

Executive Coaching:



An HR View of What Works

Summary of Research

Dr Gavin R Dagley

conducted in association with the
Australian Human Resources Institute

January 2007

With the Author's permission and with
the compliments of ~



1300 720 190

www.imentor-pro.com

OVERVIEW



Objectives:

HR professionals experienced in the use of executive coaching hold a considerable and untapped body of knowledge regarding structures, efficacy, and drawbacks of the industry. In this study we investigated the use of executive coaching by these professionals.

In particular, the study addressed three questions: how has executive coaching been used; how well did it work; and what were the factors that predicted success?

Results:

- The 17 interviewees were responsible for an estimated 1,033 individual coaching programs in the preceding two years, and had spent \$15.4 million on these programs.
- Average ratings for program success were between “moderately” and “very effective.” No HR professionals rated their programs below moderately effective.
- The HR professionals identified a large range of benefits for the executives and the organisations.
- Average programs cost \$12,600 per executive for nine sessions over seven months.
- Of those who were prepared to express an opinion, most believed that executive coaching was cost-effective.
- The HR professionals indicated that a large number of factors influence the success of programs. Those rated as most important were the skill of coaches; senior management and organisational support; the engagement and commitment of the executive; the quality of the working relationship; and effective management of confidentiality issues.
- Practitioners rated factors related to the standardisation of program structure and delivery as less important.

Discussion:

The power and value of executive coaching seems to derive from the ability of coaches to adapt to the unique circumstances, learning styles, and personality of each executive, and from the commitment and courage of the executives to look at lifelong patterns of behaviour. HR professionals, however, need to be able to demonstrate the financial value of programs. This creates a pressure for more structured and therefore more measurable approaches – whether or not such approaches increase the success of programs.

The keys to effective coaching go beyond simply the need for highly skilled coaches. A large range of factors affect the success of programs, and coding of these factors provided the basis for a model of the relationship between the factors and the individual and organisational outcomes from executive coaching.

1. BACKGROUND

1.1 Research Questions

Although the topic of executive coaching has received increasing attention over the last decade, surprisingly little research has involved one of the largest groups of purchasers of executive coaching - Human Resources (HR) professionals. The purpose of the current study was to extend the knowledge-base about the successful use of executive coaching services by tapping into the experiences of HR professionals who have used executive coaching in their organisations.

Structured interviews with these professionals provided information focused on three questions:

1. how has executive coaching been used?
2. how effective was it?
3. what were the factors that predicted success?

1.2 Scale

The data collection occurred in the first half of 2006. All participants were HR executives in Melbourne-based organisations. The 17 HR professionals who participated in the research had spent an average of 2.5 years in their current roles, and 15 held primary or joint-primary responsibility for the executive coaching programs in their organisations.

The HR professionals represented organisations from both the public and private sectors, and included organisations involved in

- manufacturing,
- retail,
- corporate services,
- industrial production,
- local government,
- state-owned ventures,
- logistics, and
- financial services.

As a group, these HR professionals were responsible for an estimated 1,033 individual coaching programs in the preceding two years, and had spent \$15.4 million on these programs.

2. EFFICACY

2.1 Does it work?

Although existing efficacy research has been criticised both for its small volume and for a number of validity issues, the answer it has provided to the question of whether executives coaching works is a consistent “yes.”

Evidence from the current study supports this position.

Overall, how effective has EC been in your organisation?

	O'all
5 - Outstandingly effective	1
4 - Very effective	6
3 - Moderately effective	10
2 - Marginally effective	-
1 - Not effective	-

The HR professionals answered two questions regarding the overall efficacy of their programs. The first question asked them to provide their personal assessment of program efficacy, and the second asked them to estimate what the participating executives thought of the programs.

The HR professionals indicated that they believed the participating executives rated the programs as more effective than did the professionals themselves.

