spent time developing that … the conversation has changed because the trust and rapport is really there"

Jade also said that she no longer had 'formal' set coaching sessions, but she and her coach met when they felt the need:

> "she (coach) recognises that when I want to be coached I will ask her, so it is more fluid".

Since our first conversation, Jade had been given additional responsibilities and she attributed this to her coach giving her the environment in which to succeed:

> "… She allows my role to flourish, for example, she has removed barriers so that I have been able to succeed. She is a real advocate in the business. and really advocates my role and position and it is amazing to have that support"

Because the coach was also Jade's senior colleague in the business, Jade was not sure sometimes whether the help from her coach was in the context of coach or as a

business colleague or both. Jade gave an example of where her coach had given her the confidence to believe in herself and challenge the opinion of another colleague in relation to a business project. Jade's approach was openly supported by her coach and Jade felt this demonstrated real trust:

> "She (coach) chose to support the work I had done over the past few months and that was hugely important, not just to our relationship but it just reconfirmed the trust I had in her and it reconfirmed, kind of, you know, showed from the very start she trusted in me and my role and ability".

Jade regarded the measure of success in coaching to be the achievement of her goals, which included an alignment of her behaviours with her organisation's vision. Her coach's intimate knowledge of the business, appeared to be relevant to Jade in this respect:

> "The measure of successful coaching is that I achieve my goals and objectives – because it helps me to think about the behaviours I need to achieve those goals … … If your behaviours aren't aligned with the vision, then a coach can help you to align your behaviours by asking the right questions to reflect on what you are doing... in my case, she can also influence other stakeholders by being part of the organisation and understanding the wider context …I think that is unique to me because my coach is also my senior colleague and I don't know how an external coach could get that level of involvement"

Jade spoke about the importance of her own role in coaching, taking responsibility and being accountable. She said:

> "I think being a recipient of coaching has a lot to do with mindset. Wanting to be coached is important …we have goals and a coach should be there to help you achieve them or help you construct an environment where you consider if that is possible. So (speaks slowly) if I don't achieve them, I will

take responsibility, but also reflect on how helpful the coaching has been in helping me to achieve them…"

Jade achieved her promotion to Director a month after her coaching for promotion finished.

Joe's story

Joe was the Operations Director of an international company, for which he had worked for ten years, when we met for our first research conversation. In that period, he had been promoted twice and had been coached by his then line manager for five years. Joe said that the experience been positive but came to an end because his line manager had left the company. Joe said that it was probably *"time anyway"* as it had become too 'friendly' and had begun to lose some objective perspective

Three months before our first conversation, Joe had been identified as being 'in line' for the role of Group Chief Operations Officer ('COO") and his HR Director had suggested coaching to help him to prepare for that role. Joe had had two coaching sessions when we met for our first conversation.

<u>First conversation</u>

Joe described himself as an ambitious, fun loving executive with a lot more 'fuel' in him. He considered himself young to be given the opportunity for promotion to COO but had always "*been focussed and in the right place at the right time*" even though, he said, he had never put time aside for his personal development.

The first thing Joe told me was that he had decided to leave his company, had a new job to go to, and had shared this news with his coach. "*This became my focus"*, he said. He had also decided to take his coach with him to his new company. He said that he wasn't convinced that his current company thought he was the right person for the promotion, and he doubted it himself having concluded that his values no longer sat comfortably with the company's.

Joe's demeanour throughout our conversation was open and engaging. He laughed a lot and walked round the room as he talked.

Joe had chosen his coach. He had met six potential coaches who had all been identified by his company. Having a coach with a sense of humour seemed important to him:

> " I have a dark sense of humour. If the coaches didn't laugh at what I said about why I wanted to be coached – extracting the most out of the company (laughs) – those who didn't laugh I just struck them off"

Having experience in business and having worked at a similar level to Joe was also part of his criteria in choosing a coach:

> "…it was important that they had worked or advised at my level. A smart young consultant could tell me what I need to do to get to where I want to get to but I can get all of that out of a book. Help around how to behave around a Board table, for example, can only be obtained through coaching by people who have done it and make me feel like they know what I am experiencing.… you need to be able to speak to someone who can help with the EI and actually help you prepare for that …"

With regards to style, Joe valued the coach's ability to challenge him which was an indication to Joe that the coach understood him:

> " he is able to challenge me which is so important in an executive role, you need to be challenged… actually we need to know about our bad habits, especially if we are going for bigger roles (laughs) and I realised I had got into them. I could tell my coach understood what I meant by things he said and challenged me on (laughs)"

The coach's ability to empathise and be genuinely interested in Joe were also characteristics Joe sought in his coach. In the context of his decision to leave the company and tell his coach he said:

> "… a few days after I had said I was going to resign he just dropped me a note and said – how did it go – this was good and authentic and he didn't do it because he had to but because he genuinely wanted to know how I was and how the business took it … sharing something with somebody is important and for me it is about empathy"

Joe had been experiencing doubts about how he fitted in to his current company and he said that challenges from his coach were relevant to his decision to leave and made him think more deeply:

> "he (coach) made me feel a bit embarrassed, in a good way (laughs) about some of the things I did. He was really interested in me as a person"

Joe returned to his coach's style and feeling valued by his coach and understanding him as a person, on several occasions. For example, the coach's ability to create space for Joe to think was valuable to him:

> "so easy to forget yourself when you are working to develop your own team and people and do the best for your company. (coach) takes notes and when I get the notes back he will say things like 'have you read this in HBR' or 'have you thought about changing your style', and I thought, maybe I am in the wrong place … it made me think about my style"

Personally engaging with the coaching was a factor that contributed to how Joe felt about his experience and what he got out of it; the coaching environment, the space away from work and being able to think, the coach's focus on him as a person and the professional coach/coachee relationship were aspects Joe kept returning to. In just a few coaching sessions, Joe had concluded that his coach knew him and

respected him and his choices as a person and trust between them had developed. Joe also referred to the coach's choice of venue which was an indication to Joe that the coach understood his personality and need for time and space for coaching:

> "the sessions are 3-4 hours off-site, often in a hotel lobby or similar and we always have something to eat and drink which is great for me. In the office we have back to back meetings and don't have time for ourselves. It is the right thing to do to focus on me and I need a decent amount of time. He talks a bit about himself and although it isn't really relevant it really just made me think we are having a good straightforward conversation and building trust by being able to say the best and worst of things that are going on. I think we have that relationship. He has read and knows so much about personal development and is like a walking library (smiles broadly whilst talking quite fast but articulately and in a flow)…"

A professional boundary between him and his coach was relevant to Joe's ability to engage in the coaching and, like Jade, he also differentiated his relationship with his coach from one with a friend. This speaks to both a loose structure in the coaching sessions and the quality of the relationship:

> " it's not like being in a pub with a mate because my coach keeps bringing me back to what is relevant and he is teasing it out of me. He gives me reading, … and I think he has just worked me out and is good at highlighting chapters and saying 'go to this bit, you will like it' rather than the whole book (laughs). … He has worked out the things that are important to me. … It's funny but my previous coach was internal and very grounded and he said things with clarity but I was always conscious that he was internal and my line manager as well and, well, having someone internal can be a bit dangerous as we became too friendly and complacent. I think you can get too familiar"'

On a few occasions in our conversation Joe referred to his organisation's involvement in the decisions to be coached, goal setting and expectations and I detected Joe's increasing unease and scepticism about his organisation's involvement and his own relationship to their involvement, in the words and quieter and more thoughtful tone he used. For example:

> "I think what my company was doing was working out whether I could be promoted in the next couple of years, but I think they had already predetermined that I wouldn't and so for me the coaching was to help me as an individual to work out what I was going to do and what I really wanted. We are right for a company for some time and then maybe it's just time to move on, so companies do this weird thing of 'let's put them into coaching'. My company didn't really engage much with me once I had my coach. That in itself was a sign to me that they wanted me to work it out for myself but it didn't feel authentic and I would have like them to be more interested in me and the coaching"

<u>Second conversation</u>

Our second conversation took place six months after our first. Joe was now working for a smaller company in a more senior position. His coaching sessions had come to an end just before he left his previous company. He had completed 8 sessions.

Joe started by reflecting on his former organisation's involvement in his coaching and he had a more positive perspective than previously:

> "I now reflect, I had switched the lights on with my company and said I was available for coaching to help me to get to the next stage and they embraced this and said it would help me to prepare but I think it was also to help me think about me and what I wanted and needed and how that fit with the company. If I am right, it was amazingly insightful of them"

Joe was taking responsibility for his own decisions but said how the focussed, structured and good coaching conversations had helped him to reach them. He reflected on valuing his coach at a time when he needed to think through options:

> "I said, when we last met, that I wanted to continue with my coach whatever I decided to do, even changing companies, because I felt he was good for me and was there for me. In the coaching, what helped me reach my conclusions was the really focussed and good conversations about what gives me energy and where I get refreshed and get pushed forward as well as what my values were.... My coach teased all that out of me just gently but in a focused structured sort of way. My coach had a focus and we followed that".

Joe's expressed feelings about his former coach, his style, the trust built up between them and feeling valued by the coach were as strong, if not stronger, than they were in our first conversation. He partly attributed his confidence about moving in to his new company to his coaching sessions which he said helped him to look more at himself as an individual.

Category B participants

All the category B participants were made aware of my research through coaching colleagues or mutual business contacts and either approached me directly or were introduced by our mutual contact.

Jackson's story

When we first met, Jackson was a part owner in a business he had founded six months after his coaching sessions had come to an end.

Jackson told me that he had been coached for promotion three years earlier in the industrial company in which he was a director. He had 8 coaching sessions over the course of around 12 months.

Throughout our conversation, Jackson was articulate, vibrant, smiled and laughed a lot. He had gone straight into business from school and had come up *"the hard way. People seemed to think there was something in me from a very young age and I always had someone to help me, support me, lead me."*

It was evident that Jackson's background, as someone who had worked his way up through the company, together with his admiration, respect and support of his then boss, were significant factors in how he felt about the coaching experience. For example, in respect of his introduction to coaching for promotion he said:

> "It was funny, as I have never been academic and the thought of being developed scared me and made me nervous (laughs) …Seriously, I felt fine about that as I knew and they knew I was really good commercially. My boss was going to be moving on and he came to me and said something like he wanted me to step in his shoes and said we should address some of the blind spots, which was a good way of putting it (laughs). We talked about how to get me into the best position for promotion. In a way, I didn't want to step into his shoes because they were such big shoes to fill and he was brilliant but he had real faith in me."

Jackson said his boss's faith in and respect for him, factored into Jackson's decision to accept the coach proposed by his boss, as he felt that he was being given a choice, and his organisation was demonstrating that they cared for him.

> "So he (boss) introduced me to a coach he really trusted and respected. My boss said, just have a coffee with this coach and see what you think. I knew my boss had my best interests at heart so I went ahead and it was brilliant"

Very early in our conversation, Jackson spoke about his goals and indicated that he had very clear ideas of what he wanted to get out of his coaching sessions and felt that exploring other options was an important part of considering promotion:

> "I had in mind running my own business. I knew I could make it commercial. the first time I met him (coach) I said I want to use these hours to really think about other things I could do and not just this possible promotion"

Jackson 's coach said that he would need to talk to the organisation to make sure they were comfortable with addressing slightly different goals than those discussed by the organisation:

> "To his credit, Bob (coach) said he could only discuss that with the company's permission, which, amazingly, though maybe not amazingly but sensibly, the business gave".

Jackson suggested that this experience indicated to him that both his coach and the organisation were interested in him and valued him as a person.

The coach's respectful, challenging, value driven and collaborative style and Jackson's perception that the coach wanted to coach him and wanted to understand him, were factors that Jackson talked about positively:

> "Bob said… let's go back to the beginning and asked me to give him a history of me, who I am, …what I had done, he basically mapped me out (emphasis by speaking slowly and enunciating each word), it was very good, it was just about me and emotionally led … I knew I wanted Bob as my coach as he seemed genuine, emotional, in a good way, and I thought he really wanted to coach me. This was indicative of how coaching was going to be and it was (laughs)"

Jackson recounted how the basic structure of his coaching sessions, together with the coach's style, gave him confidence:

> "Our way of doing a session was we would have a wad of rolling notes which I still have and refer to constantly. … It is very much about the coach and coachee and their styles. Bob is not aggressive but does challenge in an uncle type of way. I know he gets something from me to the point we talked about 'the power of now' and other books on mindfulness etc and he suggested one day we meditate at the end of our session (laughs) he said he found a great energy with me and we energised each other. We finished our sessions with a meditation"

Jackson also valued the post session actions:

> "Sessions were basically based on actions that had come out of earlier sessions, but he also got me to think about next steps and my motivation etc. It gave me the confidence to go with my sense of what was right for me. We always started the session with him asking me 'what do you want to get out of this today' … at the end we always do an action list on a flip chart and I take that away and write it up and it made me think about it by writing it up"

The coaching environment and the coach's focus on Jackson as a person made his coaching experience positive:

> "So we met in this great place off-site in the countryside and it was so quiet and every time I got within a mile of the place I just relaxed and all my concerns disappeared in the environment and Bob's style really got so much out of me. You know, a coach just helps you unpick what is there inside you and that is how I felt with Bob. He helped me to distil my life into a couple of sheets and that felt so good".

Although the structure of his coaching sessions was not formal, there was a structure in the sense of each session being in the same specific venue, focusing on actions from the previous session and ending with a brief meditation.

Self confidence was a strong theme to which Jackson returned and he credited his coach with helping him to develop self confidence and self belief:

> "Without him, I wouldn't have developed the confidence I have in the way I did and some of that confidence was about making different choices about the next stage in my career being confident enough to know that it was time to move on"

At the same time, Jackson seemed very aware of his own role in being motivated and accountable:

> " I got headspace, where are we at and where do we need to get to sort of thing. It is all there, he just helps get it out.

Jackson also wanted a professional, arms length relationship with his coach:

> "He is not a friend but if I felt at any stage I needed to talk to him outside the session I knew I could call him, but I wouldn't invite him over for Sunday lunch or anything like that (laughs). There has to be that emotional distance and if I thought he was becoming, or I was becoming, too emotionally attached I would think there might be an emotional pull to be biased and that wouldn't be right".

Trust was fundamental to Jackson's relationships, both with his coach and his boss. In respect of his relationship with his own boss and how that influenced his approach to coaching he said:

> "If someone doesn't want it, fine, but if you have that relationship of trust to begin with then … Just like me and my then boss, I trusted that he (boss) wanted the best for me and was interested in me and that is why I went for it and why they paid for it (laughs)"

Sarah's story

At the time of her coaching experience, Sarah was an accountant in an international manufacturing business, having joined as a junior accountant 12 years previously. She had been identified as a potential future Board member. Sarah said: "*I was told that I would be promoted to the board in 12 months*' and she initially focused the coaching on being ready *'it was more about being successful once there".* The opportunity to be coached, to help her prepare for the promotion had been offered to her by the CEO. Sarah was one of the only senior female executives in her organisation and she had been conscious that, if she got the promotion to the Board, she would be the only female on it.

Sarah was coached for 6 months, by two different coaches, and three months later was promoted. At the time of our research conversation, Sarah had been a director and member of the Board for 10 months.

Throughout our conversation Sarah was quietly spoken, appeared to be in a reflective mood, indicated by her pauses, slow pace and sometimes the words she used.

Sarah chose her own coaches. There were aspects about the background of the first coach, including her gender and business experience, that resonated with Sarah:

> "… I was given about six CVs … I was looking for someone with a similar background to me as I thought that would be most useful. I found one who was an accountant, like me, and with just my background in industry .. and the connection felt strong…. I also wanted someone old enough to have experience at my level …and actually another reason I chose my coach was she was a woman and I thought she would be able to understand my perspective and be able to put herself in my shoes ..and my world"

Sarah felt she could tell her coach things that:

> "maybe I wouldn't say to a man, because I knew she would understand where I was coming from"

Sarah's second coach was also a woman and this was a factor in her choice. This time, she wanted someone who would bring more structure into the sessions, something lacking in her first coaching experience:

> "The second coach, well I looked at three coaches' CVs. I was keen to go into it with more structure and in a more formal setting. One lady in particular had coached women and done academic research on coaching women and it seemed like a valuable thing to have done, so again I only met two – her and a man … I chose the woman again".

Sarah suggested that more structure with her first coach would have enabled her to benefit from the coaching and be more accountable and not forget her learning:

> "The sessions weren't really very structured and I would have preferred some structure and things to go away with… There was a risk that I stepped out of the room at the end of the coaching and forget everything and didn't do anything with it. It would have been better if I had been held more to account and held myself to account. A statement of intent or actions at the end would have been useful. She took … It would have been useful if she had shared them with me. In the sessions I didn't take notes because I wanted to concentrate"

An example of where Sarah felt central to the coaching and valued by the coach related to her coach's choice of venue which indicated to Sarah some emotional intelligence on the coach's part:

> "I am an INTJ… and I don't like distractions. With my second coach we worked in this very meeting room (half smile, gently gesticulating to indicate the room with no windows. Hands being lowered slowly and voice slowing

down) so no windows and no distractions at all and quiet. My coach knew my Myers Briggs profile and this must have made her think what sort of venue would be best for me. She was right, I preferred that"

Sarah was able to reflect on aspects of her first coaching experience which were positive for her and what wasn't and this benefited her in her second experience:

"A large part of preferring the second was because I knew more about what I wanted to get out of it. I talked to my second coach about my first experience and what was good and not so good. …well, I said to her, after what I have told you about my first experience of coaching and what I am working towards, you know the Board and all of that, what can you recommend we do in these sessions. So in the beginning she talked about the kinds of things we would cover and obviously it did go off on a tangent, but we got back on track and it was more structured"

Sarah felt her second experience was more collaborative than her first and this made her feel more motivated and accountable. She put this down to developing self confidence:

"I see a coach as someone who helps guide (animated) it was definitely a two way process, I told her what I wanted to get out of my development and asked her how we could do that – you know, the mechanisms to helping me with that development. but it was my development and I knew what I needed. It was really all about self confidence and all that."

Sarah did, however, express regret about not having any real expectations of the coaching:

"I didn't really have any expectations and should have done (nodding her head as she spoke slowly and lower in volume. She gave a small smile and

paused for a few seconds) I didn't know what to expect really other than she was going to help me deal with difficult aspects of moving to the Board. If I think about it now (another slight smile and shrug of the shoulders), I did have unrealistic expectations of my coach, I thought I would see immediate changes and benefits whereas now I know that it is a long term strategy and behaviours change over time and a lot of it is what I do after the coaching session. I didn't appreciate that at first and no-one really explained it to me."

Sarah returned to her choice of coaches and her preferred style of being challenged and creating a professional distance. With regards her second coach she said:

"But I respected her and trusted her integrity and never felt like it wouldn't be confidential. She was professional but shared just enough about herself and background to make it feel a bit personal but not too much it needs to be an arms length relationship, but I suppose that's the accountant in me (laughs). There is a fine balance, for example, sharing something about managing her own career with children. She was just trying to empathise I suppose (pause) and it was useful (pause) but I wouldn't want it too personal and I think she could have been tougher and held me to account".

Peter's story

Peter was the managing director of a UK industrial company at the time of his coaching for promotion experiences. He had risen through a traditional route, starting in marketing for an international engineering company and being promoted to general management positions.

His HR Director and CEO said they were considering him for a divisional CEO in one of their fast growing divisions. He was offered coaching to help him to prepare for the potential promotion. Peter's organisation paid for the coaching sessions. He was promoted within a few months of finishing his coaching engagement.

Peter told me that he had two experiences of coaching, both of which were good. Although only the first related directly to preparing for promotion, Peter chose to talk about both as he felt the second one, which, he said, helped him once in the role, was a useful comparison.

Our research conversation took place five years after his first coaching experience finished. Peter was now working for a different organisation, having recently joined as the CEO. Throughout our conversation, he smiled, and talked easily and fluently in a very measured way.

Peter recounted how his organisation had suggested coaching and how he chose his first coach, which was on the basis of the coach's background in industry and experience of working at Board level:

> "…my company suggested that I have some coaching to focus on some of the areas that I needed to improve. I looked at it positively as it was about me learning what I didn't know and being ready for that and promotion … I was given the choice of about five coaches and I chose my coach, … he had a very similar industrial background to mine and had been through promotions and dealt with similar people, executives, boards as me. I thought it would be really helpful to get his perspective but also his experiences and tips. I felt very lucky".

He said how his two different coaches had very different styles but he recognised that both of them used a structure which gave him the focus he needed at that stage in his career. Peter valued the structure within the sessions and actions in between sessions with his first coach:

> "what I liked …it was very formulaic, we set objectives for each session and things to do in between …there were expectations and objectives. It was very disciplined. … We set out a work plan (laughs) which was great, rigorous and focussed"

Peter described the structure in his coaching sessions with his second coach as less formulaic but more strategic:

> '".. I no longer needed the formulaic approach but a more strategic one as I was then in the job and needed to think about business strategies... no specific objectives at the beginning of the session but always focussed on talking about what was on my mind… "

Peter's coaching sessions with his first coach lasted three years, including the first year in Peter's promoted role. Peter suggested that as the time went on, and his coaching needs changed from preparing for promotion to how to work within the new role, the formulaic and mechanistic style was less helpful to him.

Peter reflected and concluded that different coaching styles were useful for different needs and times in one's career:

> " I suppose it depends where you are. The second coach worked for me in my much more senior role but I needed the formulaic and disciplined approach of coach one to work towards my promotion"

Peter talked positively about his organisation's continuing involvement in the first coaching engagement and how that indicated to him that they trusted him and were interested in him:

> "One thing I felt was really good was that my HR director would meet coach one every month to hear about progress, … I knew my coach wouldn't give away anything we talked about and it demonstrated that they were interested in me (laughs) maybe they wanted to make sure I wasn't wasting the opportunity or their money (laughs again) but seriously they trusted me and that was good… I also trusted the people who suggested the coaching to me in the first place and would often have chats with them – …just about how

> I felt I was progressing with the coaching and work in general. It felt good and moving in the right direction"

When I asked Peter what it was about his coaches that gave him the confidence that their conversation would remain confidential, he came back to the issue of trust and suggested it was instinct and his assumption that coaching would be confidential:

> "Just a feeling really. I felt I trusted them and trusted it would be confidential and not reporting back every five minutes. With both coaches I felt really trusted… I suppose I just assumed that trust was there until proved otherwise."

The choice of venue in each coaching experience was the coach's but Peter felt that each venue lent itself to the style of the coaching and to Peter's needs at that time:

> "I met coach one in the office, a proper coaching environment, it worked well with our disciplined coaching. But so did coach two's home and comfy armchairs where we both just chatted"

Peter recognised that his personal motivation, goals and accountability were key to how he felt about the coaching:

> "Another key thing is that there has to be responsibility on both sides. The person being coached has to really want to be coached and have an idea of what they want to achieve and work hard in the session. The coach has to be there for the other person and support and challenge"

Jim's story

Jim was a divisional CEO in an international company and was being considered for the Group CEO role when he was coached for promotion. Jim left that company shortly after his coaching experience, citing not being offered the promotion as a reason for leaving.

Our research conversation took place three years after his coaching finished. Jim's career had been in the international industrial sector. He had been promoted every few years and he told me he had always had his sights on a Group CEO role. Jim's organisation had told him that he would almost certainly take on the Group CEO role when the current CEO retired. However, the lack of a specific date for the CEO's retirement was a source of frustration for Jim. Jim wanted to put himself in the best position for the promotion. He said his organisation had not suggested coaching, but he was motivated and proactive in identifying and instigating coaching for himself:

> "it was more about not having anyone in the organisation with a mentoring or coaching role or someone to say you should do some coaching. So it was in the context of me saying I want to do that for myself and thinking it would be helpful for me to talk to someone about what I should be doing to prepare myself and for my own personal development. My company was happy for me to have it and paid for it"

Jim had two coaches over the period of a year. He had chosen one on the recommendation of someone he trusted and the second because he had worked with Jim's company:

> "I had two goes at it. First with Max who was a cross between someone who wrote books on strategy and behaviours and helping us with our company strategy days and apparently had done some sort of coaching or mentoring. He said he would do some one on one stuff with me. So I went with it. The second one was Sheila, who an HR friend of mine recommended and said she was fantastic."

Jim had only a few sessions with Max while looking for a longer term coach. In Jim's words, Sheila was, "*a pure coach*" having been *"formally trained as a coach"* as opposed to Max who "*did a variety of things in addition to coaching and mentoring"*.

Jim was clear about why he wanted to be coached *"my thought that it would be beneficial to me in a promotional context"* but described his coaching experiences overall as *"unsatisfactory"* and *"underwhelming"* There appeared to be a number of factors why this was so for Jim, including: his lack of clarity or misconceptions about what a coach did; lack of goals and expectations; lack of organisational involvement; and a perceived guilt because of the cost of coaching and his doubts about the value he was getting out of it:

> "Anyway, (slight sigh) I say coaching was unsatisfactory, well not unsatisfactory but underwhelming and I didn't know what to get out of it and I thought it was an indulgent thing to do and (emphasis on the word and) expensive. So I thought I was being self indulgent because there were no specific objectives. So I went into it with no clear direction but just knowing it was costing my organisation a lot of money. So I brought it to a halt after a few sessions. On reflection … if I had clarity of why I was there e.g. specific time frame for a promotion … then I would have found it easier to then say this is what coaching is designed to achieve or address and then it would have been money well spent".

Jim also felt that not having a specific objective was difficult for his coach and the coaching felt superficial:

> "There were no specific objectives to my coaching which was harder for the coach too because there wasn't a specific date for promotion. I found it bizarrely, quite superficial. I turned up for a session and there was no output or tasks I had to go away with, so it was easy to be engaged in the session and find it interesting but then not give it a moment's thought till next time… I allowed it to be superficial because I had no real goals. I wasn't on a succession plan, my organisation didn't do that sort of thing (pause). We all knew the CEO was going to retire and everyone wanted me to be in a good position for that role. So, I imagined I would go to a coach and explain all of that and the coach would help me to think through options between now and the next

time but I didn't know what to get out of it and the coaches didn't really help me so it felt artificial… "

Jim spoke about his organisation's involvement and moral support being minimal:

"I really needed the organisation to say you are up for the CEO role and here is the money for coaching to help you get there. As it was, it was my initiative even though the organisation paid"

Jim seemed to get some enjoyment and satisfaction during the coaching session itself, but not outside the sessions and he reflected on what could have made his experience different and valuable to him:

"I suppose I felt before the session 'oh no, it's come round again' (laughs) but then in the session it was enjoyable and good to have someone interested in you and pay you some attention. You know in business it can be draining because you are constantly giving. So, I felt good in the coaching itself, but afterwards didn't have anything to do with it. … HR or my line manager for example, could have said to me – 'what are you going to do about this and what will you take away from this session and how will you embed it in your thinking?'. But nobody did. Maybe a proper structure or focus would have helped. I have since heard about coaching models. Maybe that would have helped. Something that guided me to think about what I wanted to get out of it and achieve by the end of the session or even end of all the sessions. I don't remember either of my coaches having a model or structure. I think I would have found it helpful. With my guilt about the spend, if I'd had homework to do, you know actions, what next, then I would have been able to decide if I had the inclination to carry on"

Jim inferred that he accepted some responsibility for not getting enough out of the coaching:

> "My issue, not theirs. as my motivation wasn't clear. To work, I think it has to be something that the coachee actively and positively embraces and I don't think I did. Both parties have to be clear about why they are there and what are their responsibilities. I don't think I took on any responsibilities"

I asked Jim what impact, if any, either of his coaching experiences had on his progress to promotion. He said he didn't achieve his promotion and felt that his organisation and coach needed to understand the broader context more and take more of a personal interest in him. This all contributed to him feeling alone in the coaching and this had a negative impact on his experience:

> " because of the culture and structure of where I was working there was little personal input from the business. Our focus was on the practical rather than the personal… (quickly) If my boss had come to me and said we want to put you in the best position for promotion … and openly supported me and helped raise my profile internally, well (laughs) imagine that (laughs. Pauses, shoulders raised and eyes directly forward focussed on the researcher). I would have liked the coach to spend time with the organisation to understand the broader context rather than working in a void. I felt in a void or vacuum which just felt self-indulgent. Oh, and don't worry about the cost just get the most out of it, what a difference that might that have made to me!"

Jim returned to the issue of the context being understood by all parties as he drew the conversation to a close:

> "But overall, context is key and the coach and coachee understanding that context of coaching and the organisation. The organisation has to be purposeful about it too, not sure mine was."

Anita's story

Anita had been coached three years before our conversation. At the time of her coaching, Anita, an accountant by background, was a director for a professional services firm and was being considered for partnership. At the outset she *"wasn't sure whether being a partner was what I wanted"* and whether the professional services sector was where she wanted to be anymore. She said she "*used coaching as a way of exploring what to do next",* possibly pursuing an entrepreneurial career, but had not shared that with her firm.

Anita's organisation had neither suggested coaching, nor paid for it, nor chosen the coach.

Throughout our conversation, Anita was very measured in her speech, mannerisms and tone of voice. Her voice was quiet, but confident, which I interpreted by the way she looked me in the eye throughout the conversation.

At the end of her twelve month coaching assignment, Anita said she had decided to leave her firm and set up her own business. She knew, when she engaged her coach, that she would also use it to explore other options, but still regarded the coaching as helping her to prepare for a promotion:

> "I was earmarked for promotion … but wasn't sure if it was what I wanted so I wanted to explore a more entrepreneurial route. For me it was still a promotion (smiles), just somewhere else (pause) and doing something different (pause) but a personal promotion nevertheless"

At the point of our research conversation, Anita had been managing her own coaching and consultancy business for nearly two years. She said that *"coaching was one of the things that had given me the freedom and space to think, to reach that decision".*

Anita chose her coach based on the coach's own entrepreneurial background. She had not considered any other coach:

> "I engaged my coach myself and paid for it personally, someone had recommended a particular coach who had worked in the same sector as me. That was perfect as I wanted someone who could relate to my world but also the world I might enter. I regarded him as entrepreneurial because he had set up his own coaching business, so I admired that"

The coach's style, model or approach to coaching was not something that Anita considered initially when engaging her coach, but was something she reflected on following her coaching experience:

> "I had no idea of his philosophy or model of coaching and to be honest even now after the coaching I couldn't tell you what it was... He may have explained it but I don't remember. I can tell you one thing I do remember and that was he asked me once and I don't remember the context, 'what are you afraid of?' I remember because (pause) I think at that time, reflecting afterwards, maybe a sense of frustration, not quite anger, but a bit of irritability because it might have been an incongruous question and not really related to our conversation and I remember I didn't get the context of that question. I said, I am not afraid. Obviously, on reflection, some years later, and with more experience, I realise it was a provocative approach, you know, my coach's style of questioning me. It was not about trying to create a friendly relationship and maybe the coach has to create some discomfort to get the right effect. It was objective, leading to a more useful experience, clearly it resonated."

The fact that her coach's 'provocative' question was an abiding memory of her coaching, I asked her if she wanted to say more about the irritability she referred to.

> "It wasn't irritability about his right to ask that question but on reflection it was a misunderstanding on my part, of my need, but actually (pausing) what I realise now is that it was a very astute question but it almost missed the point, as I wasn't astute enough, or had the capacity, at the time, to think this has struck a nerve and asked myself what was going on"'

This suggested that Anita had not been receptive to the style of very challenging questioning at the time, but on reflection she had gained an appreciation for why it might have been used.

Anita reflected a lot on how she felt about the coaching three years later and considered self reflection as one of the biggest benefits of coaching and attributed much of this to her coach's style of asking questions and giving her space to think (Kline, 1999). Anita said:

> " So for me that self knowledge is more comfortable as I unravel a bit of self mystery as I get to know myself better. My coach helped me to do that and I suppose come to my own decisions about where next. Possibly the biggest benefit of my coaching, he made me think and reflect which was helpful. ".

Anita felt that there wasn't enough focus on goals and a clear process including post session actions and reflected on whether her coach's style, in this regard, had been the right one for her:

> "…maybe we weren't clear enough on the process we needed to go through (another pause) perhaps it was less goal focussed than it could have been. I am just thinking about that now. I don't remember finishing a coaching session with a clear set of things to do before the next session. It was perhaps a higher level of counsel, less granular … on reflection, possibly I needed more, (pause) in terms of my ultimate goal (pause) the approach was wrong"

Anita also suggested that a specific goal and actions might have helped in ascertaining the effectiveness of the coaching:

> "perhaps if there had been a goal and list of actions then I might have assumed that success would follow and if it didn't I might have thought that the coaching had failed".

Anita also reflected on whether she could have been held more accountable in her coaching but failed to reach a conclusion.

Anita felt the relationship with her coach had been a good one, overall, and cited a few reasons, including the coach's professional background and objective distance, which lent him credibility in her eyes:

> "So why was I content with the coaching relationship at the time, which I was. Now that might have been because it was my first experience of being coached and just going through that process with someone who had been very successful in his career, credibility played a big role for me. Also, difficult at that time to get a conversation or guidance with someone I respected without me thinking it was just trivial or not useful as would be with family and friends. … So the nature of the relationship with my coach was very important and providing me with something that wasn't available to me from elsewhere".

Anita also felt that there was an equality in her relationship with her coach in terms of contributions:

> "I felt comfortable, I felt I was (pause) intellectually challenged which I liked (speaking slowly and nodding) I felt like he understood my world. In fact he was of greater intellectual capacity and he was more successful in his former career than I was so I saw him positively superior to me in that (emphasis on the word that) respect which was good for me. But I certainly felt equal in our

> coaching relationship and sessions. The equality in the relationship came from the weight of our contributions. His voice had no more importance than mine in those sessions … in some respects the fact that I was a client meant I had more power …it is interesting… we mutually agreed when to have sessions. He decided the venue. The nature of the conversation I had power and control there… so not one sided but mutual and so that says something about the relationship and strong rapport but, and I emphasise this but, it was professional and objective and I don't regard him as a friend"

Anita felt that her coach's style was challenging but supportive which resonated with her own style:

Overall, our coaching conversation was a blend of Anita's recollections about how she felt at the time of her coaching and how she felt with the benefit of reflection. Anita suggested that her coach could have given her things to do in between coaching sessions that would have made her consider her coaching on a deeper and more meaningful level. She said she would: *"forget what we talked about and didn't take away actions, maybe he could have done that, but something stopped us doing that and maybe only on reflection now am I thinking that would have been a possibility and given me more"*

Anita had not mentioned her then employing organisation, so I asked her if she had anything to say about it:

> "not a lot to say really because they didn't get involved. I decided, I paid. They didn't ask about it. They didn't speak to my coach (pause) yes, that's interesting isn't, (looking at me and her face changing into a questioning expression) I was on track for a bigger role, I think, no I'm sure they knew I was being coached and they didn't show any interest or ask how it was progressing and was I getting anything out of it (looking directly at me) maybe they missed a trick"

Denise's story

When we met, Denise was happy in her role as senior partner in an accountancy firm. She had been promoted to partnership when she was very young and relatively inexperienced.

It was Denise's initiative to engage a coach to help her prepare for promotion to partnership and she had shared this with her line manager:

> "we are taught how to be accountants and apply it but never how to manage people. Partnership is a big step up and a challenge in terms of managing people"

Denise had two experiences of coaching in preparation for her promotion. She chose her own coaches and paid for them, but had told her line manager.

Denise's first experience was with the former HR director of a former client, who was going through her coaching training and needed 'guinea pigs' to practice on. Denise welcomed this opportunity to have free coaching sessions.

> "I got on really well with her and when she asked me if I would be her 'guinea pig' and be coached by her as part of her coach training, I said yes I will. The timing was great for me and I thought it would be helpful to me and get some first class coaching for nothing (a broad smile and slight pause). I had 6 sessions with her at her house".

Denise's second experience, with another trainee coach, who was also a friend of Denise's, came shortly after the end of the allocated six months with her first coach.

Denise only had one session with her second coach and she attributed that to a lack of connection or dynamic between them:

> "I only did one session because although she is a great friend of mine the dynamic wasn't there and I just didn't feel the connection"

Comparing the relationships of her first and second coaches, Denise said she felt *"challenged, inspired and motivated"* by her first coach. A relationship built on trust was a factor Denise attributed to why she felt it was a positive experience. She said:

> "She just got me and we thought alike .. I liked her sensitivity, tactical approach… the relationship was great. I trusted her … I trusted her integrity … manner of approach was excellent. I would say something and she would say ' what about this' and I stopped and thought that is a good comment and it made me think. …"

With regards her second coach Denise said:

> "The second coach, much as I love her and she is a friend, it was a confidence thing. Professionally she just wasn't there. She was very ummm, there was no animation, no inspiration from her whereas the first coach was enthusiastic, motivating me, made me think and the second one just didn't. Maybe it was because I couldn't think of anything to say and she didn't seem able to draw out of me anything to talk about."

Denise also commented that her first coach *"had also been a woman in a male dominated work place and that was useful to me as she could understand my position"* and so could empathise with Denise. She also felt she could *"connect"* with her but not with the second:

> "One thing that comes out of the two experiences is the connection. I connected with the first but not the second and if you don't feel you connect then you are not going to get anything out of it"

I asked Denise how she recognised a connection and she said:

> "I suppose their demeanour, speech pattern, how they responded to me and talked to me which made me listen. I felt as one with my first coach"

Although Denise had paid for her own coaching she had mentioned it to her senior partner and felt he demonstrated his interest and support by asking her about the coaching and giving her the time and space to be coached:

> "he was really good with me and asked about it and gave me his moral support and let me take time out and I try and copy him in how I support others and be a role model"

As we came towards the end of our conversation, I asked Denise how she might approach coaching if she had another opportunity to be coached and she talked about preparation, setting expectations, putting building blocks in place and focusing on goals. She reflected that the lack of setting expectations and having structure might have been a reason why coaching with her second coach had not worked for her. She said quickly and without hesitation:

> "I would put building blocks in place, definitely – so what do I want to get out if it, how will I do that, what will the coach do to help me. We would need to have specific goals so that I know what to expect and I can measure at the end of it whether I have achieved what I set out to achieve (became quiet for a moment, leaned head to one side, looked up and said quietly) …second coaching experience … it was like an open book with blank pages. She didn't outline at the start what we were going to achieve. It was a conversation with no parameters. Whereas my first coach did set parameters and that is why it worked for me. I knew what we were working towards"

Then after a pause, Denise commented on her own responsibility to set a plan:

> "when I said a moment ago that my second coach didn't set out actions or a plan, maybe I should have done that but I didn't know".

Denise concluded that the coaching with her first coach helped her to think about what it would mean to be a partner and this helped her to prepare and gain the promotion. Denise felt trusted by her first coach because "she listened to me and seemed genuinely interested in what I had to say" Denise said she reciprocated that trust by being open and honest.

Aysha's story

Our research conversation took place three years after Aysha's coaching for promotion experience. She had left her company shortly after her coaching ended and had joined a similar business in a more senior role as a divisional director.

At the time of her coaching, Aysha was a sales director in an industrial company where she had worked for five years. She was not happy at work, nor in her relationship with her line manager.

Aysha's body language throughout our conversation was relaxed, her arms were open, she smiled and laughed, she spoke clearly with minimal hesitation.

Aysha had enjoyed a *"fairly rapid rise"* throughout her career in business. She had accepted the offer of coaching from her employer when she was being considered for promotion to a senior director role. She had done so reluctantly because she was going through a *"difficult patch"* at work and hadn't felt supported by her employer. At the time she regarded coaching as a *"remedial"* intervention. Trusted friends had, however, encouraged her to accept the offer of coaching:

> "All of us who were in the running for the role were offered coaches. I didn't accept straight away until a friend suggested to me that I should go with it. I saw it as remedial at first and not about promotion at all, but two people I respected told me they'd had similar feelings"

Gender was a relevant factor in Aysha's choice of coach:

> "she was, like me, a woman working in a predominantly male working environment and managing a totally male team. Being a woman was a plus for me. … we explored this whole concept of being a woman in a very male dominated environment"

Trust, however, was the dominant theme running through Aysha's story. Her perception of her organisation's relationship with her coach made her initially wary of her relationship with her coach:

> "I remember my first session, I was guarded about what I was going to say and conscious that my employer had suggested it rather than it coming from me. I felt her affinity with my immediate boss made me feel uncomfortable".

Aysha raised the issue of trust in her coach again in respect of the coach's background, experience and confidentiality and gave two examples of when she didn't trust her coach:

> "She said she hadn't coached much in my sector and I later found out that she had never (loudly said) coached in my sector (laughs) but (brushes her hand away as if to dismiss this thought) that is by the by and didn't matter in the slightest (eyes looking upwards and shoulders raised momentarily).
>
> She (coach) suggested a 360 degree feedback. She encouraged me to be open, she said I had a moral obligation. I thought this was a great plan to get a sense of what others thought about me and this would give us something to go on during the sessions. She said my manager wouldn't see it but I was still a bit wary and I said what if he sees it, so she said it will be confidential (in an angry tone of voice) Well it wasn't (pause) and I felt so intimidated"

Aysha said that she felt betrayed by her coach, especially as she had welcomed the 360 degree feedback as good preparation for her coaching, so I asked her how she felt continuing her coaching sessions with this coach. Aysha said she took control:

> "well easy because I already had my leave date … so I didn't share this with her.. so from then on I dictated where coaching would go and focussed on good practices for when I left my company. I am not sure if she realised I was doing this"

Another factor that went to the issue of trust was the coaching environment:

> "it was surrounded by personal photos and I felt uncomfortable with that … it is hard to get into the coaching experience when you can see all their personal paraphernalia and it became more about the coach"

As for Aysha's organisation's involvement in her coaching engagement, Aysha expressed disappointment, surprise, and some anger at what she perceived as her company's lack of involvement:

> ".. there was no closing off by the organisation. In fact (laughs) there was no communication at all between my coach and the organisation during the coaching (laughs) isn't that strange, my manager had said that he wanted me coached but he didn't ask me anything about it".

At the time of our research conversation, Aysha was being coached by another coach who she had engaged and paid for personally. Again, Aysha referred to trust, but this time in a positive way associated with the coach's intellectual style and her own development:

> "My experience is more mature, as am I and I am ready to give back more so if I think something isn't in accordance with how I see it I will say so and

question. That works very well. It is interesting, I don't feel like I am going through a goal or process but feel I am being coached in the moment and in a very non judgmental way. … It feels authentic and there is nothing (emphasis by saying the word carefully and deliberately) I wouldn't tell him. There is total trust… It feels enabling. I feel 100% trusted by him and I trust him 100%. There is an intellect there and that is what I love"

Aysha also inferred that the professional detachment of her current coach was more conducive to developing trust:

> "There is detachment (emphasis and pause), he is not particularly warm or effusive. Not touchy feely but I know I can just talk to him and he gets it, there is trust because I know he won't let me down… (Smiling broadly and openly at this point)"

Brian's story

Brian worked for an international engineering company when he was identified for promotion and offered coaching. He was on a leadership programme for the top 2% of his company. Our research conversation took place just over 2 years after his coaching experience came to an end. Brian had retrained as an executive coach.