Quotes:

- “Anecdotally, I’m hearing ‘I like my coach, I’m getting a lot out of it, he’s challenging me, I’m learning a lot about myself, he’s getting me to commit to things.’ The range of responses goes from ‘I never thought it would be this good’ to ‘I’m not so sure about this, whether it is for me.’”
- “Those who have used [the coaching] view it as positive, but others are less so. They often feel there might be suspicion something is wrong with me.”

Overall, what have been the participants’ responses to the degree of benefit they received from EC?

	O'all
5 - Outstandingly effective	3
4 - Very effective	11
3 - Moderately effective	2
2 - Marginally effective	-
1 - Not effective	-

2.2 What did executives gain?

The HR professionals were asked to indicate the specific gains or benefits they had noticed for the executives and that had resulted from the executive coaching. The HR professionals chose from a list of 20 possibilities, and listed any other gains not covered by this list. (The only additional gain provided was “health/relief from anxiety.”) The professionals allocated two points for strong gains and one point for some gain.

The most widely supported benefit was a “clearer understanding of own style, automatic responses, and the issues arising from these.” All but one of the HR professionals indicated strong gains in this area.

Which of the following specific gains for the individuals have you become aware of that resulted from the EC work?

	"strong"	"some"	Points
Style, responses & issues	16	1	33
Communication & engagement	7	9	23
Robustness	6	7	19
Understanding own performance	7	4	18
Understanding org issues & solutions	3	11	17

Quotes:

- “There are intangible benefits. It’s recognition of the individual, time out to review their careers. It’s special. It improves motivation and feeling valued and recognised. People do like to talk about themselves. It can be pretty lonely in executive roles. It is the opportunity to open up. Possibly for stress relief. There is a bravado required of executives. They don’t have the opportunity to show any chinks. Executive coaching deals with the wants in all of us without outside scrutiny.”

2.3 What did the organisations gain?

As separate from the gains made by individuals, the HR professionals could identify at least one, and an average of five organisational benefits resulting from executive coaching. The list of benefits for organisations from executive coaching was much shorter than the list for individuals, with only seven items.

Development of the talent pool and organisational capability was the most commonly identified benefit, with all but one of the HR professionals indicating some gain in this area. The other major area of organisational gain was in talent retention and morale.

Quotes:

- “Many of these younger managers thought it was nice to be part of the group above the thick black line.”
- Executive coaching “became a badge of honour.”

Which of the following organisational gains occurred as result of using EC?

	"strong"	"some"	Points
Building talent pool capability	8	8	24
Talent retention & morale	6	6	18
Effective leadership	4	7	15
Cultural change	3	6	12
Team cohesion	3	6	12
Conflict resolution	1	9	11
Performance remediation	3	5	11

2.4 What are the drawbacks?

The HR professionals indicated there were a number of drawbacks to using executive coaching. The most commonly reported concerns were difficulties for executives in making time for sessions, and the expense of executive coaching.

Although there was almost universal support for the belief that executive coaching was an expensive intervention, a number of the HR

What drawbacks and difficulties have you experienced with EC services?

	"big"	"some"	Points
Expensive	4	6	14
Making session time	1	12	14
Poor translation to behaviours	3	6	12
Negative perceptions of EC	3	6	12
Locating good coaches	3	5	11
Difficulty linking to org performance	1	9	11

professionals commented that it was not as big an issue as they had expected.

Quotes:

- “it’s considered expensive, but that doesn’t matter if it works,”
- “there has been no push back on costs,”
- “money [is an issue], but not as much as expected”

The HR professionals also commented on two other areas that seemed to be problems for the use of executive coaching. The first was the perception that executive coaching was being used as a tool for “managers outsourcing their people leadership responsibilities.” The second was that the HR professionals often had difficulty “getting traction” in their organisations for executive coaching programs.