Brian began by explaining how he had been introduced to coaching. He said it was a 'given' that as he was on a promotional track he would be coached. Brian's experiences stood out from the other research participants as he had experienced both group coaching, as part of an intensive one week leadership programme, and then one on one coaching. With regards the group coaching and how it compared to individual coaching Brian said:

> "I was part of a programme … (that) .. included group coaching. As I worked for a large international company I was fortunate enough to be coached by really senior and experienced people who had experience across industry and in government. I liked their insights and bringing personal experiences

> to life was great. So I took on board useful snippets. But it wasn't proper 1:1 coaching I am now used to. It was more, telling stories and less about drawing things out of us as individuals. Useful yes, but I didn't feel it was proper coaching and developing me for a potential promotion"

Shortly thereafter, Brian was offered one on one coaching with a coach chosen for him by his company. They worked together for six months and Brian felt they *'gelled'* and this created a good relationship:

> "…I worked with her for six sessions. I remember at the time I had a really good relationship with her. I felt privileged to be with this coach. I did however, still feel a bit suspicions that everything would be fed back to my line manager so felt a bit conflicted and didn't know how I should engage with it, however, I decided to be quite open. It was a positive relationship because we gelled"

On reflection, Brian regretted not having chosen his own coach but didn't feel he had a choice:

> "I never had any involvement in choosing my coach. I think it is important to note that I should have (emphasis on the word 'should') ... In those days there was no choice".

He returned to this issue of choosing a coach later in our conversation and said:

> "…I didn't know enough at the time to know I could have had a choice and decide on my own coach who I felt I could relate to. Chemistry sessions would have been good. As it turned out, she was a good coach for me and the chemistry was good but it could easily have turned out differently. So I was lucky"

In terms of his coach's style, Brian recalled the *'life wheel'* model his coach used at the beginning of the coaching engagement, because it was about exploring him as a person:

> *"I remember she used the 'life wheel' where I was asked to identify the important life moments which was a good basis for the coaching to kick off"*

Later, however, he returned to coaching models and whilst he had valued the 'life wheel' model, he expressed some general scepticism about the use of coaching models in general:

> "If a coach comes with a model or conditioning or process, I think they are just testing themselves and telling themselves they know what they are doing"

In terms of goals, Brian regarded them as something *"fluid and transient"* and questioned their effectiveness. For Brian, the connection and the relationship with his coach which he described as one *"holding the space"* was very important. He said:

> "I haven't mentioned goals, or outcomes, strategies, techniques. How effective are those things? To my mind I question how effective they are. It is about the connection. Holding the space. You may not even think the coach and coachee are doing anything but on reflection a lot has been achieved. That is how I viewed my coaching and how I continue to view coaching in general. And I have done a huge amount of reflection… How you approach the coaching relationship with the person in front of you is key. It is about connecting as a human being and behind the façade and that is where the true value resides. Achievement for me was and is broader than the specific goal, it is about discovery"

Understanding who Brian was as a person was something Brian said his coach did which enabled him to develop insights. He had not been certain that he wanted the promotion and said that coaching helped him to think that through:

> *" a coach comes up against – egos, layers of face and their job is to help strip it back to who the coachee is at source and connect at that source. My coach did that with me and that helped me to generate some good insights. Rapport helped us to do that together. It was helpful at the time when I didn't know where I was going. Did I even want the promotion or not?. …My coach – she was in my world, experienced in my business, so could understand where I was coming from. She just let me think and contemplate and was respectful and supportive by listening and turning up and focusing on me to the exclusion of everything else"*

With regards his expectations of coaching, Brian said:

> " it would have been helpful to have been better prepared to know what to expect from the relationship, otherwise expectations can't be set. We got there but it took time and preparation saves time and builds the trust earlier"

Brian did achieve his promotion to Managing Director but questioned whether the coaching had helped him to achieve promotion:

> "Did I benefit from it? I did end up with my promotion, but could I relate that back to the coaching experiences – no, not really. I suppose it was part and parcel of the overall development programme so perhaps it was relevant and had an effect, but I don't ascribe anything to coaching specifically, in terms of my promotion"

Stephan's story

Stephan was a Senior Director in a manufacturing business. At the time of our research conversation, Stephan had recently been promoted. He had been coached, nearly three years prior to our meeting, to help him prepare for the imminent promotion.

Stephan told me that he had been coached three times and said he wanted to mention all three, because he felt they were all relevant to what he had to say about his felt experiences of coaching for promotion.

His first experience came when he was being considered for promotion in a previous organisation. He had met a coach when he was travelling and was fascinated by what this coach said about coaching.

> "It was his passion, what he was getting out of it and I was fascinated by the stories he was telling me about some of the people he had coached. I asked for his card. He was a psychologist and also had some sort of medical background and his coaching philosophy came from this background, so it had a strong theoretical basis. I then went back to my office and asked my boss if I could engage him to coach me as I was being considered for this promotion. They said yes" Stephan told me.

Stephan recounted a good start to this coaching experience. He liked the coach's style, particularly the scientific models he used, his intellect and the gravitas that he brought to coaching based on his experience with "*important clients*":

> "The first iterations were brilliant, understanding how I get the best out of myself. That coach started off brilliantly; he was well regarded, had important clients who had achieved great things. He started with physiological data and what are the components that make you great …. so that was the basis of his model. …He had read all the right books and had

such a positive impact on me on how to understand oneself and have more self confidence and build resilience. He seemed to understand my personality and how I could go into different heads psychologically and feel better about doing a task by concentrating on another head, so for example, what would it be like being Einstein doing an intellectual task. This model …worked for me"

However, after two years, it became less positive for Stephan, partly due to the cost but mainly, according to Stephan, because the focus had become less about Stephan and more about the coach. At this point Stephan did not feel central to the coaching:

*"*I stopped eventually because it became more about him than me. He became a big coaching superstar and I suppose I was just a bit player. He actually tried to get one of his colleagues to coach me (eyes wide open and slight raise of the shoulders) and that wasn't what I wanted because I felt I had a personal relationship with him (nodding his head and shrugging his shoulders).*"*

Before this coaching relationship came to an end, Stephan had decided to leave his company and credited his coach's style and scientific model and initial focus on Stephan as a person with giving him the confidence and self belief to leave where he was:

*"*it was about the whole person – so business, physical, emotional, spiritual self all make up the person and I am that person… he was absolutely convinced this is how you help people be the best they can be. So why effective for me? I got to know myself better and was myself, but his data gives a better dimensional understanding of you and that is a great foundation for most coaching. … I learnt techniques for building resilience and being stronger. He also challenged me on emotional strengths… I had radically changed as a result of coaching, but realised that my organisation

was no longer where I wanted to be. … I ended up with the confidence and self belief to actually leave where I was".

Although Stephan was promoted to Senior Director elsewhere, he talked about his own measure of success being about personal happiness:

"… coaching helped me to realise that success was about being happy and where would I get that happiness"

Stephan's company paid for his coaching but Stephan did not feel like they demonstrated any ongoing interest in it or him:

"My company just paid for the coaching. Were they involved (laughs) No, not really. My boss met my coach just once and that was it and success wasn't measured. But maybe they saw my performance improve and I was ready for promotion and decided to leave it"

With regards his second coaching experience Stephan approached his new organisation to ask for coaching:

"I had the promise of this great new role, I had lots of ideas and energy so I went to HR and asked for coaching"

His HR department agreed to the coaching and gave him the choice of a few potential coaches. Stephan chose one with whom he felt he could relate:

"just felt right when I met him. He was different from my first coach. He doesn't have a science background. He comes from a marketing background but we share a fascination of data. He looks at things from a psychological perspective and is very well read around all the thinking on performance. I could relate to him"

Stephan's second coach also encouraged Stephan to look at himself and reflect on how others saw him:

> "first thing he did was to construct a survey on what people thought of me. He spoke to people. I introduced him to a broad group of stakeholders, peers, subordinates, friends, those outside, really big piece of work. Anyway, that was massively valuable, massively, massively. When someone is conducting that for you there is no bias"

This coaching experience lasted about a year and came to a natural end when he felt Stephan was getting too close to his coach:

> "I valued my coach but came to a point where I needed a new one because I felt too close to him personally"

Stephan was now in his new role and keen to find a coach to help him to be successful in the role. He was not given a choice of coach but offered one by his organisation, who was described to him as *"fantastic"*. After being initially impressed by this coach and hoping she would help with presentation techniques, it very quickly turned sour for Stephan as he felt her challenging style was one which "*humiliated*" him:

> "I was instantly struck by her energy … things like presentations are her thing and she got me to look at them at a deep level and ask myself how my emotions help or not. However, immediately she undermined my confidence, she humiliated me and it was painful and demeaning. She pulled apart my life, who I was, my so called privileges … It really affected me personally and I felt awful and pained. "

Stephan brought this "*personally painful*" coaching relationship to an end. This experience, however, did not deter Stephan from coaching:

”But I didn’t give up on coaching as I still believed in it, just not the way she did it”

Stephan said that overall, his coaching experiences had been positive and trust was an important element:

“Trust is the most important thing and if you don’t trust one another then it is useless. Being non judgmental is also vital and that’s why my third coach didn’t work for me – we had a rapport and had intimate conversations, I accepted challenges from her and listened to her but in the end I just didn’t trust her because she judged me so critically, so it wouldn’t have been a good relationship going forward. I felt she brought her own unconscious biases into the session”

6.3 Themes

The themes and subordinate themes came out of a thorough analysis of the conversations with the participants. There is considerable overlap between them with the overarching theme of ‘being valued’ connecting them.

The themes did not necessarily reflect the number of occasions the participants inferred something but indicated the strength of feeling indicated by the words, body language and tone of voice that accompanied them.

I identified the same themes and sub themes in the research conversations with Category A and Category B participants. I had expected there to be some differences, because of the longer time lapse between the category B participants’ coaching experience and their research conversations. I had anticipated that their recollections and emotions might have changed as a result of having longer to reflect and make sense of their experiences and emotions; and a longer time to forget. In fact, there was no major difference between the two categories of participants. I did, however,

identify stronger emotions expressed by category B participants and in category A participants' second conversations. This may be because during the early stages of their coaching, category A participants were getting used to the process and developing trust with their coach, although the same could be said of the participants in category B. For example, Dara, a category A participant, had been rather tentative in our first research conversation and, whilst some of that may have been her getting used to me and developing a trust in me, I wondered whether the fact that her coaching had only just begun meant and she did not a lot of coaching experience to talk about was relevant. By our second conversation, Dara appeared more in control:

> *".. the biggest difference between how I feel now and how I felt six months ago is that my coach is helping me to challenge myself. I suppose I feel more comfortable with him. He knows me better and I know him better"*

This difference in the felt experiences of the participants in category A in their first and second conversations was not, however, a strong enough difference for my observation to be anything more than something which may be worthy of further research with other participants.

BEING VALUED BY THE COACH

Central to this theme was how the coach made the participant feel and how that impacted their overall felt experiences of coaching. It was evident in all the participants stories. The sub themes I identified were those factors that contributed most to the participants feeling valued by the coach.

Sub theme – coach's background and experience

Most of the participants expressed how important the coach's background and experience in their industry or sector was to them in the following respects: feeling confident in the coach's ability to relate and engage with them; establishing the coach's credibility; and establishing and developing trust and openness in the coaching relationship. For example, Anita referred to the coach's "*relatability*" with her world: *"Someone had recommended a particular coach who had worked in the*

same sector as me. That was perfect as I wanted someone who could relate to my world". Sarah spoke of a similar feeling of connection, in the form of common interests: *"I found one with just my background in industry and was interested in things I was interested in and the connection felt strong'".* Like Anita, Dara referred to her coach's knowledge of her industry: *"He is external but works extensively in my organisation so knows it really well".* Joe expressed a similar sentiment*: "a smart young consultant could tell me what I need to do to get to where I want to get to, but I can get all of that out of a book. Help around how to behave around a board table, for example, can only be obtained through coaching by people who have done it and make me feel like they know what I am experiencing".*

Sarah, Denise and Aysha, considered the coach's gender as a woman to be relevant to them in creating a relationship with their coach based on relatability. Each expressed similar sentiments that the female coach would be able to empathise with the coachee's position as a female.

It was the sense of relatability, connection and equality in their relationship with the coach, whether that came from gender, experience or background in the same industry that provided a link between the participants.

References to the coach's qualifications, coaching or otherwise, or coaching accreditation were conspicuous by their absence.

Sub theme - Relationship

The second sub theme related to the relationship between the coach and coachee. It was apparent from the conversations with all the participants that a relationship with their coach, based on trust, was fundamental to having open and honest coaching conversations.

A common characteristic, identified by many of the participants, was the professional relationship, distance and boundaries within the coaching engagement. For example, Anita said: *"so just the nature of the relationship where we could talk and my coach*

wasn't coming from a family or historical friendship meant we could be objective and it was a more useful experience". Sarah recognised that she needed to have an "*arms length relationship*" with her coach. She referred to an aspect of her coach's style that could have potentially crossed the boundary between professionalism and empathy, but because of the trust they had already built up it didn't. She said: *"there is a fine balance, for example, sharing something about managing her own career with children. She was just trying to empathise I suppose. (pause) … but I wouldn't want it to be too personal".* Two other participants had less positive reactions than Sarah's – Aysha had suggested that one of her coaches had demonstrated her unprofessionalism by purporting to have coached in her sector before but had not: Though Aysha claimed not to be concerned by this, her body language, laugh and tone of voice suggested otherwise. With respect to her second coach, it was the coaching environment which went to the issue of trust and professionalism: *"it was surrounded by personal photos and I felt uncomfortable".* Stephan recognised that he had become too close, personally, to one of his coaches and he had to bring the engagement to an end to protect himself, indicating his understanding of professional boundaries in coaching relationship: *"I valued my coach but it came to a point where I needed a new one because I felt too close to him personally"'.*

What links these excerpts is the references to professional boundaries between the coach and coachee and how essential those boundaries were to the participants in maintaining a professional relationship in which they felt valued and felt they could be open and honest.

Sub theme - Coach's style of coaching

The coach's style was another major sub theme I identified. Participants expressed how their coach's style affected their felt experiences of coaching. Most of the participants felt that a positive experience was most commonly associated with a coach who was strong, challenging, professional, not too friendly but collaborative, empathic, supportive, facilitative and non-judgmental.

Being challenging was the most common coach characteristic evident in the data. Joe welcomed being challenged and it was his coach demonstrating an interest in him as a person that gave Joe the confidence to accept the challenges: *"I could tell my coach understood what I meant by things he said and challenged me on …He was really interested in me as a person".* In my analysis of affect, which included body language, tone, level and pace of voice, I had noted that another participant, Anita, also spoke about her coach's style of challenging her which Anita took as a sign of the coach understanding her world. I categorised this as being valued by the coach. Anita spoke fluently, clearly and audibly with good eye contact and movement to emphasise points. (See appendix 15 for an example from a small section of the transcript indicating various aspects of affect). Anita suggested that her coach's challenging style came from a position of being at a professional distance and this was seen positively by Anita: *"Obviously, on reflection and with more experience, I realise it was a provocative approach, you know, my coach's style of questioning me. It was not about trying to create a friendly relationship and maybe the coach has to create some discomfort to get the right effect. Clearly it resonated".*

Similarly, Denise characterised her "great" relationship with her first coach as being professional and she felt inspired, challenged and motivated by the questioning style*: "she (coach) just got me and we thought alike .. I liked her sensitivity, tactical approach .. the relationship was great. I trusted her integrity .. manner of approach was excellent. I would say something and she would say 'what about this' and it made me think".* Comparing this to her experience with her second coach, a personal friend of hers who didn't inspire or make her think, Denise said: *"Professionally she just wasn't there… there was no inspiration from her". This* highlighted that being professional was a more important coach characteristic to Denise than being a friend*.* Sarah's words, body language and tone of voice suggested that, on reflection, she might consider a coach with a more challenging style if she were coached again: *"I gravitated towards two coaches similar to me and maybe had a sense that you share characteristics (laughs) and maybe next time a different character could challenge me more,"* Jim hinted that he had expected his coach would make him think about his options, which I interpreted as challenging him, and when that was lacking, the

coaching felt "artificial" to him: *"So, I imagined the coach would help me to think through options between now and the next time but I didn't know what to get out of it and the coaches didn't really help me so it felt artificial".*

Dara, acknowledged in our first conversation when she had had just two coaching sessions, that her coach had made her think but she was not sure if this helped her or not. By the time of our second conversation, six months into her coaching engagement, Dara suggested that because she now trusted her coach, she was more open to being questioned: "*the conversation has changed because the trust and rapport is really there and so there hasn't been a need for her to develop that trust as it is here*". This change in emphasis indicated that time had enabled the trust to develop and out of that trust grew self confidence to accept non judgmental challenges from her coach. I saw this element of trust and non judgmental challenges across most of the conversations and it was what connected them.

Stephan and Aysha, however, felt their coach's challenges had been too judgmental. Aysha had lost trust in her coach and had felt judged and thereafter Aysha dictated the direction of the coaching, which did not include being open to being challenged *"So I didn't share this with her…I was guarded about what I was going to give away from then on I dictated where coaching would go and focused on good practices for when I left"*' Stephan similarly had a very negative reaction to his coach's challenges which he felt were too personal and crossed the boundary of professionalism. This broke the trust between them: *"I accepted challenges…but in the end I just didn't trust her because she judged me so critically".*

These excerpts suggest that challenges from the coach can be powerful and effective, provided they are well judged, in the coachee's best interest, are professional and empathic, but not too personal or judgmental.

BEING VALUED AS A PERSON

This theme is about how central to the coaching engagement the participants were made to feel by the coach, organisation and themselves and how being valued as a person in all their facets, and not just as a business person, was important to them.

Sub theme - Person centred

Paramount to the participants feeling valued as a person was whether they felt that the coaching was centred around them, their needs, their contexts and their personalities. In other words, the coach's, the organisation's and their own willingness to know and understand the participant on more than a business level. For example, Brian described his coach as someone who could *"hold the space and find it in themselves to connect to me at a deeper level".* Joe said: *"the way he worked with me was very personal – he knew me very well, not just the work me but the personal me".* Joe implied that his coach had helped him to understand himself better and this helped to make the coaching more person centred: *"I feel my coach is really helping me to explore that and myself",* whilst Stephan's coach put him at the centre by encouraging Stephan to reflect on how others saw him: *"first thing he did was to construct a survey on what people thought of me. … that was massively valuable…".*

In contrast, Jim did not feel like he was the focus of the coaching. He attributed this to his organisation: *"there was little personal input from the business. Our focus was more on the practical rather than the personal", and* his coach who he would have liked to engage more with his organisation to get a sense of the organisational context in which Jim worked. He felt that both were lacking and it led to Jim feeling that the coaching was*"self indulgent"* which suggested to me that he didn't put himself in the centre either.

Sub theme – motivation and accountability of the coachee

The second sub theme concerns how the participants felt motivated to be coached and felt responsible and accountable for what happened within the coaching engagement. This presented itself across most of the conversations. Tying in with

the first sub theme, Jade recognised that to be central in the coaching, she needed to take responsibility for her own role in it: *"I wanted to be coached and be held to account for my own actions"***.** Peter related being person focused with being accountable for his own learning: *"I looked at it really positively because it was about me learning what I didn't know and being ready for that and the promotion".* Sarah also referred to her own learning, whilst emphasising the collaborative aspect of coaching: *"I told her what I wanted to get out of my development and asked her how we could do that … but it was my development and I knew what I needed"*

Not all the participants felt personally motivated; ultimately the lack of learning and personal motivation and accountability was a factor in Jim finding the coaching experience underwhelming. He said: *" …my motivation wasn't clear. To work, I think it has to be something that the coachee actively and positively embraces and I don't think I did. Both parties have to be clear about why they are there and what are their responsibilities. I don't think I took on any responsibilities".*

Stephan's experience was different and despite his own motivation and accountability and good start to the coaching he subsequently felt let down by his coach when he felt that he was no longer central and important to the coach *"He became a big coaching superstar and I suppose I was just a bit player".*

These excerpts indicate that the participants' motivation and accountability were important to their felt experiences of coaching, but that motivation and accountability can be influenced by what else is going on in and around the coaching engagement.

Sub theme – context – coachee's context and overall context of the coaching engagement

The third sub concerns the coaching context, meaning the participants' own background and context, including how they came to be coached. It also relates to the organisational context - where the participant worked, what it was like and how the participant felt about it.

Jackson appreciated that his coach took the time to find out about his background to provide some context to the coaching engagement: *"she said – let's go back to the beginning and asked me to give a history of me, who I am .. it was very good. It was just about me".* This excerpt weaves in with the sub theme of being person centred. Others, such as Jim, noted that the personal and organisational context were both relevant to how he experienced coaching: *"Overall, context is key and the coach and coachee's understanding that context of coaching and the organisation. The organisation has to be purposeful about it too"* implying that where there is a lack of understanding of the overall context by any of the parties involved – coach, coachee and organisation - the coaching may be less effective.

Jade, whose coach was her line manager, took for granted that her coach was able to see the wider organisational context and appreciated how this enabled her coach to see points of alignment: *"she can influence other stakeholders by being part of the organisation and understanding the wider context".* Likewise, Peter felt that his coach's involvement with his HR Director helped the coach to understand the broader organisational context in which Peter worked. He also felt that it helped the coach to gain a deeper knowledge of Peter's personal and professional context by looking at it from a different perspective: *"my coach had met my HR Director many times before I started coaching and had developed knowledge about the business, the people and me (laughs and smiles). So knew us well (laughs)".*

Aysha expressed disappointment that her coach hadn't really understood the organisational context *"…(coach) encouraged me to get an office, which to me indicated that my coach didn't understand our politics and environment".* This seeming lack of understanding of the organisational culture was a factor in Aysha losing trust in her coach, thus linking this sub theme back to relationship and trust.

With regards personal context, Sarah felt that her first coach's lack of understanding about her as a person was reflected in the choice of venue: "*The venue was a bit of a problem, it was in a hotel lobby … I am an INTJ … and I don't like distractions"*

whereas, her second coach chose a quiet meeting room, and Sarah took that as an indication that she had taken account of her personal context and preferences *"…(coach) knew my MBTI profile and this must have made her choose the meeting room".*

What I took from my participants' stories was that being person centred focused was about the participants valuing themselves, the main catalyst for which came from how others treated, respected and believed in them as individuals, part of which involved them understanding the coachee's personal and professional contexts. This, in turn, had an impact on the degree to which the coachees took accountability for their own actions and decisions. This theme is, therefore, strongly related to the first theme of being valued by the coach, but I suggest that this theme of being valued as a person is broader and more holistic.

GOALS EXCITE AND PROVIDE A FOCUS

This theme centres around goals providing a focus, direction and motivation in the coaching.

Peter, Stephan, Denise and Dara were very clear about their respective goals of achieving promotion, and this was exciting and provided a strong focus for their coaching. Stephan was animated when talking about how he felt his coach would help him to achieve his goal of promotion by helping him to gain a greater understanding of himself: *"(coach) thought about our personalities and we can put ourselves into different heads and do better on something by concentrating on a different head".* Peter said his goal of promotion provided him with his focus: *"it was about me… being ready for promotion".* Denise, too, was driven by her prospective promotion and this led her to initiate coaching because she recognised that: *"partnership is a big step up and a challenge in terms of managing people".* Jackson was equally driven and excited by his personal goal of setting up a new business: *"I had in mind running my own business. I knew I could make it commercial".*

However, not all the participants experienced the excitement of working towards a goal; Jim, was unsure about how realistic the goal of promotion was: *"I wasn't on a succession plan, my organisation doesn't do that sort of thing"* whilst Aysha lacked enthusiasm and drive for coaching partly because she was not convinced that her organisation's ostensible goal of promotion was genuine*: "I saw it [coaching]as remedial at first and not about promotion at all".*

Sub theme – goals were different from the organisational goal or changed to a personal goal

I identified this sub theme because whilst four of the participants identified achieving promotion as their goal, other participants identified having a broader goal, such as "*achieving happiness*" (Brian) or exploring other career options (Anita) or establishing a new business (Jackson) or exploring themselves to work out what they wanted to do next (Joe). Others wanted to focus on practical aspects of the potential new role (Sarah).

Some participants started their coaching engagement knowing their goal was not the same as the organisation's. Jackson knew from the start that his goal was different from his organisation's stated goal of promotion, but it excited him and he was open with his coach and his organisation about his different goal.

The common thread in the stories was the feeling that working towards a goal was exciting and was what made the coaching gel. The more personally relevant the goal felt to the participant, the more engaged, focused and in control of their own destinies they felt. Returning to Jackson, it was this personal focus and belief that gave him the drive: *"I said I wanted to use these hours to really think about other things I could do and not just this possible promotion".* Joe, whose goal was initially to gain promotion, remained driven and enthusiastic about his coaching experience when his goal changed to moving to a new job elsewhere: *"this became my focus"*. Anita's goal was to explore a new entrepreneurial career which she categorised as a personal promotion: *"for me, it was still a promotion (nodding and half smiling) just somewhere else and doing something different (pause) but a promotion*

nevertheless" Anita's body language, nodding and half smiling, indicated her motivation, self belief, commitment and drive toward this personal goal.
Brian approached the issue of goals from a more holistic perspective: *"coaching is about achieving a broader outcome – happiness or achievement that is broader than just a specific goal."*

Sub theme – no goal or goal not specific enough

This second sub theme I identified concerned the impact a goal could have on the direction and focus of the coaching. Jim did not feel he had a specific enough goal to work towards*: "if the company had said ,- in 1 years' time there will be two of you in contention for the role, - then that would have felt like a more specific goal to work towards",* whereas Sarah was clearer about her time scale for promotion: *"I was told that I would be promoted to the board in 12 months"* and was able to focus, initially, on being ready for the promotion.

This sub theme also relates to the ability to measure the effectiveness of the coaching against the achievement of a goal. In respect of her own coaching experience, Anita said: *"perhaps if there had been a goal and list of actions then I might have assumed that success would follow and if it didn't I might have thought that the coaching had failed"*. Denise also suggested that having specific goals would have helped her to *"know what to expect"* and enable her to: *"measure at the end of it whether I have achieved what I set out to achieve".*

Some of the participants set their own goals, some were set by their organisation and some didn't appear to have a goal or weren't sure what the goal was. Although this latter group did not represent the majority of participants, they expressed strong emotions about the frustration or reduced satisfaction in their coaching experience as a result of not having clear, focused goals. For example, the lack of a clear time frame for Jim's potential promotion was a frustration for him: *"There were no specific objectives to my coaching which was harder for the coach too because there wasn't a specific date for promotion".* Jim's frustration extended to his perception that his

coach was not focused on goals *"so we must have agreed these are useful things to discuss but it wasn't in the context of I want to get from A to B."*

Joe's early perception that the goal of promotion was not a genuine one shared by his organisation, made the goal unclear for him and this led him to change his focus: *" …and so for me the coaching was to help me as an individual to work out what I was going to do"* Dara's said she initially had 'vague' goals around developing skills *"..I suppose I wanted what my boss wanted to get out of it, she thought communication skills would be useful so, well, yes, I suppose it was that",* but her focus changed through the course of her coaching as she became much clearer, more excited and took ownership of her own goals, which were aligned with her organisation's goal of promotion: *"we talk more about my quest to be promoted .. it is less about skills and more about behaviours. I feel supported navigating my way around what the firm wants and what I want."*

These excerpts above cannot be read in isolation and solely concerned with goals; they point to the interrelationship between goals, motivation, context, trust and the role of all parties to the coaching being aligned.

LACK OF STRUCTURE WASTES TIME

I chose this as a theme because it spoke to me about how many of the participants preferred to work and were used to working. Sarah, for example said: *"I would have preferred some sort of proper structure, but then that's the accountant in me."*

Lack of structure represented, to some, a lack of feeling valued by the coach, thus linking this with the first theme. Aysha's coach's style was conversational and whilst Aysha felt she benefited from some of the conversations, particularly around gender, most were, according to Aysha, unstructured and lacked an understanding of her organisational context: *"A lot of the coaching is a blur, it seemed muddled and unstructured but what I do remember is that she encouraged me to get an office, which to me indicated that she didn't understand our politics and environment."* Anita

reflected that there was a period when *"something was not working"* in her coaching and said she *"forgot what we talked about and didn't take away actions.. something stopped us doing that".* Both Anita and her coach had lost sight of the value post session actions provided to Anita and this suggested that Anita did not feel as valued by her coach at this point: *"I think it would have been interesting, speculating, how that would have evolved differently if he had articulated that he thought we were just going through the motions in the session and then nothing…"*

Sub theme – Structure within the coaching session

The first sub theme, I identified, related to the structure within the coaching session itself.

Irrespective of the seniority or business experience of the participant, many referred to structure within their business roles, and how structure within the coaching session itself did, or might have, made a difference to their felt experience of coaching. For example, Denise reflected on why one of her coaching experiences had not worked for her: *"it was a conversation with no parameters".* Jim, likewise, said: *"I thought coaching would be more structured"* and found it; "superficial" with *"no output or tasks"* and *"didn't give a moment's thought till next time".*

Some participants preferred a rigid, structure, whilst others preferred a more fluid structure. Peter, for example, found the formulaic structure used by his first coach helpful in providing focus in the early stages of his coaching: *"we set objectives for each session and things to do in between. … we set out a work plan (laughs) which was great, rigorous and focussed",* whilst the "free flow" structure used by his second coach was helpful for more strategic thinking: *"have you thought of this, why not…"*.

Sarah feared losing momentum and direction because of the lack of a more formal structure, her preferred approach, to her coaching sessions: *"There was a risk that I stepped out of the room at the end of the coaching and did nothing with it".* Jade, in contrast, liked the more flexible structure: *"she recognises that when I want to be coached I will ask her, so it is more fluid*" but implied that conversations around 'non

work matters' were digressing and more discipline would have helped her to focus on her objectives: *"…it can get in the way as it is not the focus of the conversation I want to have so it can be a bit frustrating as I want the time coaching for a practical effect…".*

Joe considered his sessions to be loosely structured around the question posed by the coach at the beginning of each session and this provided Joe with a focus: *"(coach) always starts by saying what do you want to talk about today, and that is very good, it really just made me think we are just having a good straightforward conversation and building trust by being able to say the best and worst of things that are going on"*

Sub theme – post session actions

The second sub theme concerns what happens in between the coaching sessions. Many of the participants referred to what they took away from the coaching session itself and I identified this as on-going structure. Those who reported that they had specific tasks to do after the coaching session, such as reading in Joe's case: *"(coach) gives me reading… highlights chapters and saying 'go to this bit' which saves me time (laughs)"* or exercises in Peter's: *"We set things to do in between, although it wasn't an exam question there were expectations and objectives",* reported being more motivated and engaged. Aysha's 360 degree feedback exercise was initially regarded positively by her as framing the coaching: *"this would give us something to go on during the sessions".*

Post session actions were regarded by some as the link between one session and the next, providing continuity and focus. Sarah commented: *"A statement of intent or actions at the end would have been useful. She (coach) took notes ..It would have been useful if she had shared them with me …".* Jim also felt that follow up was lacking in his coaching: *"there was no output or tasks to go away with … but then not give it a moment's thought till next time".* Anita expressed a similar feeling: "*I don't remember finishing a session with a clear set of things to do before the next session. On reflection, possibly I needed more… the approach was wrong".*

What I took away from the stories, was that the participants regarded some degree of structure, whether or not rigid, helped to differentiate a coaching conversation from a conversation with family or friends and it was what facilitated focus and direction in the coaching conversation.

BEING VALUED BY MY EMPLOYER

Throughout this section I refer to the participants' employer as either organisation or employer.

This theme revolved around the participants' desire to feel that their organisation had a personal interest in them as individuals and in their development. I chose this as a theme because I was struck, specifically, by two things: first, how few of the participants mentioned their organisation's involvement in the coaching engagement once the coach had been appointed, until prompted by me to do so. Secondly, once they did speak about their organisation, most of the participants suggested their organisation had not been involved, which disappointed them and they considered this to be an indication of their organisation's lack of interest in them. This spoke to me about how the participants perceived their employer had or had not satisfied their obligations under the psychological contract between them and how that, in turn, impacted the participants' felt experiences of coaching.

I identified two sub themes:

Sub theme - Little or no involvement from the organisation

This related to the participants' perceptions of the degree to which their organisation had been involved, at any stage, in the coaching engagement.

Most of the participants were encouraged by their organisation's suggestion of coaching but many felt that this was where their organisation's involvement came to an end. It was not enough for most of the participants, that they were being coached, they expected more involvement from their organisation; Aysha said: "*in fact (laughs)*

there was no communication at all between my coach and the organisation during the coaching (laughs) isn't that strange". Jim would have liked his organisation to have given both moral and financial support to signify their confidence in him: *"I really needed the organisation to say you are up for the CEO role and we will help you and here is the money for coaching to help you get there"*. Joe's organisation: *"didn't really engage with me once I had my coach"* and Joe concluded that this was because the organisation wanted Joe to use the coaching to think things through for himself. Nevertheless, he was disappointed in their lack of interest: "*I would have liked them to be more interested in me and the coaching*".

Peter reported that his organisation had demonstrated its support and interest in him throughout his coaching, for example by following up with Peter's coach during the coaching engagement. Peter regarded this positively: *"it demonstrated that they (organisation) were interested in me".* Jade also appreciated her organisation's on-going involvement, but expected it, since her coach was also her line manager and therefore in a position to also provide sponsorship. In Jade's words: *"She is a real advocate in the business and really advocates my role and position and it is amazing to have that support".*

Sub theme – the importance of the organisation's support and interest

This sub theme followed naturally from the first. Not all the participants, felt that their organisation had continued to support them and this affected their felt experiences: Aysha felt angry: "*there was no closing off by the organisation. He (line manager) didn't ask me anything about it…".* Jim gave a particularly strong indication of his feelings of disappointment and being let down and undervalued by his organisation: "*If my boss had come to me and said we want to put you in the best position for this promotion and don't worry about the cost just get the most out of it … and openly supported me and helped raise my profile internally, well (laughs) imagine that (pause and shoulders raised and eyes directly focused on the researcher)"* and cited it as one of the main reasons he decided to leave.

Stephan, likewise, expressed disappointment that his organisation had not continued to support him psychologically and his tone was particularly dismissive and ironic in his final comment: *"My company <u>just</u> paid … were they involved (laughs) no, not really. My boss met my coach once and that was it …".* Anita also felt disappointed that her organisation did not show more interest in her development: *"I was on track for a bigger role .. and they didn't show any interest or ask how it (coaching) was progressing and was I getting anything out of it… maybe they missed a trick".*

Joe's initial view of his organisation's support was also negative: *He* seemed to doubt his employer's interest and suggested coaching was a tick box exercise for them *"when coaching started I never got the intent written down by my company which I thought was odd"*. By our second research conversation, however, Joe had reflected on his organisation's involvement and inferred that even though he had made the decision to leave his organisation, he felt they had actually given him the space to reach that decision by their approach of not getting involved and letting Joe focus on himself and think through various options. Joe regarded this as a positive outcome: "*I had switched on the lights with (my organisation) and said I was available for coaching .. and they embraced it and said it would help me to … really think about me and what I wanted"*

Those who felt that their organisation had taken an interest in them, felt more engaged, motivated and vested in the coaching and in themselves. For example, Jackson said: *"I didn't really want to step into (boss's) shoes ... but he had faith in me. So I trusted my boss … he had my interests at heart".* Dara also felt her line manager supported her and understood her desire for partnership and this motivated her: *"my line manager knew I wanted to do all I could to get a promotion, .. coaching was to help me on my way to that partnership as my line manager had said I was on my way".* The fact that her manager was going to be her coach was an indication to Jade that her organisation was going to continue to be involved in her development through the coaching: *"I really value her as someone who cares about my work practice"* and this gave Jade reassurance.

Some of the participants commented that their decisions to leave their organisations was partly influenced by their organisation's lack of interest in them. Jim said: *"I didn't get the promotion so I left. Maybe if the organisation had given me more (pause) well more encouragement, moral support in coaching and other things of course, I would still be there".* Joe also cited his organisation's lack of support for him as helping him to reach the decision to leave *"I wonder whether they (organisation) were building me up to leave and if I am right there, I think their intent was good but the execution wasn't".*

This feeling of desiring engagement from their organisation is neatly tied in with other themes around being valued.

Summary

This study inquired into the felt experiences of Executive Talent coachees. I was not surprised that 'being valued' was the dominant theme I recognised running through all the stories. Feeling valued by the coach, the organisation and the participants themselves, and feeling trusted and respected and equal in the relationships, were key to the participants' felt experiences of coaching; those participants who did not feel valued reported less positive experiences of coaching than those who did. The themes of goals and structure also spoke to the theme of value. For example, having a goal helped some of the participants to value themselves. Having a structure indicated to some participants that their coach had understood their context and them as individuals whose preference and experience was to work within a structure, thus demonstrating how they valued the participants as individuals with individual needs, preferences and desires.

In the next chapter, entitled Discussion of Findings, I will discuss these findings alongside the Knowledge Landscape and literature review that I set out in an earlier chapter.

7 Discussion of findings

This study looked at felt experiences of Executive Talent coachees who were being coached for promotion. The purpose of this study was to improve the effectiveness of coaching for promotion by bringing the coachee's voice into the discussion and thereby practise of coaching Executive Talent.

I remind the reader of some of my assumptions and values and how these may have informed how I analysed the data and made meaning of it through a social constructivist lens and critical reflection. My interpretations of the data may be challenged by readers using different lenses.

According to Mezirow:

> "*Critical reflection involves a critique of the presuppositions on which our beliefs have been built …. influenced by the habits of expectation, that constitute our frame of reference that is our set of assumptions that structure the way we interpret our experiences*" (Mezirow, 1990, p.1)

My assumptions around coaching executives for promotion were that they were senior business people who had already demonstrated leadership capabilities and competencies and gained the confidence of their organisations through previous career promotions. The paradigm in which I have generally coached Executive Talent is that discussions about the organisation's expectations of the coaching take place between the coach and the organisation prior to the coaching. Thereafter, there is little involvement from the organisation.

Overall, participants regarded coaching as something to help them think through options. This element of 'helping' (Kilburg, 2009) and reaching their own answers (Rogers, 2009) was also evident in most of the definitions in the literature. Unlike some of those definitions (de Haan et al, 2013) the participants did not comment on whether the coach should be qualified.

The effectiveness of coaching was relevant to explore in the literature because in my coaching practice my own coachee clients tell me that how they feel about their experiences affects what they get out of it and how effective coaching is for them. My findings showed that feeling valued was most important to the participants and it directly affected how they felt about their coaching experience and how effective the coaching had been for them.

In the following pages, I consider the themes I identified (see appendix 13) in relation to the knowledge landscape and literature review.

The themes reflected the different felt experiences articulated by the participants. I expected to see some differences between category A and B participants' conversations because of the different time frames of their recollections and reflections on coaching. In fact, I found very few differences, but I remind the reader that there were only three participants in category A.

The participants' feelings of being valued were manifested predominantly through how the coach behaved and engaged with the participant and how the employing organisation fulfilled its obligations in the psychological contract with the participant (Fillery-Travis, 2015). How the coachees valued themselves came as a direct consequence of how they felt valued by others. The extent to which the participant felt valued overall had an impact on their perception of the effectiveness of the coaching overall.

Being valued by my coach

Based on my personal experience, the theme of *being valued by my coach* was uncontentious and unsurprising to me. The findings indicated that how valued the participants felt by the coach, related closely to the trust they had for the coach which came from factors such as the quality of the relationship with the coach (de Haan and Gannon, 2017), and the coach's background and coaching style (Gyllensten and Palmer, 2007), which I identified as sub themes. The quality of the relationship had the biggest impact on how effective most of the participants considered the coaching

to be and this was in line with the literature; De Haan et al (2013) suggest that the relationship between the coach and coachee is one of the most significant factors in achieving effectiveness in coaching, with some suggestion that trust is the foundation of the relationship (Gyllensten and Palmer, 2007).

Some authors (Ianiro et al, 2013) suggest that coachees consider trust, and in turn outcomes, come from the coach's empathetic and friendly relationship with the coachee. This seemed, at first, to be at odds with what I interpreted from strong emotions expressed by many participants around their need for an arm's length, professional relationship with the coach, as opposed to one akin to a friendship, a view supported by Tooth et al (2008). The research participants did not regard their coach as a friend and did not want that sort of relationship. The fact that Anita's coach was not a family member or a friend made her coach appear more *"objective, leading to a more useful experience".* The participants wanted a coach who was empathetic, who could, according to Sarah "*relate to her world"* and "*connect*" with it because of the coach's experience in Sarah's industry. Peter learnt from his coach's experiences in industry. This relatability coming from the coach's knowledge of the coachee's industry is supported in literature (Carter et al, 2016) though critics (Jarvis, 2004) consider that the coach's business background in industry is not relevant as the main aim of the coaching is the coachee's learning and development. My findings would suggest that the two are not mutually exclusive; some of the participants suggested that they learnt from their coach's business background and experience and it leant strength to their coaching experience.

Ianiro et al (2013) link trust with the coach's dominance in the first coaching session, which I found surprising based on my own experience and my participants' stories of trust developing over time. This may be because of the seniority of the Executive Talent participants, and my own client base, and their overwhelming desire for a collaborative, equal relationship in which they lead the agenda and the coach leads the process.

Three of the female participants talked about the importance of their coach's shared characteristic of gender in terms of relatability to their world of being in a female in a male dominated industry or organisation. Hodgetts (2002) agrees that a perceived similarity, such as a shared gender, may lead to more effective coaching. Bozer and Joo, (2015) agree, but argue this is provided the coachee has a high degree of self efficacy. This was supported by many of my research participants.

There is debate (Duckworth and de Haan, 2009,) about the relevance of personality matching in coaching with contrasting views about whether similar (Cozza, 2006) or dissimilar (Scoular and Linley, 2006) coach and coachee personalities should be matched or whether it doesn't make any difference (Duckworth and de Haan, 2009). None of the participants referred to the coach's personality profile in the context of matching personalities for effective coaching, but two of them referred to their own personalities and suggested that their coach valued them by demonstrating their understanding of what they might appreciate in terms of coaching style in line with their MBTI preference. In other words, it was more about how the coach related to them as people.

A coaching style in which the coachee felt challenged (Hall et al, 1999), personally and professionally, was another factor that evoked participants' feelings of being valued by the coach. Jackson felt that his coach challenged him to consider who he was as a person by reflecting on his background. Anita appreciated the blend of challenge and support from her coach. Joe expected his coach to challenge him "*so important in an executive role, you need to be challenged."* Whilst most wanted to be challenged in a supportive, constructive and developing way, they did not want to be challenged in a way that disrespected and undervalued them as individuals, as suggested by Stephan: "*she humiliated me and it was painful and demeaning. She pulled apart my life, who I was"*, or before trust had developed between them as suggested by Anita: "*I think at that time, reflecting afterwards, maybe a sense of frustration, not quite anger, but a bit of irritability because it might have been an incongruous question and not really related to our conversation and I remember I didn't get the context of that question*." I did not identify specific references in the

literature to a coaching style of being challenging, however, the FACTS coaching model (Blakey and Day, 2012) specifically advocates challenging the coachee as an integral aspect of coaching and this appeared in line with what many of the participants expected and wanted.

Being valued by the coach has been implied in the literature from other perspectives such as the coach's competencies, which I did not hear explicitly in my participants' stories. The literature (Coutu and Kauffman 2009) and the professional accreditation bodies (e.g. EMCC, 2020a and ICF, 2021) and coaching training programmes such as Meyler Campbell's Mastered Programme (www.meylercampbell.com) emphasise the importance of coach competencies which can be external indicators of a professional, safe and competent practitioner. Although most of the participants did not refer to qualifications, accreditations or competencies, perhaps Peter provided a logical explanation for this when he said that he assumed the coach was professional until proved otherwise.

Being valued as a person

At the heart of this theme was the participants' feelings about being central to the coaching. What signified to the participants that they were valued as a person by the organisation, the coach and themselves was: the coaching was person centred; they felt motivated and accountable; and parties understood the whole context of the coaching engagement.

How participants felt they were treated and regarded by the coach and organisation, through their behaviours, impacted how they related to the coaching; the more central they felt, the more they benefited. For example, Jackson's coach wanted to know everything about him and Jackson interpreted this as the coach being genuinely interested in Jackson as a person. Likewise, he considered that his organisation empathised with him and his desire for promotion: "*my company suggested that I have some coaching to focus on some of the areas that I need to improve. I looked at it positively as it was about me*". In contrast, Jim, reported not feeling central to the coaching and he attributed this partly to his perception of his organisation's lack of

involvement (Solomon and Van Coller-Peter, 2019). Stephan felt undervalued as a person when he felt his coach's attentions were diverted away from him and he no longer felt central.

Some of the literature supports what I was hearing from the participants about feeling central to the coaching. In Hall et al (1999), three of the coach attributes considered necessary attributes by coaches were: - *connecting personally; recognising where the client is; caring;* and *listening* - thereby putting the coachee centre stage. Likewise, Carter et al (2016) identified coach characteristics of empathy, listening, coaching techniques and knowledge of the coachee's industry as being important coach characteristics from the coachee's perspective. I would suggest that each of these characteristics is about the coach getting to know and understand the coachee, from understanding them as a person to understanding the context within which they work and demonstrating empathy. All of which goes to the issue of trust and valuing the coachee. The EMCC (2020a) and ICF (2021) set out coach competences which require the coach to know the coachee, which can be an outward indication to the coachee that the coach values them as individuals. For example, the ICF's third core competency (see appendix 2) is specific to co-creating the relationship and includes a requirement around *'creating a safe, supportive environment that produces ongoing mutual respect and trust*'. The eighth core competency focuses around creating awareness, specifically 'integrating *and accurately evaluating multiple sources of information and making interpretations that help the client to gain awareness and thereby achieve agreed-upon results'.* Although not explicit, taken together these two competencies could be interpreted broadly to imply that knowledge of the coachee's context and them as a person in all their facets, is necessary to develop the mutual trust, respect and consequently value, within which the coaching can flourish and the coachee can learn. This is what the research participants indicated was important to their felt experiences of coaching for promotion.

There was limited comment in the literature on how organisations demonstrate their value of the coachee as a person, however, Soloman and Van Coller-Peter (2019) found that coachees regard on-going career support as evidence of the organisation valuing them by abiding by their obligation under the psychological contract (Khoreva, 2017). Jade was coached by her line manager, however, she felt their relationship transcended a hierarchical employer/employee relationship because her coach's behaviours had suggested he cared and valued her as a person by sharing something of himself and '*putting on a different hat'* when he was coaching her. Jade felt this helped to build rapport and equality between them. The participants did not speak of on-going career support specifically, but did suggest on-going moral support from the organisation was an indication of their interest in and support of them as valuable senior executives within the organisation. As Jim said: "*I really needed the organisation to say you are up for the CEO role and here is the money for coaching to help you get there"*

Boyce et al, (2010) suggest that rapport builds on similarities and breaks down differences and one could argue that similarities and differences can only be properly discovered and identified when there is genuine interest in the coachee as a person. Some of the participants suggested that they had a rapport which was based on a similarity such as gender or experience in industry, which made it easier for the participant to relate to the coach and vice versa, thus supporting the literature.

With regards to context, the third sub theme of being valued as a person, both the literature (Boyce et al, 2010) and the participants considered context an important aspect of the coach getting to know and value the coachee. In contrast, the suggestion in Tooth et al (2008) that the coach's independence from the organisation is helpful to the coachee, could be interpreted as not paying attention to the organisational context or only learning of the coachee's perspective on organisational context and not the organisation's perspective. Jim said he would have liked his coach to spend time with his employer to understand the context in which he was working so that he did not feel like he was working in a void. Aysha expressed a similar disappointment when she concluded that her coach did not understand her

organisational context and the relationship felt immediately less person centred and less trusting.

Going back to the literature review, there was commentary on return on investment for the organisation (Fillery-Travis and Cox, 2014) but I did not find anything in the literature indicating how coachees felt about the spend on coaching and how that impacted on how valued they felt. Some of the research participants did, however, reflect on it and whether they were getting value for money out of the coaching. This impacted how they felt about the coaching itself. Jim, for example, felt guilty about the spend on coaching as he felt underwhelmed by his coaching experience and was conscious of how much it was costing his organisation. He suggested that had the organisation talked to him about coaching and given him reassurance that they thought it was a valuable intervention for him, he might have been more engaged in the coaching and got more benefit from it.

The findings have encouraged me to consider my own practice and how I seek to demonstrate my respect and value for the coachee as a person in all their facets. I think more about my former title of business coach and how that might be misconstrued by executives who want to be coached as people whose business lives cannot be separated from who they are in their personal lives and whose values and contexts have a role in informing how they operate in their business world.

The participants suggested that recognising, acknowledging and valuing them as individuals, whose assumptions and world view have been made up of life experiences which contribute to their meaning making in their business context, is relevant to how they experience coaching for promotion.

Goals excite and provide a focus

Another one of my assumptions that was tested was that coachees on a trajectory to promotion focus on promotion as their goal, a goal generally supported by their organisation. This view was not shared by many of the participants. Most used the coaching to reflect on themselves as individuals and on their next career step. This

could be interpreted as a more holistic approach to their coaching aligned with Grant (2017) who found that an alignment of personal and organisational goals linked to both personal and organisational wellbeing was more beneficial.

Overall, the participants felt that goals provided them with a focus, irrespective of whether the goal was promotion or something else. Grant et al (2009) agree and say that coachees who set goals are more focused on achieving an outcome than those who don't. Others (Boyatzis, 2020) are not convinced by this position and caution that setting goals can be a negative place from which to start the coaching engagement. The research participants put a greater emphasis on the personal side and their autonomy to choose their career path and used coaching to help them to think through life options. Blackman et al (2016) found that when coachees were asked to state their personal goals and then say what they thought the organisational goals were, there was very little overlap between the two. Blackman et al (2016) did not regard this as necessarily negative but posited that a successful coaching programme helps the coachee to reach their personal goal, which may lead them to leaving the organisation. Two of the participants reported leaving their organisation as a positive outcome of the coaching, suggesting that their goals were personal ones which excited and focused them in a different direction. A transparent acknowledgment, by the organisations, of this as a possible outcome of the coaching, might be something that the coach, coachee and organisation can benefit from discussing in contracting and setting expectations. I would suggest it is a topic worthy of further research.

Goals changing or being different from the organisation raises the issue of potential competing commitments (Kegan and Lahey, 2001). Jackson knew that he did not want to be promoted and used coaching to help him to think through other career options. The competing commitments here are multiple: first, the coach knowing that he/she is being paid to coach someone with an ostensible goal of promotion but also knowing that the coachee has a different goal in mind may be a conflict. The coach might rely on a successful coaching engagement for references or future work. Success, from the organisation's point of view might be the coachee's readiness for

promotion. If the coachee leaves the organisation following the coaching, this might represent failure from the organisation's point of view and reflect negatively on the coach. The competing commitment for the coach, therefore, might be which 'client' to prioritise, the coachee or the paying organisation. Scoular (2011) is clear that it would be unethical to continue to coach someone whose goals are different from those the coach has agreed with the organisation and those goals could be detrimental to the organisation. One approach to this potential dilemma is to contract with the organisation and the coachee at the beginning of the engagement and regularly throughout to agree boundaries and expectations (Fillery-Travis, 2015), including what to do if the coaching goal changes or is inimical to the organisation's interests. This is what Jackson and his coach did.

Lack of structure wastes time

The literature (Terblanche et al, 2017) suggests that structure in the form of a goal focussed coaching model helps provide a focus and way of progressing the coaching conversation. Robins (2017) agrees that structure facilitates conversation and provides focus for the coachee.

I did not find support in the participants' stories that specific models made any difference to their felt experience of coaching, a view supported by de Haan et al, (2013) but they did consider structure itself, both in the session and post session actions, to be helpful in providing focus. Jim, said that he felt underwhelmed by his coaching, partly because he felt there was no focus to it and it lacked logical progression with actions to take away to maintain momentum. Sarah felt similarly that lack of structure created a vacuum for her.

The participants did not suggest that structure negated from their autonomy and control of the coaching conversation, an aspect of coaching they valued. According to Kline, (1999) coaching offers the time and space for critical thinking, something to which the participants could relate. Some of the participants expressed satisfaction and a feeling of empowerment when they felt in control of the direction of coaching and coaching conversation in a psychological and safe structure in which they felt

supported, trusted and valued by the organisation and the coach. This was particularly evident in Jim's account: *"One of the things we unpacked in our coaching conversations was that it is in the detail of what inspires you and makes you tick and what you are looking for with others. My coach teased all that out of me just gently but in a focused structured sort of way. My coach had a focus and we followed that"*.

Being valued by my employer

This theme spoke loudest to me because it challenged my assumptions that: (i) coachees expect autonomy and independence from their employer during the coachin; and (ii) the organisation's value of the coachee is taken for granted by virtue of coaching being proposed and paid for by the organisation.

I identified 'Being valued by my employer' because it struck me that of the twelve participants, four of them left their organisation and cited lack of involvement or support from their organisation as a contributing factor. Secondly, I identified a strong connection between those who felt positively about their organisation's involvement and support and the participant's motivation to be coached and achieve their goals.

All the participants were successful senior executives who spoke about autonomy and control in respect of their own careers, yet most engaged more with coaching when they had psychological support from their organisation. For example, Jackson said: *"I trusted that he (boss) wanted the best for me and was interested in me and that is why I went for it"*. Whereas, the fact that Jim's organisation had paid for his coaching was not enough, in itself, to signify that the organisation valued him and as a consequence he felt guilty about the cost of coaching. The difference between the two participants is that Jackson felt that his organisation was interested in him and supported him and, consequently, Jackson felt valued and comfortable with the cost. In contrast, Jim felt no personal connection with his organisation and as a result felt guilty about the cost of the coaching.

Other participants did not express positive feelings about their organisation's level of involvement unless there was something in addition to the financial outlay for coaching. The need for more than financial support from the organisation is supported in recent research (de Haan et al, 2020) who identified the coachee's perceived social support, which I interpret to include the organisation's psychological support, as a new factor contributing to the effectiveness of coaching. For Peter, additional support was in the form of follow up with the coach, whereas Anita felt that there was no follow up from her organisation and this resulted in her feeling distanced from her organisation and from the coaching. This appeared to be in stark contrast to Tooth et al (2008), who identified that coaching works best when the employing "*organisation remains at a distance and coaching occurs as an individual and personal learning journey"* (p.15). This did not mirror what my research participants were telling me about their own felt experiences.

One of the dichotomies in Tooth et al (2008) is that even though the coachees wanted to maintain a distance from their organisation, they expressed surprise that coaching was not evaluated by the organisation *"at an individual level"* (2008, p.16). I find it difficult to reconcile the coachees' concern about the organisation not evaluating the coaching on a personal level with the coach wanting the organisation to remain at a distance. This begs a question about what sort of evaluation of the coachees' experiences would be acceptable to an organisation, if the organisation had had no involvement in the coaching engagement.

Joo, (2005) emphasised the need for organisational support: *"overseeing the coaching process, consulting with the parties on the requirements for a successful coaching outcome, ensuring alignment with business needs, contracting regarding roles and keeping track of goal"'* (p479) and for coachees to be more open and accepting of coaching. What is absent in Joo's (2005) description of organisational support is psychological support. Fillery-Travis (2015) says that the psychological contract is about what each can expect of the other on an emotional level. Khoreva et al (2017) suggest that the organisation's commitment to their obligations under the psychological contract will affect the employee's commitment to their personal

development e.g. coaching. This is what I was hearing in the participants' stories and is a strong rationale for three-way contracting at the beginning and throughout the coaching engagement.

I also identified support in the literature (Kauffman and Coutu, 2009) the coach accreditation (EMCC, 2020) and training bodies (www.meylercampbell.com) that the organisation is a client of the coach and this spoke further about the importance of three-way contracting between the coach, coachee and organisation in preparation for and on-going support of the coachee's coaching. This position is supported by Fillery-Travis (2015) and EMCC (see appendix 3) who advocate contracting and re-contracting throughout the coaching engagement. With regards the psychological contract, *S*herman and Freas (2004) suggest that the contracting stage of the coaching is an ideal opportunity for the organisation to be engaged with expectation setting. Research participant Peter recognised the value of three way contracting and re-contracting and communication and it made him feel more positive about his coaching experience.

The participants' strength of feeling that the organisation's role in supporting and developing them within an on-going psychological contract was important to how they felt about the coaching as a whole, was evident throughout the conversations.

Tooth et al, (2008) did not identify the coaching relationship as a tripartite one, contrary to more current literature (Fillery-Travis, 2015) but regarded the organisation as the "*broker for the services*" (Tooth et al, 2008, p16). This is not dissimilar to the coaching paradigm in which I have generally coached where the organisation steps back once the coaching has been set up. The research participants, on the other hand, suggested strongly that they wanted their organisation to be more than a broker for services and wanted more involvement from them personally as a validation of how the organisation valued them. As Anita articulated it: "*they knew I was being coached and they didn't show any interest or ask how it was progressing and was I getting anything out of it*" indicating a lack of psychological involvement by the organisation which Anita felt let her down.

Another aspect of the organisational support my participants referred to was 'sponsorship' (Ibarra et al, 2010). None of them used the term sponsorship but it was implicit that they expected it. For example, Jade said of her coach, who was also her line manager: *"He allows my role to flourish … he has removed barriers so that I have been able to succeed. He advocates for me and my role in the company and it is amazing to have that support". This is* aligned with Ayyala et al's (2019) approach to sponsorship enabling connections and raising profiles and the mutual benefit of sponsorship for the coachee and the organisation (Hewlett, 2019). Jim lamented that his organisation did not advocate for him within the organisation: *"if my boss had …openly supported me and helped raise my profile internally, well (laughs) imagine that (laughs)".* This impacted negatively on his coaching experience. Ibarra et al (2010) suggest that women suffer more from lack of visibility than men and that notwithstanding the skills and experience of a woman and the apparent ability to undertake a promotional role, if they do not have sponsorship support the woman is less likely to get the promotion. None of the female research participants alluded directly to their organisation's lack of support or interest being as a result of their gender, but three of them did refer to choosing a female coach because they felt they could relate to their position as a woman in a male dominated organisation.

This theme of 'Being valued by the employer' made me think more about the value of three way contracting between the coach, coachee and organisation, before the coaching engagement begins and re-contracting at points throughout the coaching, particularly where goals change or the coachee's motivation changes. What is evident to me from this discussion is that where the coaching relationship is considered to be a tripartite one, there is a stronger connection with the organisation and its role in facilitating an effective coaching experience for the coachee. This is implicit in what the ICF, in two of its competencies (ICF, 2021) – '*Co-creating the relationship*' and '*Communicating effectively*' says about the requirement of the coach to reach agreement with the coachee and other stakeholders in seeking to understand the coachee and his or her context, enabling the coach to understand the

coachee's needs. Jim didn't feel that the coaching was a tripartite relationship and this affected his relationship with the coaching. This begs the question whether some of the participants' felt experiences might have been more positive had there been more engagement with the organisation, including three way contracting, re-contracting and on-going psychological support.

Although there is support in the literature for on-going support by the organisation of the coachee and the coaching engagement, the participants suggested they wanted and needed to see and experience evidence of that psychological support. This is another potential topic for future research.

Adding to my worldview

Reflecting on my findings and analysis, I could have had one major overriding theme called 'being valued' which could have encapsulated all the themes I chose. They were all about how important the feeling of being valued was to the coachee's sense of a constructive coaching experience, even the theme of *Lack of structure wastes time* speaks to how the participants felt valued by the coach. No structure indicated to them that the coach had not understood their need for structure and maybe hadn't enquired about their preferred style which represented a lack of interest. This highlights for me the need for preparation of the coaching for promotion involving contracting, re-contracting between the coach, coachee and organisation. The themes I identified all speak to my own personal values around trust, respect and appreciation of subjective realities and could explain why I chose them to encapsulate the participants' stories.

Undoubtedly, someone else presented with the same data and using the same analytical tool of thematic analysis would identify different themes and codes and make different judgments on the importance and value of the findings based on their own assumptions. One might ask that if that is the case, why did I ask independent people to review two transcripts and comment on what they saw in the data in terms of themes and patterns and things of note. My response to that reasonable challenge is to go back to my need to make sure that my bias was not taking centre stage. The

individuals I asked to interpret the two transcripts were part of the hermeneutic process which is meaning making. I go back to my ontology and epistemological position; I believe in multiple realities which are informed by the world in which we live and the experiences we have. I could have identified a number of themes, including emotions such as happiness, sadness, anger, frustration, positivity, enlightenment. I chose, instead, to categorise the themes as being valued by the coach, being valued as a person, being valued by my employer, goals excite and provide a focus and lack of structure wastes time, because they encapsulated the felt experiences of the research participants in a way in which I could make sense of their stories.

In the following section, I highlight the unique contribution to knowledge this study has made and I suggest possible areas for future research.

8 Insights

I did not set out to make recommendations to the coaching community but to improve my own practice and understanding of what goes on emotionally for the Executive Talent coachee in and around a coaching session and hope that the coaching community would find some useful and meaningful insights emerging from my research. I have, therefore, entitled this chapter "Insights" and not recommendations.

Unique contributions to knowledge

I am not aware of any literature on the specific topic of coaching executives for promotion, nor coachees' felt experiences of coaching and, therefore, my findings have added something new, namely the Executive Talent coachees' own perspectives of their felt experiences of coaching for promotion. This contribution is relevant for the whole coaching community as it challenges us to consider what does and does not make coaching effective for Executive Talent and consider what changes that might suggest for the coaching community concerned with coaching Executive Talent for promotion and seeking to enhance the effectiveness of coaching.

Some readers might make some generalisations from my findings with other branches of coaching, particularly around the employing organisation's support, goal setting and structure. The distinct characteristics of my cohort of participants that make some of my findings surprising for me is that they were senior executives, ambitious, had already enjoyed successful careers and appeared to be strong, independent and autonomous. Yet, their desire and need for structure, goals and their employing organisation's on-going psychological support was evident. What they mainly craved was to be valued as individuals in all their complexities with a sense of autonomy and control. Wanting structure, goals and feeling valued does not take away any of those values of freedom, autonomy, respect and trust.

I draw the following general insights from my research into Executive Talent coachees' felt experiences of coaching for promotion:

Executive Talent Coachees being coached for promotion:

i) feel more engaged and focused in the coaching when: a) their employing organisation demonstrates their ongoing engagement, interest, involvement and support in the coaching and the coachee's on-going development; b) expectations and goals are set and sometimes re-set; c) an arm's length professional authentic relationship is developed with the coach; d) the coachee is in control of their own destiny.

ii) use the coaching experience to reflect on what is important to them and their careers from a holistic point of view and not just from the point of view of the potential promotion;

iii) feel coaching helps them to think about promotion in the broader context of life choices;

iv) feel, more directed, but at the same time more in control, when there is some structure to the coaching;

v) feel the coach's background and experience in the coachee's industry are strong factors in developing trust and relationship with the coach, which they consider necessary to a beneficial effective coaching experience.

What has given me most pause for thought in my own practice is the impact that the employing organisation's level of psychological engagement and support for the participant during their coaching engagement had on how the participants then felt and related to their coaching for promotion experience.

The insights I have gained from my research are that I discovered that what goes on for the Executive Talent coachee at an emotional level transcends the coaching approach, coaching models used, goals identified, the coach's competencies and other more tangible aspects of coaching. This is a way of approaching relationships, psychological contracts and expectations. The data did not suggest to me that feelings and emotions are significant in isolation from how the coaching takes place,

where and with whom, but were critical to how emotionally prepared the coachee felt for the coaching and what they got out of it as a result. It indicated to me that how the coachees felt about a range of issues and overall how valued they felt, impacted on the coaching itself, the coachee's engagement with it and ultimately what the coachee, coach and organisational client derived from it. What I gained as a major insight was that preparing emotionally for the coaching is a precursor for what happens in the coaching engagement itself. Paying attention to the relevance and importance of what goes on for the coachee at an emotional level and using that knowledge to help to create the optimum psychological contract, expectations and environment for the coaching to take place and benefits to be reaped, is now an essential aspect of my preparation for my coaching engagements.

A major learning for me, therefore, is the importance of the preparation for coaching, which includes the coach, coachee and employing organisation in that preparation. This was central to the coaching and its perceived success for the participants.

Practical output from my findings

My insights have led me to develop and use a checklist to help me and my organisational and coachee clients prepare more effectively for coaching for promotion. The checklist is essentially an aide memoire for discussion with my coachee and organisational clients before the coaching begins and throughout. Its main purpose is to encourage three way psychological contracting between the coach, coachee and employing organisation, on-going support and sponsorship from the organisation and trust and expectation setting for all parties.

I have used the acronym CRAVE, adopting the meaning of "*having a very strong feeling of wanting something*" (Crave 2021) to provide structure to my checklist and prompt me to ask what do I and my coachee and organisational clients crave out of the coaching engagement and how can I prepare most effectively to be the best I can be for my clients, whilst being true to my values of trust, honesty, respect and learning (appendix 16 shows the checklist that is in operation within my own coaching business Cap Consulting Ltd).

Figure 9 below shows a pictorial representation of the CRAVE checklist.

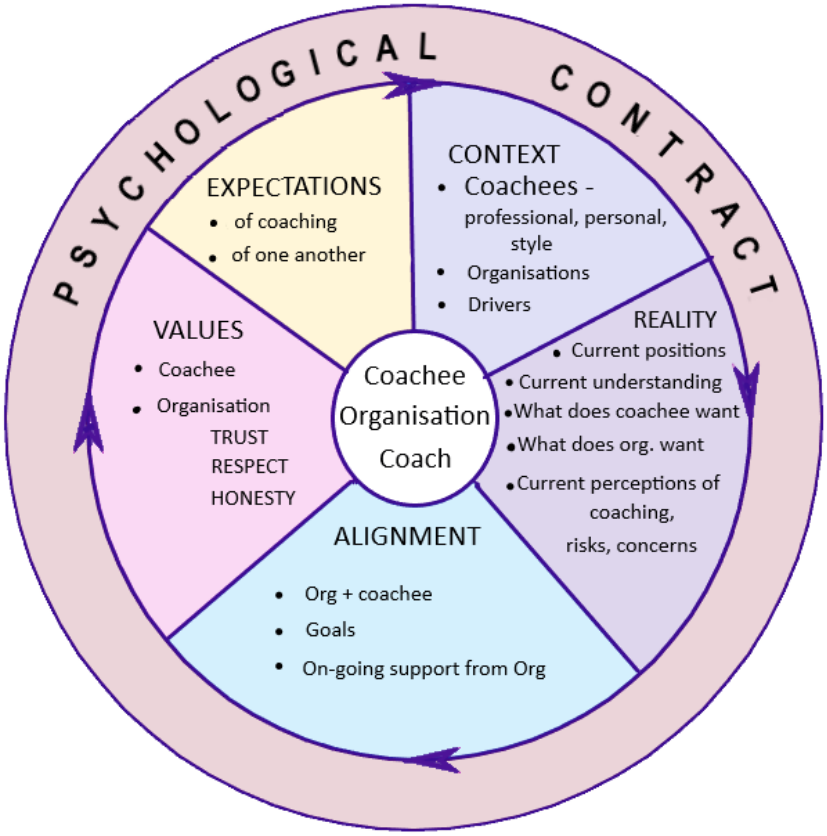

Figure 9 CRAVE pictorial aide memoire

The acronym CRAVE represents:

- C – CONTEXT – what is the context of the coaching? what is the coachee's professional and personal context? what is the employing organisation's context? what are the drivers for the coaching? For the coachee? For the employing organisation? What will on-going emotional support and commitment look like?
- R – REALITY – what is the current position? What does the coachee crave from the coaching? what does the employing organisation crave from the coaching? What is the coachee's understanding of coaching? what is the

organisation's understanding of coaching? How does the coachee feel about the prospect of coaching? Concerns?

- A – ALIGNMENT – to what extent are the coachee and organisation's cravings in alignment or misalignment? Are the goals aligned? If not, does that matter? Changing goals? 'permission to deviate'?
- V- VALUES – what are the respective values of the coachee and organisation. Incorporating the values into the coaching. How will the coachee feel valued?
- E – EXPECTATIONS – what are the coachee and organisational client's expectations of the coaching, of one another, of the coach? What are the coach's expectations of the coachee and organisational client? Changing expectations? Expectations of trust, support and engagement.

What I will do with these insights

1. Share my findings and insights with the coaching community, through contribution of articles to professional coaching journals, specific social media platforms and client development programmes.
2. Share my checklist with the coaching community as something that could be beneficial to other coaching practitioners, regardless of coaching model or approach used by them.
3. Present my findings at coaching and leadership conferences. At the time of writing, I had been invited to present at the Guildhall School of Business and Law, London Metropolitan University's 11th Developing Leadership Capacity conference in July 2021.

Limitations of the research

My research might have been richer if

(i) I had asked the participants to also talk about what they felt uncomfortable raising in their coaching sessions or with their employing organisations;

(ii) I had invited participants to talk about how they felt about their preparation for coaching. This might have provided me with some deeper insight into what optimum preparation could look like;

(iii) There had been more than three category A participants;

(iv) I had videorecorded myself during the research conversations with participants so that I could assess my own body language.

Potential future research

This research has identified potential topics for future research expanding on the current study:

(i) The coach's felt experiences of coaching Executive Talent coachees for promotion;

(ii) The impact of the following on Executive Talent coachees' felt experiences of coaching:

a. psychological contract between the coach, coachee and organisation;
b. three-way (coach, coachee and organisation) contracting and re-contracting;
c. the coach's specific or general knowledge of the coachee's industry;
d. specific coaching models;
e. similar or dissimilar coach and coachee values;
f. sponsorship by the organisation.

(iii) How does lapse of time between the coaching and the coachee's reflections on their coaching experience affect their perceptions of its effectiveness;

(iv) A comprehensive comparison of executive coaching and other development interventions in preparing Executive Talent for promotion

9 My personal reflections

Am I glad I pursued a doctorate in coaching?

Until recently, had developed as a coach through professional coaching practice, professional coaching supervision, reading coaching journals and engaging in expert seminars and workshops. This gave me confidence that I was practising safely and to the best of my ability. I wanted to take my knowledge further and contribute to the body of knowledge on coaching Executive Talent for promotion and this gave me the impetus to undertake doctoral research.

Through the WABC, I was introduced to Dr Annette Fillery-Travis[2], who encouraged me to delve into the differences between a PhD and a DProf to decide which route would appeal to me as a person and practitioner and further the dialogue and practice of executive coaching. I wanted my research to contribute to the practice as well as the thinking on executive coaching. The emerging discipline of a professional doctorate (Armsby et al, 2018) struck me as being an appropriate vehicle through which I could do this.

In my interview for a place on the DProf programme at the Middlesex University, I recall Dr David Adams [3] saying that it was less of an interview and more of a curious inquiry on both sides to explore whether each fitted with the other. I immediately liked this approach to inquiry and knew that a professional doctorate would allow me to be the 'CEO' of my own research, with the supervisors, academic teams, studying peers and coaching supervisors as part of my learning team, there to challenge and make me accountable and responsible.

My submission to undertake a DProf degree contained the following paragraph:

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[2] Dr Annette Fillery-Travis, Head of Wales Institute for Work Based Learning; senior coach educator; former head of faculty for the professional doctorate programme at the Middlesex University.
[3] Dr David Adams, Senior Lecturer, Transdisciplinary Practice, Faculty of Professional and Social Science, Middlesex University, London.

"I want to look at how the conversations, that take place before the coaching actually starts, impact on how successful the coaching turns out to be, particularly where the organisation has identified individuals as either fast track to the Board, or in line for a senior executive position".

I continued:

"My observation and personal experience lead me to think that one of the factors may be around how we, as business coaches, promote coaching to organisations and how they, in turn, promote it to individuals in their organisations".

I wanted to blow away an assumption that a productive business coaching relationship simply happens, without the same rigour of preparation that is used by businesses in other supplier contracts, before the formal engagement commences.

Unsurprisingly, as I developed a general knowledge landscape on executive coaching, my specific research inquiry changed. My interest remained with Executive Talent, but my focus changed to their felt experiences of being coached, because my initial literature review revealed a lack of research from coachees' points of view on coaching for promotion and nothing on their felt experiences.

When I was thinking about my research topic, Kate Maguire's paper on Personal and Professional Integrity (Maguire, 2017) prompted me to make the following journal entry:

"*If it is about us putting ourselves into the research with integrity and transparency and my proposal around the pre contract conversations starts from my personal frustration at not getting that right. What does that mean? … is it more about my uneasiness at being able to promote an offering that may or may not have measurable outcomes. … What conversations have worked and how and when? For me, success has come when I believed the*

client wanted it and I believed in the client's willingness to participate in an honest way". (Scholes, 2017b)

Re-reading this in 2020 I was struck by the fact that although my research topic had moved on, my sentiment about authenticity and what makes coaching effective for coachees was still at the core of what I felt I needed to explore.

My new research inquiry had the potential to make a significant impact on how we view and practice coaching Executive Talent. As I brought together my findings and insights I had an epiphanous moment that the occasions when I had felt strongest and most comfortable in my coaching engagements were when I had really actively listened to what the coachees and their employing organisations had said prior to the start of the coaching, as well as throughout. This concurred with my findings.

As my research drew to a close, I reflected on how I chose to obtain my data from my participants through conversations. I had videorecorded the conversations so that I could be fully engaged and not be distracted by taking notes. Three of the participants said they would suggest to their own coaches that they record their coaching conversations as watching them would remind them of what took place. I have some regret at not having shared the recordings of our research conversations with the participants, but that regret is for what they might have gained from seeing it.

Re-reading my journal entries of those conversations about videorecording the research conversations, I now consider that a limitation of my research was that I was not able to observe and analyse my own body language and the impact it had on the conversation and my overall analysis as I had only focussed the camera on the participant and not on both of us. Although my voice was captured on the video recordings, my physical presence and body language wasn't. Had it been, it would have provided some richer material around how my role in the conversation was influencing what the participant shared. Those who expressed positive feelings of 'getting the most out of coaching' were those who also indicated that the relationship with the coach was a positive one. I reflected on that and it brought to mind that as

my method of collecting the data was similar to a coaching session, the relationship between myself and the participant may have elicited similar feelings and therefore quality and openness of the conversations.

Journal

I was encouraged to acknowledge my positionality in my research partly through the use of a reflexive journal. Lincoln and Guba (1982) describe reflexive journals as analogous to anthropologists' field strategy journals. My own journal was not one chronological journey and included both reflexivity and reflection. Jarvis talks about professionals continuing to learn through reflection by reaching back and questioning our assumptions and motivations (Jarvis, 1999). Going back to my journal entries over three years has been an experience in looking back and questioning my assumptions and motivations. Schon (1987) says we form our understanding as we reflect on practices that come from earlier experiences and actions that create knowledge. We build on our knowledge by making sense of our experiences. In my journal, I noted what I was seeing, hearing, feeling and reacting to as I progressed. This included my reactions to the literature I reviewed, the difficulties I encountered as I considered what methodology would best suit my epistemological and ontological position and what I wanted to achieve. I also noted my changing reactions to what I was reading and finding in my study.

My journal was a private space in which I could be honest, angry, happy, frustrated, confused and at times delighted Etherington (2004). It allowed me to record how I changed as a person, as a researcher and as a practitioner, at various stages of my research.

My journal comprises of at least 8 A5 note books, an on-line journal, notes on my iPhone and jottings on pieces of paper and post it notes. Thoughts and ideas occurred to me at odd times. The experience of writing in a journal reminded me of something I learnt as an undergraduate student to always carry a notebook, or iphone, so that I could jot down my thoughts as and when they occurred. My journal entries told a

story of where and how I started, what I knew or didn't know at the beginning, how my assumptions were challenged and how I and my research developed.

I was influenced by Etherington (2004). In June 2017 I wrote the following:

> "*Etherington says that social constructionism has challenged modernist notions of truth and reality and invited us to explore how meanings and identity are created through language, stories and behaviour. She says that social constructionism invites us to see the world and ourselves as socially constructed and challenges us to see the world through other lenses.*" (Scholes, 2017c)

Against this margin note I wrote:

> "*I agree!! We are what we are because of our backgrounds, where we were brought up, by whom and how, who our early influencers were and how the powerful paradigms have prevailed." (Scholes, 2019b)*

There were times when I felt frustrated with how slowly I was progressing. I shared this with my academic supervisor and noted:

> *"… I told Brian that I was feeling frustrated and felt like I was getting no-where and had wasted so much time going down different rabbit holes trying to find the best approach or searching for … If I had really understood some of the writers we had been introduced to when we were in our first year of preparing our proposals, I would have saved so much time. Brian said: 'every doctoral student feels the same way because it is the first time you have each done a doctorate and things start to become meaningful to you at different stages'. This gave me reassurance and encouragement to carry on."* (Scholes, 2020)

On these occasions I questioned whether I was doing the right thing by continuing but suddenly something would happen to reinvigorate me. For example, in 2019 I

was invited to submit a proposal for a draft chapter for inclusion in a book about learning (Loo and Sutton, 2020). This gave me another reason to write, which was a positive experience for me during a period of self-doubt. The exercise of writing the chapter reminded me that my learning style is one that builds on what I have learnt before. This reminded me why I had decided to undertake this degree in the first place and gave me the impetus to re-engage with it.

Am I glad I pursued a DProf in coaching?

This study has expanded my perspective beyond my personal and practical experience and has given me an evidence base from which I can continue having conversations and add to the debate and development of coaching Executive Talent for promotion.

Undertaking this research has changed me as a practitioner and thinker, by giving me validation that there is no one single way to coach Executives preparing for promotion, and nor is there only one type of person wishing to be coached.

Bringing my project up to date, during the Covid 19 pandemic I spoke to some of my research participants and fellow coaches to get their thoughts on what is now different for them with regards coaching for promotion. One coaching colleague said:

> "*I am coaching someone whose promotion was postponed because of the lockdown*[4]*. Previously he was using the coaching sessions to explore life options and even deciding if he wanted to be promoted. Now, he is so scared of losing his job all together that the thought of moving has disappeared completely, he now just wants to focus his coaching on ensuring he is in the best position for promotion because he sees that as the safe option in the current Covid environment."* (Scholes, 2020d)

[4] During the 2020/2021 Covid 19 pandemic, the British government imposed, at different times, various lockdowns which required people in the UK to stay at home where at all possible.

To the same question, one of the research participants said:

> "*I believe coaches are even more in need now, as we are adapting to a new way of working where we are getting Zoom fatigue. If you are on the way to promotion you have to think about how this distance working will work for you in your new role. How can you demonstrate your worth to your bosses who don't actually see you now on a day to day basis. I am grappling with those concepts and my coach is grappling with this new world herself too, so we are working things out together. So yes, this coaching is even more relevant and necessary than it was before.*" (Scholes, 2020e)

Another participant, who has since been promoted said:

> "*If I were now being coached for promotion, I think I would just use promotion as an excuse but really use the coaching to fill the gaps left by not having those little chats with colleagues. In a way, it would fill a social need that I have to release pressure.*" (Scholes, 2020f)

These conversations have validated the importance of hearing about coachees' felt experiences of coaching for promotion to help coaches to adapt their styles where necessary and support organisations in their holistic support of the coachees. It feels even more important and relevant now as an inquiry than it did when I started.

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11 Appendices

11.1 Appendix 1 – Accreditations, Qualifications and Regulations

My qualification of Worldwide Association of Business Coaches ("WABC") Certified Business Coach ("CBC" ™) was obtained following a year's training on the Meyler Campbell business coach programme and is renewed annually subject to satisfying qualifying criteria set by WABC.

At the time of writing, there is no single qualification or training required to call oneself a coach or practice as a coach. Rather, there are many providers of coach training, which differ in terms of length, quality, models of coaching employed, or skills and competencies determined to be necessary. In other words, it is not a profession in the sense of law or medicine for example, where a specific qualification is the licence to practice and the indicator to the public that the individual has attained the basic level of skills and knowledge to practice safely in that profession.

My coaching training through Meyler Campbell was called "Business Coaching" and through my accreditation with the WABC I am entitled to use the term Certified Business Coach to describe myself. The term business coaching refers to coaching within businesses. My coaching practice has predominantly been coaching within businesses at the executive level and this is why I have used the term Executive coach.

There are a number of coaching accreditation bodies e.g. International Coaching Federation (ICF); European Mentoring and Coaching Federation (EMCC) and Worldwide Association of Business Coaches (WABC) all of whom have their own codes of ethics, competencies and professional requirements for accreditation.

The ICF currently has three levels of individual accreditation/ credentialing – Associate Certified Coach, Professional Certified Coach and Master Certified Coach;

The EMCC has four levels of accreditation – Foundation, Practitioner, Senior practitioner and Master Practitioner; and the WABC has four levels – WABC accredited level 1 RCC™, level 2 CBC™, level 3 CMBC® and level 4 ChBC®

11.2 Appendix 2 - ICF Core Competencies

(https://coachingfederation.org/app/uploads/2021/02/Current-ICF-Core-Competencies.pdf)

ICF Core Competencies

**The updated Core Competencies will be integrated in ICF-accredited Coach Training Programs curricula beginning in January 2021. Then, updated Credentialing assessments reflecting the revised Core Competencies will launch in early 2022. Learn more at coachingfederation.org/ core-competencies.*

Setting the Foundation

1) Meeting Ethical Guidelines & Professional Standards

Understanding coaching ethics and standards and applying them appropriately in all coaching situations.

2) Establishing the Coaching Agreement

Understanding what is required in the specific coaching interaction and coming to agreement with the prospective and new client about the coaching process and relationship.

Co-Creating the Relationship

3) Establishing Trust & Intimacy with the Client

Creating a safe, supportive environment that produces ongoing mutual respect and trust.

4) Coaching Presence

Being fully conscious and creating spontaneous relationships with clients, employing a style that is open, flexible and confident.

Communicating Effectively

5) Active Listening

Focusing completely on what the client is saying and is not saying, understanding the meaning of what is said in the context of the client's desires, and supporting client self-expression.

6) Powerful Questioning

Asking questions that reveal the information needed for maximum benefit to the coaching relationship and the client.

7) Direct Communication

Communicating effectively during coaching sessions, and using language that has the greatest positive impact on the client.

Facilitating Learning and Results

8) Creating Awareness

Integrating and accurately evaluating multiple sources of information and making interpretations that help the client to gain awareness and thereby achieve agreed-upon results.

9) Designing Actions

Creating with the client opportunities for ongoing learning, during coaching and in work/life situations, and for taking new actions that will most effectively lead to agreed-upon coaching results.

10) Planning & Goal Setting

Developing and maintaining an effective coaching plan with the client.

11) Managing Progress & Accountability

Holding attention on what is important for the client, and leaving responsibility with the client to take action.

11.3 Appendix 3 – EMCC contracting guidance

EMCC
Contracting
Guidance

Internal coaches contracting conversation guidance

Purpose of this document

Various members of the EMCC have collaborated to develop guidance on the key ingredients of a good contracting conversation when internal coaches are engaging with their clients (either verbally or written).

The primary audience is heads of coaching in organisations who are setting up or leading internal coaching programmes. The guidance is not intended to be prescriptive, more to act as the basis for a conversation between the head of coaching and their coaches – to ensure that they are covering the ground – but we intend it to be of value for internal coaches themselves too, their clients and their clients' line managers.

Part One: Roles and responsibilities

If the coaching relationship is to be a success, there needs to be clarity and agreement about the overall purpose of the coaching, the obligations of the coach, the client and, often, the line manager or 'sponsor'. The following suggestions are not intended to be prescriptive but are the sorts of things that could be covered.

Coach's obligations

Helping the client to formulate coaching goals or intentions
Supporting and challenging the client appropriately
Managing the process e.g. time, number and duration of meetings
Helping the client to work things out for themselves and learn from this
Helping the client to explore what support they need and how/where to find it beyond the coaching relationship

Helping the client to explore options – the advantages/disadvantages of different courses of action Inviting the client to reflect on past experiences with the intention of extracting learning from them and exploring how the learning occurred, so they can do it in other circumstances
Asking questions to help the client to explore issues more deeply

Active listening
Being honest and open in conversations
Giving constructive feedback as and when appropriate and agreed
Supporting the client in identifying specific actions and a way forward in order to meet their development needs
Holding the client to account for agreed actions – exploring when the client doesn't complete actions: what are the reasons?

Being alert to the multiparty nature of the coaching relationship and the need to balance the different interests of the client, the sponsor and the organisation – who will decide on this
balance? Will there be discussion/agreement on this?
Being alert to the potential for a conflict of interests of either a professional (e.g. client and coach in competition for promotion) or emotional (e.g. coach being a friend of someone whom the client wants to talk about) nature arising through the coaching relationship – agreeing under what circumstances the coaching agreement will end (instigated by either party)

Coaching client's obligations

- Thinking about what they would like to explore during the meetings and preparing for them
- Being honest and open in the conversations
- Taking responsibility for their learning and development
- Capturing learning e.g. note-taking during the meetings
- Reflecting between meetings
- Carrying through actions that they have committed to – willingness to explore the reasons if not carried through
- Providing feedback to the coach

Line manager/sponsor's obligations

- Involvement in the goal setting
- Being honest about any changes they are expecting to see (but avoiding references to the client's

  personality as opposed to their behaviours)

- Being as clear as possible about what success/effectiveness would look like
- Taking responsibility for giving the client regular, constructive feedback and being mindful of their role in supporting the client's development

Confidentiality

This is a prerequisite if honest and open dialogue is to take place. Explain to the client what is included in the confidentiality agreement e.g. what would the consequences be of a potential breach of the organisation's disciplinary code? Is there a form of words provided by the organisation that all its internal coaches are expected to abide by? Is the very fact that you are coaching that individual to be regarded as confidential information in itself?

As a rule of thumb, you should disclose information only where it has been explicitly agreed with the client and sponsor, unless you believe that there is convincing evidence of serious danger to the client, others or the organisation.

Explain how some issues raised in meetings may be taken to supervision and what the confidentiality implications of that will be (particularly if the

supervisor is also internal or is the person responsible for the coaching scheme). If it is group supervision with other internal coaches from the same organisation, think about how client confidentiality will be maintained and explain that. Also, if in your organisation, coaches are periodically asked to feed back – unattributably – themes that have arisen in their coaching sessions that could contribute to organisational learning, explain that to the client too.

Explain whether you will be taking any notes and, if so, how and where they will be stored (and for how long they will be kept).

Establish if they are happy to be communicated with between sessions using the work email system e.g. if anyone else has access to their in-box.

Boundaries

As the coach, you are responsible for managing the boundaries between your professional role in the organisation and the assignments you take on as an internal coach. Explain that internal coaches can sometimes find themselves privy to information about their clients through their organisational role and work relationships and how you will be dealing with that.

Discuss the areas that the client wants to explore, how these relate to their development, and how they fit into the coaching brief. Identify, and decide how to approach, any issues that might be on the borderline of what the sponsor would consider appropriate e.g. exploration of childhood/family experiences; difficult personal relationships which may be having an impact on the client's performance; help with an application/interview for a role elsewhere in the organisation.

Explain how you will always be alert to your own competence as a coach and the circumstances in which you will refer your client to other sources of support. Ensure that you are familiar with the process within the organisation for doing this e.g. employee assistance programme or occupational health section. Or will you be expected to rely on your own network of professionals?

Global Code of Ethics/Complaints process

Provide the client with a copy of the EMCC (or other professional coaching body) Global Code of Ethics and ensure the client has read it and understands the complaints process. Ensure that they know whom they can contact within the organisation if they are unhappy about anything arising from the coaching relationship.

Is a coach related complaint aligned with or connected to your organisation's complaints procedure? Who will respond internally to a coachee's complaint? How will this be managed?

Part Two: The process

This part is about how the coach and client plan to work together and also provides an opportunity for the coach to explain their approach to coaching e.g. Is any particular model favoured? Is there a 360 degree feedback tool that the organisation commonly uses which will be deployed? Will any psychometrics be used?

Three-way meeting with coach, client and client's line manager/sponsor

This optional meeting should ensure a common understanding of the purpose of the coaching; the roles and responsibilities of the different parties, the coaching goals and what success will look like. There may be public and private goals e.g. some goals agreed with the line manager /sponsor and others that are agreed just between the coach and client. It is common, for example, for the client to want to do some work on their relationship with their line manager but may not want to be explicit about that. At this meeting, it should be agreed what, if any, feedback will be given by the coach to the line manager/sponsor.

Coaching approach

Describe your coaching approach and support the client in understanding the process. Explain and agree the value of a directive/non-directive coaching process. The intention is to help the client think and explore a topic for themselves rather than you give 'advice'. You may agree to challenge assumptions and any pre-conceptions or barriers, and create a safe place to explore/reflect. Explain that you will be offering both support and challenge.

Agree how you will co-manage goals and explore the impact of explicit and implicit goals. Discuss with whom, if anyone, do the goals get shared. Agree how you will measure progress against the goals. Establish what role, if any, the client's line manager or sponsor will have. How will these be connected, if at all, with performance development/appraisal process?

Explain how, and if, you will use appropriate and relevant psychometrics or a 360 feedback instrument.

11.4 Appendix 4 - Choosing two coaching supervisors for sense checking

I chose the two specific individuals for a few reasons: first, I trusted them as experienced, ethical executive coaches and coaching supervisors positioned in the same operational world as I am. They were both professional, reflective people whose perspectives added value and rigour to my own reading of the data. Their own social constructs would be different from mine and, therefore, what held meaning for them in the data would be from their perspectives. I had worked with one of them on the development of a coaching programme for a client and we had trained together as coaches on the Meyler Campbell Business Coach Programme. We had also engaged in informal peer coaching supervision sessions with one another on a regular basis since completing the Business Coach Programme. He abides by the same codes of conduct set by the coach training body and accreditation body to which we both belong. I did consider whether the fact that we trained together might mean that his interpretations would be informed by the same training and whether this would be a disadvantage. I concluded that this would be balanced by the fact that his personal, business, coaching background and personality were very different from mine and some of his assumptions would therefore be different. The second coaching supervisor is an accredited coaching supervisor through the Coaching Supervision Academy Ltd, a senior coaching practitioner and senior practitioner on the European Mentoring and Coaching Council. He has been my coaching supervisor for at least six years. We meet regularly every few months. I value his insightfulness, professionalism and perspective and it was these attributes that I knew he would bring to bear on reading the transcripts and identifying themes, patterns or things of note. He had previously undertaken a higher level degree on a coaching related topic and was familiar with analysing interviews, transcripts and other source material.

11.5 Appendix 5 – Proforma Participant Information Sheet on Middlesex University letterhead

PARTICIPANT SHEET (PIS)

Participant ID Code: CSDP018

Study title

An exploration of coachees' felt experience of executive coaching where the coachee has been marked out for promotion.

You are being invited to take part in a research study. Before you decide, it is important for you to understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. Please take time to read the following information carefully and discuss it with others if you wish. Please ask me if there is anything that is not clear or if you would like more information. Do take time to decide whether or not you wish to take part.

Thank you for reading this.

What is the purpose of the study?

My name is Christine Scholes and I am the researcher. I am an executive coach and I am interested in exploring what makes coaching successful for people who have been marked out for promotion or are part of a succession plan in their organisation. There are various reasons why this may be so, including; well considered coaching goals; the coachee's motivation to take opportunities to develop to put them in an optimum position to be promoted; the coachee's own self-discipline and focus; the coaching tools that the coach uses in the coaching sessions; a good, trusting relationship or rapport between the coach and the coachee; the coaching sessions provide the coachee with a period of time when they can talk with a coach and neither they nor their opinions will be judged. There are, of course, other reasons why coaching may be successful from a coachee's point of view and reasons why it is not successful. The coachee participants will

have their own thoughts and felt experiences, which is what I am interested in exploring in my research.

I hope that the output and analysis of my research will provide those who engage internal and/or external coaches, with additional knowledge to make informed decisions about investing in coaching. In particular, I hope it will: (i) provide learning and development, HR functions and those supporting people development in organisations, with evidence to consider under what circumstances it may be appropriate to use coaching for their employees on succession plans, or on the path for promotion, and what criteria they should look at when proposing coaches; (iii) help individuals in organisations to consider whether coaching might be appropriate for them and, if so, how they will choose and/or work with their coach.

Why have I been chosen?

It is important that the coachee participants come from a cross section of organisations and the participants are fully informed and willing to take part in the research. You have indicated that you are interested in taking part in this study. You were invited to take part for the following reasons: (i) you have volunteered to take part and it is important that all those who take part in any academic research do so completely voluntarily; (ii) you are on your organisation's succession plan or have been identified, or marked out, for possible promotion over the next 2-3 years or have been promoted; (iii) you were selected for coaching because you are on a succession plan or have been marked out for possible promotion in the next few years or have been promoted.

You are one of approximately 15 - 20 similar individuals across a number of various organisations, who are being coached and who have volunteered to take part in this research.

Do I have to take part?

It is up to you to decide whether or not to take part. If you decide to do so, I will give you this information sheet to keep. I will also ask you to sign a consent form. If

you decide to take part you are still free to withdraw at any time and without giving a reason. If you do decide to withdraw from the study then please inform me as soon as possible and I will facilitate your withdrawal. If, for any reason, you wish to withdraw your data, please contact me within a month of your participation. After this date, it may not be possible to withdraw your individual data as the results may have already been analysed and included in my written research. However, as all data are anonymised, your individual data will not be identifiable in any way.

It is important for you to know that my research is totally unrelated to your progress, or not, in your organisation; it is your organisation which has identified you as someone on a promotion track. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part, will not affect your position in your organisation, nor your opportunities for promotion.

What will I have to do?
I am the doctoral research student undertaking this research.

I will invite you to up to two meetings, evenly spaced over a period of 12 months, or the period of your coaching engagement, whichever is shortest. The dates and times of the meetings will be arranged with your agreement and to fit in with your diary. At those meetings, I will ask you to talk about your felt experiences of being coached. You may talk about whatever is important to you in the coaching engagement and what makes it successful or not successful for you.

Each meeting, which will take place either at your place of work or a neutral space agreed between you and me, will last approximately 60 - 120 minutes. Present at the meeting will be you and me.

At each meeting, I will record what you say. I may also ask you additional questions. The recording will be on a Dictaphone, iPhone or other reliable recording device. I may also take video images on an iPhone or iPad. The reason for the video images is so that I can analyse your body language, tone of voice and silences, all of which will

provide me with richer data for my research study. Your consent will be required for both the audible and visual recording and you have the right to refuse to give your consent for either, or both, and this will not affect your participation in the research study.

Confidentiality and anonymity

All data, whether written or recorded, which will be analysed by me, will be anonymised and confidential. As a participant, neither your name, nor your employing organisation, nor your coach's name will be identifiable. I will attribute code numbers to each participant and organisation.

I will comply with all data protection legislation in place during the course of my research study. My research, methodology and publication will also be governed by the Middlesex University's ethics and academic codes and regulations.

Please note that in order to ensure quality assurance and equity this project may be selected for audit by a designated member of the Middlesex University's ethics committee. This means that the designated member can request to see signed consent forms. However, if this is the case, your signed consent form will only be accessed by the designated auditor or member of the audit team.

Will I have to provide any bodily samples (i.e. blood/saliva/urine)?

No. This is not a medical study and will not entail any medical tests.

What are the possible disadvantages and risks of taking part?

There are no known risks in participating in this project.

There will be no financial reward for taking part in this research study.

What are the possible benefits of taking part?

I hope that you will benefit personally from the opportunity to reflect on your coaching experience, in the knowledge that you will be contributing to the body of practical and academic knowledge about coaching, for the benefit of those who take part in coaching either as a coach, coachee or employing organisation.

Will my taking part in this study be kept confidential?

I have put a number of procedures in place to protect the confidentiality of participants. You will be allocated a participant code that will always be used to identify any data you provide. Your name or other personal details will not be associated with your data, for example, the consent form that you sign will be kept separate from your data. All paper records will be stored in a locked filing cabinet, accessible only to me, the researcher. All electronic data will be stored on my password protected computer or iPhone. All information you provide will be treated in accordance with the data protection legislation in place, including GDPR.

What will happen to the results of the research study?

The results of my research study will be used as part of my Doctoral dissertation. The results may also be presented by me at conferences or in journal articles. However, the data will only be used by me as researcher and at no point will your personal information or data be revealed.

Who has reviewed the study?

The study has received full ethical clearance from the Research ethics committee who reviewed the study. That committee is the Trans Disciplinary DProf Sub-Committee.

Willingness to participate and contact for further information

If you would like to meet me, either in person or via skype or telephone, to discuss your potential involvement in my research, please let me know by email, at the address shown below, and I will make the appropriate arrangements.

Christine Scholes, Doctoral Researcher, (cs1279@live.mdx.ac.uk)
Mobile: (withheld)

If you require further information, have any questions or would like to withdraw your data then please contact:

Christine Scholes, Doctoral Researcher, (cs1279@live.mdx.ac.uk)
Professor Brian Sutton, Supervisor, Faculty of Professional and Social Sciences
Middlesex University, London NW4 4BT, (b.x.sutton@mdx.ac.uk)

Thank you for taking part in this study. You should keep this participant information sheet as it contains your participant code, important information and the research teams contact details.

Christine Scholes, Doctoral Researcher, Middlesex University
Date: 21 November 2018

11.6 Appendix 6 – Consent Form

Participant Identification Number: CSDP018

CONSENT FORM

Title of Project: An exploration of Coachees' felt experience of executive coaching

Name of Researcher: Christine Scholes

Supervisor's name and email*:* Professor Brian Sutton

Please initial box

I confirm that I have read and understand the information sheet dated 21 November 2018 for the above study. I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have been given contact details for the researcher	1
I understand that my participation is voluntary, the data collected during the research will not be identifiable, and I am free to withdraw my consent without giving a reason	2
I agree that this form that bears my name and signature may be seen by a designated auditor (i.e. a Chair of the Trans Disciplinary DProf Sub-Committee Ethics Committee or representative of the University Ethics Committee) to monitor correctness of procedure. I understand that the data I provide may be used for analysis and subsequent publication, and provide my consent that this might occur	3
I understand that I can ask for my data to be withdrawn from the project until data analysis begins in approximately one month following my initial interview.	7
I understand that my interview may be taped, video image recorded and subsequently transcribed	8

I agree to take part in the above study

_____	_____	_____
Name of participant	Date	Signature
_____	_____	_____
Name of person taking consent (if different from researcher)	Date	Signature
Christine Scholes Researcher	_____ Date	_____ Signature

1 copy for participant; 1 copy for researcher

11.7 Appendix 7 – Letter from organisation consenting to participation

(Coachee's organisation's letterhead)

Contact details (phone number and email)

Date:

To: Ms Christine Scholes, DProf researcher at Middlesex University

cc: Professor Brian Sutton, Professor of Learning Performance, Faculty of Professional and Social Sciences, Middlesex University, London, NW4 4BT

I certify that Ms Christine Scholes has been granted permission to collect data in relation to the study: Coachees' felt experience of executive coaching

This involves Ms Scholes meeting with ( ) ("coachee participants") of ( ) individually on two to three separate occasions. The dates and times of the meetings will be arranged between Ms Scholes and the coachee participant to fit in with the participant's diary. At those meetings, Ms Scholes will ask the participant to talk about their felt experiences of being coached. I understand that they may talk about whatever is important to them in the coaching engagement and what makes it successful or not successful for them. I also confirm that I may provide Ms Scholes with additional coachee participants from ( ) in which case, permission to collect data from those participants, who will be named and agreed in email correspondence between Ms Scholes and ( ), is also granted.

Each meeting, which will take place either at the participant's place of work or a neutral space agreed between the coachee participant and Ms Scholes, will last approximately 60 - 120 minutes. Present at the meeting will be the coachee participant and Ms Scholes.

At each meeting, Ms Scholes will record what is said by the coachee participant. She may also ask additional questions. The recording will be on a Dictaphone, iPhone or other reliable recording device. Video images may also be taken on an iPhone or iPad. Ms Scholes explained that the reasons for the video images is so that she can

analyse body language, tone of voice and silences, all of which will provide her with richer data for her research study. The coachee participant's consent will be required for both the audible and visual recording and they have the right to refuse to give their consent for either or both and this will not affect their participation in the research study.

All data, whether written or recorded, which will be analysed by Ms Scholes, will be anonymised and confidential. Neither the participant, nor our company, nor the participant's coach will be identifiable. Ms Scholes will attribute code numbers to each participant, organisation and coach.

I understand that Ms Scholes will comply with all data protection legislation in place during the course of her research study. Her research, methodology and publication will also be governed by the Middlesex University's ethics and academic codes and regulations.

I acknowledge that Ms Scholes will be required to provide Consent Forms and Participation Information Sheet to those taking part in the study.

Yours sincerely

( )
MD/CEO/Partner

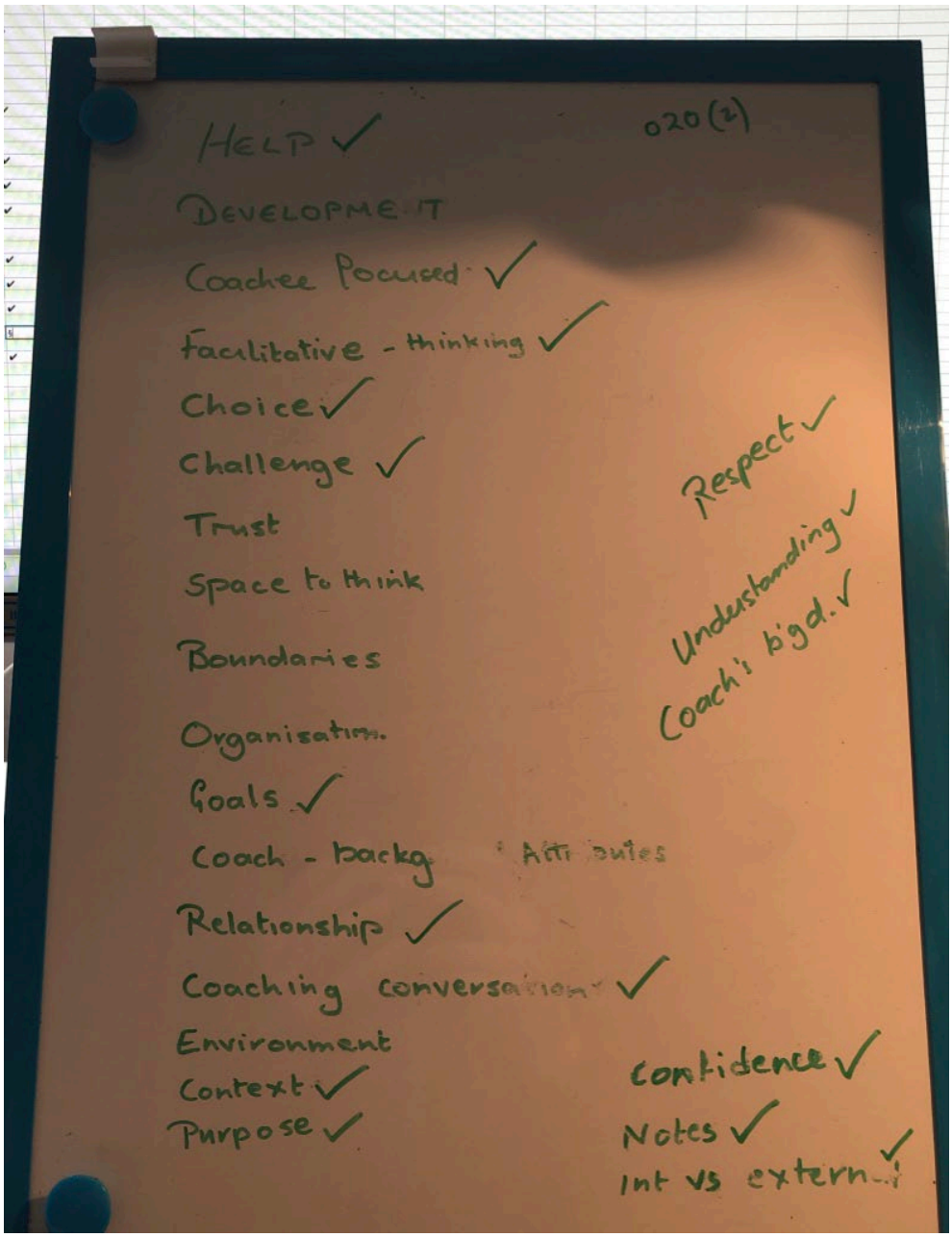
Signature

11.8 Appendix 8 – Participants' Unique Reference Codes and pseudonyms

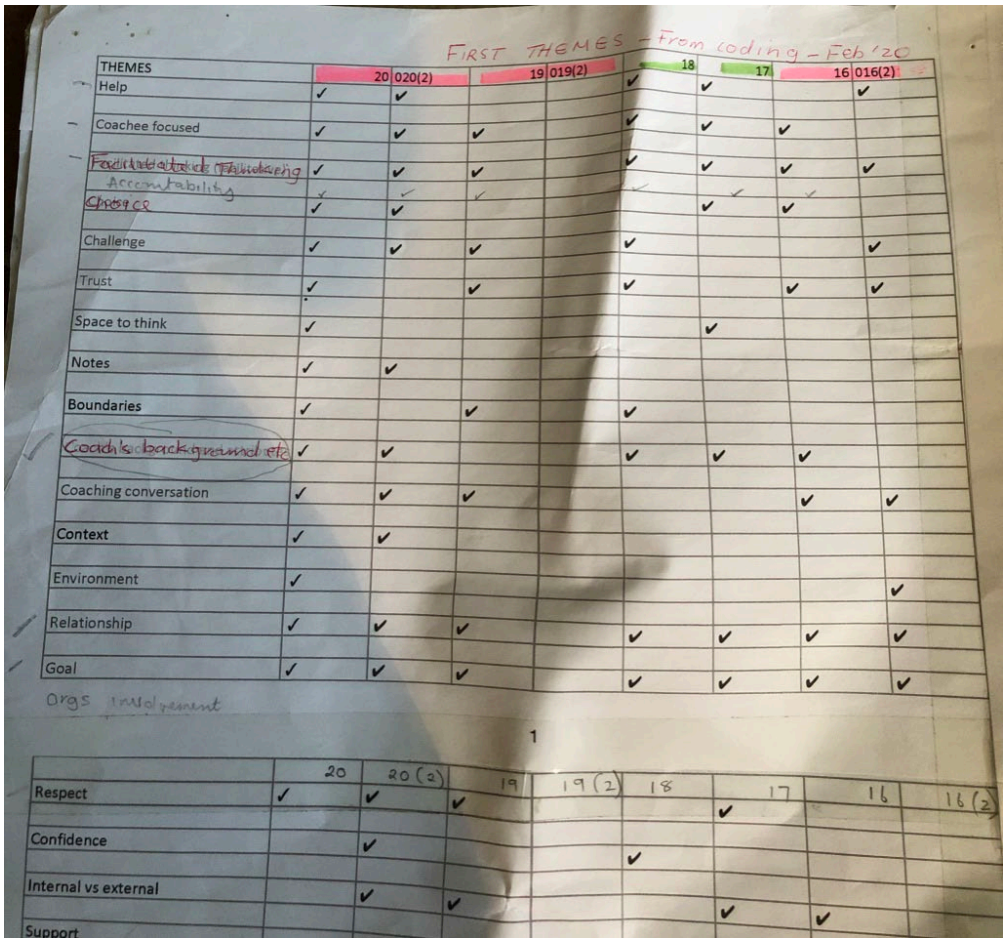
CATEGORY A	CATEGORY B
CSDP020A Joe	CSDP018B Stephan
CSDP0019A Jade	CSDP017B Brian
CSDP0016A Dara	CSDP015B Aysha
	CSDP014B Denise
	CSDP013B Anita
	CSDP012B Jim
	CSDP011B Peter
	CSDP010B Sarah
	CSDP09B Jackson

My two categories of research participants were: category A – those who were in the process of being coached when they took part in my research project; and category B – those who had been coached for promotion between 2 – 5 years previously.

11.9 Appendix 9 - Whiteboard markings of initial thoughts on transcript CSDP20A2



11.10 Appendix 10 - A section of an initial spreadsheet with initial thoughts and impressions



FIRST THEMES – From coding – Feb '20

THEMES	20	020(2)	19	019(2)	18	17	16	016(2)
Help	✓	✓			✓	✓		✓
Coachee focused	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	
Facilitated autonomous Thinking	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Accountability	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Choice	✓	✓				✓	✓	
Challenge	✓	✓	✓		✓			✓
Trust	✓		✓		✓		✓	✓
Space to think	✓					✓		
Notes	✓	✓						
Boundaries	✓		✓		✓			
Coach's background etc	✓	✓			✓	✓	✓	
Coaching conversation	✓	✓	✓				✓	✓
Context	✓	✓						
Environment	✓							✓
Relationship	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓
Goal	✓	✓	✓		✓	✓	✓	✓

Orgs involvement

1

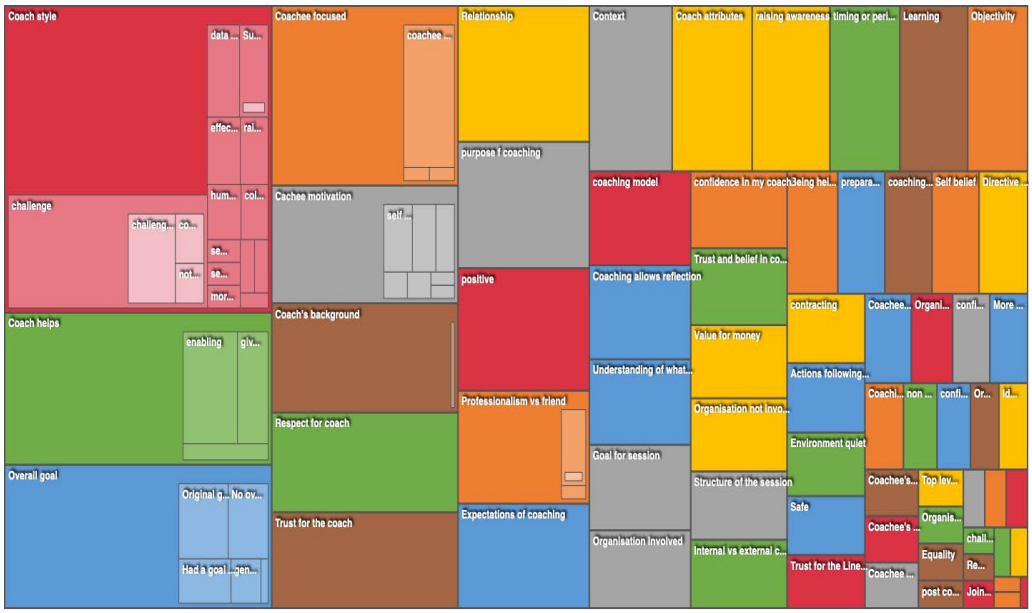
	20	20 (2)	19	19 (2)	18	17	16	16 (2)
Respect	✓	✓	✓			✓		
Confidence		✓			✓			
Internal vs external		✓	✓			✓	✓	
Support								

11.11 Appendix 11 - The strengths and limitations of using computer programs in data coding

The strengths and limitations of using computer programs in data coding (From Braun and Clarke, 2013, p.219)

Strengths	Limitations
Can increase the organisation of data, coding and analysis through functioning as online 'filing system'	Cost – if you have to buy a program, it may not be affordable, commercialisation has been raised as a concern in this area in general
Allows quick searching for codes, data and (often) the generation of visual connections	May not be possible to spend time learning to use (well) new software in a time-limited (e.g. seven-month) project
Can increase efficiency, making the process of coding and analysis quicker. However, this only applies if you're competent with the program or a quick learner (otherwise it can take longer)	For some forms of analysis, it can take longer
Can give reassurance of comprehensiveness of coding (but this does depend on you doing it well in the first place)	Risk of 'usability frustration, even despair and hopelessness' (Lu and Shulman, 2008) if not tech-savvy
Subsequently, may increase the rigour of qualitative coding and analysis	Risk of technologically mediated distancing from the data – less immersion leading to less insight
May facilitate visualisation and (thus) theoretical/analytical development	Can work as a distraction, the technologies can be seductive, and assist (fear-induced) analytic-avoidance (procrastination)
May increase transparency of qualitative research process, as there are clear 'audit trails'	Carries the temptation to over-code or use features of the program not necessary for your analysis (Mangabeira, 1995)
Can be very useful for managing a large dataset	Risk of producing a focus on quantity – with frequency being mistaken for meaningfulness
Can be useful for team projects	Risk that the software can promote certain forms of analysis (tendency towards GT in many programs, MacMillan & Koenig, 2004) rather than facilitating the use of a chosen method – this risks analysis being determined by techniques and technologies, rather than conceptual or other factors, a process referred to as methodolatory (Chamberlain, 2000)
	Programs can contain embedded methodological and theoretical assumptions (often derived from GT) and these need to be critically considered (MacMillan and Koenig, 2004)

11.12 Appendix 12 - Treemap of early coding using Nvivo



11.13 Appendix 13 – Themes

Theme 1 Being valued by my coach

Theme 1	Sub theme	Detail
Being valued by my coach		
	Coach's background	
		Coach's experience in coachee's industry
		Coach's practical background and experience
		Time coach has spent coaching
		Gender
	Relationship between the coach and coachee	
		Rapport
		Trust
		Respect
		Professional
		Boundaries
	Coach's coaching style	
		Challenging
		Collaborative
		Facilitative
		Objective

Theme 2 Being valued as a person

Theme 2	Sub themes
Being valued as a person	
	Person centred
	Motivation and accountability of the coachee
	Context – the coachee's and the overall context of the coaching engagement

Theme 3 Goals excite and provide a focus

Theme 3	Sub theme
Goals excite and provide a focus	
	The goals were different from the organisational goal or changed to a personal goal
	No goal or goal not specific enough

Theme 4 Lack of structure wastes time

Theme 4	Sub theme
Lack of structure wastes time	
	Structure within the coaching session
	Post session actions

Theme 5 Being valued by my employer

Theme 5	Sub themes
Being valued by my employer	
	Little or no involvement from the organisation
	The importance of the organisation's support and interest

11.14 Appendix 14 – A sample of participants' quotations - examples

Selected quotations - Theme 1 Being valued by my coach
Sub theme Coach's background and experience

Participant unique code number	Sub theme Coach's background and experience	Quotations from participants' conversations
CSDP013B Anita	In coachee's industry	'I engaged my coach personally and paid myself. Someone had recommended a particular coach who had worked in the same sector as me. That was perfect as I wanted someone who could relate to my world'
CSDP010B Sarah **CSDP016A(1) Dara**	In coachee's industry	'When I looked at the profiles of the potential coaches, I was looking for someone with a similar background to me as I thought that would be most useful. I found one with just my background in industry and was interested in things I was interested in and the connection felt strong' 'He is external but works extensively in my organisation so knows it really well. He has a total knowledge so it has been good to have that background'
CSDP010B Sarah	Time	'I also wanted someone old enough to have experience at my level and that's who I chose'
CSDP020A1 Joe	Practical	'A smart young consultant could tell me what I need to do to get to where I want to get to but I can get all of that out of a book. Help around how to behave around a Board table, for example, can only be obtained through coaching by people who have done it and make me feel like they know what I am experiencing'
CSDP010B Sarah	Gender	'Another reason I chose my coach was she was a woman and I thought she would be able to understand my perspective and be able to put herself in my shoes and my world. I was right, I could tell her things maybe I wouldn't say to a man because I knew she would understand where I was coming from'

Quotations – Theme 1 Being valued by my coach
Sub theme Relationship

Participant unique code number	Relationship	Quotations from participants' conversations
CSDP010B Sarah	Boundaries and professionalism	'She was professional but shared just enough about herself and background to make it feel personal but not too much. It needs to be more of an arm's length relationship. But I suppose that's the lawyer in me (laughs). For example, sharing something about managing her own career with children. She was trying to empathise I suppose (pause) and it was useful (pause) but I wouldn't want it to be too personal'
CSDP020A1 Joe	Supportive Respect Professionalism	'As I get older I realise that the spots and stripes of how you are made up need something deeper to untangle and that is why I need my coach to be really with me and for me and be supportive and critique me heavily. Yes, heavy critique from someone I really trust because they are there for you. That is how I feel about my coach'
CSDP020A1 Joe	Rapport	'My coach is genuine, you know, genuinely interested in me as a person'
CSDP018B Stephan	Rapport Respect Professionalism	'(my coach) was the most impressive person in their area and really has great gravitas and intellect and we had great rapport but it got less good when my coach's world got bigger and I was smaller in it and my coach became too big for me and was looking at much bigger clients and I felt that because I couldn't bring my coach the organisation as a client I was less interesting to my coach. So rapport was built around my coach's interest in me'
CSDP013B Anita	Boundaries Objective	'So just the nature of the relationship where we could talk and my coach wasn't coming from a family or historical friendship meant we could be objective and it was a more useful experience. I felt good at the end of the sessions – mainly. So the nature of the relationship with my coach was very important and provided me with something that wasn't available to me from elsewhere'.

Quotations – Theme 1 Being valued by my coach
Sub theme Coach's coaching style

Participant Unique code number	Coach's coaching style	Quotations from participants' conversations
CSDP011B Peter	Directive Based on experience	'The first coach was a strong character used to doing things in a very particular way in business and we set objectives and deliverables and my coach asked me how I was doing. I got things to read which was very helpful. The second was more based on his personality. Broad senior experience. Two very different approaches. The first was good for the tactics of getting promoted but the second approach was more strategic and the world's your oyster and more fulfilling and gave me more confidence'
CSDP013B Anita	Challenging	'Obviously, on reflection and with more experience, I realise it was a provocative approach, you know, my coach's style of questioning me. It was not about trying to create a friendly relationship and maybe the coach has to create some discomfort to get the right effect. Clearly it resonated.'
CSDP020A1 Joe	Challenging	'My coach was able to challenge me, which is so important in an executive role, you need to be challenged. We are paid well for what we do. But actually, we need to know about our bad habits, especially if we are going for even bigger roles (laughs) and I realised I had got into them. I could tell my coach understood what I meant by things he said and challenged me on and he is easily able to challenge me (laughs). He made me feel embarrassed, in a good way, about some of the things I did. He was really interested in me as a person'
CSDP010B Sarah	Challenging Trust	'Ultimately, I gravitated towards two coaches similar to me and maybe had a sense that you share characteristics (laughs) and maybe next time a different character could challenge me more, I don't know really. Not sure (pause and head tilted to one side and then forward). (then a quicker pace) But I got on well with my coach and felt comfortable and trusted them and I knew they trusted me so maybe that was more important at that point '
CSDP020A2 Joe	Challenging Facilitative	'Reflecting back on my coaching, it was great, it helped me to prepare myself for the next stage. I was challenged. I was explored (laughs). My coach got into me and my background and what makes me tick and what is important to me and what isn't. They made me think about what is right for me and what isn't. Without them I wouldn't have developed the confidence about myself in the way I did and some of that confidence was about making different choices about the next stage in my career'.

Quotations – Theme 2 Being valued as a person

Participant unique code number	Person centred	Quotations from participants' conversations
CSDP020A2 Joe		'In the coaching what helped me to come to my decisions was the really focussed and good conversation about what gives me (emphasis on the word me) energy and where I get refreshed and get pushed forward as well as what my values were. And coaching helped me to understand that these were my values. Previously I had preconceptions about what I needed to get a promotion and what it meant to me. Coaching has helped me to look at it and myself more broadly and realise that so much of it has to come from me. I feel my coach is really helping me to explore that and myself'
		'The way he worked with me was very personal … he knew me very well, not just the work me but the personal me'
CSDP017B Brian		'That connection. A good coach with whom I am going to have a great relationship is one who can hold that space and find it in themselves to connect to me at a deeper level. That is what does it'
	Motivation and accountability of the coachee	
CSDP019A1 Jade		'For me, being a recipient of coaching was a lot to do with my own mindset. Wanting to be coached is important. I wanted to be coached and be held to account for my own actions'
CSDP011B Peter		'I looked at it (coaching) really positively because it was about me learning what I didn't know and being ready for that and promotion'
CSDP010B Sarah		'I see a coach as someone who helps guide (animated). It was definitely a two way process. I told her what I wanted to get out of my development and asked her how we could do that – you know, the mechanisms to helping me with that development. But it was my development and I knew what I needed.'
CSDP019A2 Jade		'We have goals and a coach should be there to help you achieve them or rather help construct an environment where you consider whether it is possible. So, if I don't achieve them I will take full responsibility but also reflect on how the coaching has been in helping me to achieve them'

	Context	
CSDP012B Jim		'the other thing I would have thought was important is how someone has ended up here, in other words, the context. So is it really about promotion, or is it about behaviours and I was surprised that nobody, including my coach, really asked me about that specifically and it was just taken for granted that I was there as a coachee and get on with it whatever that was' 'Overall, context is key and the coach and coachees understanding that context of coaching and the organisation. The organisation has to be purposeful about it too'
CSDP09B Jackson		'she said – let's go back to the beginning and asked me to give a history of me, who I am (emphasis by speaking slowly and enunciating each word) it was very good. It was just about me and emotionally led'

Quotations – Theme 3 Goals excite and provide a focus

Participant unique code number	Sub theme	Quotations from participants' conversations
	The goals were different from the organisational goal or changed to a personal goal	
CSDP020A1 Joe		'what the company was doing was working out whether I could be promoted in the next couple of years, but I think they had already predetermined that I wouldn't and so for me the coaching was to help me as an individual to work out what I was going to do and what I really wanted'
CSDP020A2 Joe		'I now reflect on what my coach did for me in the early stages of my coaching and realised coaching was a blessing because it gave me the chance to think about doing something different. I had switched on the lights with my company and said I was available for coaching to help me to get to the next stage and embraced it and said it would help me prepare but also I think it was to help me think about me and what I wanted and needed and how that fit with the company. If I am right, it was amazingly insightful of them' 'I said when we last met that I wanted to continue with my coach whatever I decided to do, even changing companies, because I felt they were so good for me and were there for me. But when I started in a new company. Things were different and what I wanted to achieve was different.
	Goals not specific enough	
CSDP012B Jim		'The possibility of promotion, well maybe that just wasn't specific enough. If the company had said in 1 year's time there will be two of you in contention for the role then that would have felt like a more specific goal that I could work towards'
CSDP016A1 Dara		'there were no particular objectives to it (the coaching) but I suppose I wanted what my boss wanted to get out of it. She thought communication skills would be useful so, well, yes, I suppose it was that'

CSDP015B Aysha		'I didn't feel like I was going through a goal or process but felt I was being coached in the moment and in a very non-judgmental way. Felt good' (smiles and raises eyebrows and nods).
CSDP014B Denise		'I wanted to prepare for promotion and in particular how to manage my team' … 'If I were coached again, I would put building blocks in place – so what do I want to get out of it, how will I do that, what will the coach do to help me. We would need to have specific goals. So that I would know what to expect and I can measure at the end whether I have achieved what I set out to achieve. (became quiet for a moment, leaned head to one side, looked up and said quietly) in fact just saying that has made me think that this is probably why my coaching experience didn't really work. It was like an open book with blank pages. It was a conversation with no parameters'
CSDP013B Anita		'when I talk about success, I don't mean that as a reflection on the nature of our relationship. I don't think so, because it is a weak link between what you do to be successful and generating (long pause here and looking upwards) maybe we weren't clear enough on the process we needed to go through (another pause) perhaps it was less goal focused than it could have been. I am just thinking about that now. I don't remember finishing a coaching session with a clear set of things to do before the next session. (another pause) in terms of the ultimate goal (pause) the approach was wrong' …

Quotations – Theme 4 Lack of structure wastes time

Participant unique code number	Sub theme	Quotations from participants' conversations
	Structure and post session actions	
CSDP010B Sarah		'The sessions weren't really very structured and I would have preferred some structure and things to go away with' …'There was a risk that I stepped out of the room at the end of the coaching and forgot everything and didn't do anything with it. It would have been better if I had been held to account and held myself to account'
CSDP011B Peter **CSDP013B Anita**		'what I liked about it was that it was very formulaic, we set objectives for each session and things to do in between. Although it wasn't exam questions there were expectations and objectives. It was very disciplined. We went through tons of material which was great for me initially. As the time went on, it did feel too mechanistic and not about me, so we came to a natural end' 'Perhaps if there had been a list of actions then I might have assumed success would follow and if it didn't I might have thought that the coaching had failed'

Quotations – Theme 5 Being valued by my employer

Participant unique code number	Sub theme	Quotations from participants' conversations
	Little or no support from the organisation	
CSDP015B Aysha		'there was no closing off by the organisation. In fact (laughs) there was no communication between my coach and the organisation during the coaching (laughs) isn't that strange. My manager had said he wanted me coached but he didn't ask me anything about it'
CSDP018B Stephan		'My company just paid for the coaching. Were they involved (laughs) no, not really. My boss met my coach once and that was it and success wasn't measured (eyes upward and slight shrug of the shoulders) But maybe they saw my performance improve and I was ready for promotion and decided to leave it' (flat tone of voice)
CSDP020A1 Joe **CSDP020A2 Joe**		'when coaching started I never got the intent written down by my company (laughs) which I thought was odd but now I think maybe it was a good thing (laughs)' 'Reflecting on it, I think my old company gave me a chance to think about doing something different and coaching would help me to prepare but also really to think about me and what I wanted and needed'
	The importance of the organisation's support and interest	
CSDP012B Jim		'If my boss had come to me and said we want to put you in the best position for this promotion and don't worry about the cost just get the most out of it … and openly supported me and helped raise my profile internally, well (laughs) imagine that (pause and shoulders raised and eyes directly focused on the researcher) I would have liked the coach to spend time with my organisation to understand the broader context rather than working in a void. I felt in a void or vacuum which just felt self-indulgent'

11.15 Appendix 15 - Extract of transcript CSDP013B indicating affect in blue

"I felt I was (pause in speaking, tilted head, appeared to be thinking of the word) intellectually challenged which I liked (spoke these words quickly and looking directly at me, the researcher) I felt like she understood my world (lots of nods and smiles). In fact, she was of greater intellectual capacity and she was more successful in her career than I was (shrug of the shoulder, matter of factly, open hands) so I saw her positively superior to me in that (emphasised the word that by saying it slowly and looking straight into my eyes and smiling and nodding)respect which was good for me, it was what I wanted (hands out and open as he spoke). But (pause and leaning forward with a smile) I certainly felt equal in our coaching relationship and sessions. (leans back in chair and smiles). The equality in the relationship came from the weight of our contributions. My coach's voice had no more importance than mine in those sessions … in some respects the fact that I was a client meant that I had more power… it is interesting.. (looks at me, smiles and tilts head on to one side as if to obtain my acknowledgment)".

11.16 Appendix 16 – CRAVE checklist

CRAVE checklist in preparation for coaching assignment

CAPCONSULTING
EXECUTIVE COACHING

C	Context	What is the coachee's personal/professional context? What is the organisation's context? What are the coachee's drivers for coaching? What are the organisation's drivers for coaching?
R	Reality	What is the current position? What is the coachee's/organisation's understanding of coaching? What does the coachee crave from the coaching? What does the organisation crave from the coaching?
A	Alignment	Are the coachee's and organisation's coaching goals aligned? If not does that matter? To whom? Is there "permission" to deviate from the originally stated coaching goals? What on-going psychological support will the organisation provide to the coachee?
V	Values and being valued	What are the respective values of the coachee and organisation? What will make the coachee feel valued in coaching? How will each demonstrate trust, respect and support?
E	Expectations	What are the coach's, coachee's and organisation's expectations of themselves and one another? What are the coachee's expectations of the coach and coaching? What are the organisation's expectations of the coach and coaching?

12 Acknowledgements

At various stages along my journey towards completion of my doctoral degree, I have stepped back to reflect on that journey. My reflection has been focused on what and how I have learnt and developed and how my research has developed. I have reflected on the "aha" moments, the "ups and downs", the many frustrations and the barriers along the way. It has taught me more than I could have imagined or anticipated. I have learnt more about myself as a person, a coaching practitioner and researcher but also about others and how they learn and develop. Along the way, I have been challenged, guided and supported by my academic supervisors Professor Brian Sutton and Doctor Pauline Armsby, my coaching supervisor Louis Harvey, my friend and peer coach supervisor Mike Lang, my friend and fellow doctoral candidate Doctor Jane Freeman-Hunt and my cohort of fellow researchers on the DProf programme at the Middlesex University. Each of them has brought their own challenges, questions and reality checks for me to contemplate, debate and explore. I believe each one of them supported me out of a desire to help me to be the best I can be. For that, I want to say thank you, I am truly grateful. I could not have embarked on this study without my wonderful research participants who so generously gave me their time, interest, honesty and rich data. Thank you to each one of you for making this so worthwhile for me.

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