2.4 What does it cost?

An “average” program had the following structure and costs:

- 9 sessions (range: 4 to 18 sessions)
- 90-minutes per session (range: 50 to 120 minutes)
- 7 months duration (range: 3 to 12 months)
- \$12,600 per executive (range: \$600 [4 sessions] to \$45,000 [18 sessions]; median: \$10,000)
- \$717 per hour (range: \$150 to \$1,650; median \$488)

Half of the programs were funded from HR budgets and the rest were funded by the executives’ business units.

2.5 What is the ROI?

Only five of the HR professionals engaged in any analysis of ROI (return on investment), and for four of the five the analysis was “informal.” Only one practitioner indicated her program had strong measures and formal assessment of ROI.

Only 9 of the 17 HR professionals were prepared to estimate whether they thought that benefits exceeded costs.

Quotes:

- “We don’t do it very well. We need better measures. The industry does not like to be measured. The tools are lacking.”
- “We have not been good at being able to quantify returns. This is partly due to the one-off nature of the work and the restriction of information due to confidentiality.”



If you were to make an estimate, overall, how do you rate EC in terms of the extent to which the dollar returns exceeded (or were exceeded by) the cost?

Greatly exceeded	2
Exceeded	4
Equal	2
Less than	1
A lot less than	-

- “Senior executives wouldn’t support executive coaching (or pay for it) if they didn’t think it was really worthwhile.” This practitioner’s program was funded entirely from the participating executives’ budgets.
- “As a percentage of salary it’s weeny.”

Other comments on measurement included:

- “[We do evaluation and measurement] on a subjective level. In this we are prepared to use the ‘feel-good’ factor. Anything else we would evaluate. But how do you measure soft skills?”
- “I’m cynical about how others have reported on executive coaching. I’m a great believer in process without getting hung up on outcomes. It is less about tangible results and more about building this process into the fabric of the organisation. It’s an input rather than an output. Cost/benefit is a judgment ... Building stories is important and far more powerful than [quantitative] data.”

2.6 Are you interested?

The HR professionals rated their interest in using executive coaching in the future on a four-point scale, with “4” indicating strong interest, and “1” indicating no interest. Only 2 of the 17 HR professionals indicated anything other than strong interest in using executive coaching in the future.



How much interest do you have in using EC services in the next two years?

Strong	15
Some	2
Little	-
None	-

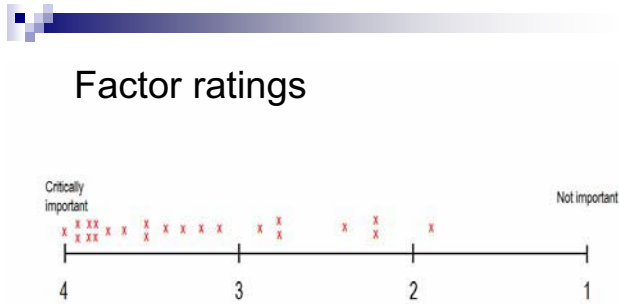
Quotes:

- “There is not a lot around to develop executives. Executive coaching is customised, intensive, and tailored – and you can’t get that off-the-shelf.”
- “Self-awareness is not part of normal executive development, and this is where executive coaching can be helpful. Most executives don’t have the opportunity otherwise.”
- “To increase the [executive coaching] program I would need evaluation to justify the big bucks.”

3. EFFICACY DRIVERS

The interview process used two approaches to identify the important factors that influence program success. Firstly, the HR professionals responded to two open-ended questions regarding the factors they felt contributed most to, or detracted most from, the success of programs. Subsequently, using a 4-point scale, they rated 22 factors listed in the questionnaire for their relative importance, with “4” indicating that a factor was critically important, and “1” indicating that a factor was not important. (The factors listed in the questionnaire included most of the factors raised by the HR professionals in their responses to the open-ended questions, and all of the factors that were rated as important.)

Most of the factors clustered between 3 and 4 on the rating scale, indicating that successful programs require the management of a large number of very important factors. Only 7 of the 22 factors rated below 3.



3.1 What makes executive coaching effective?



For each of the following program factors please indicate the relative importance of each using a 4 to 1 scale, with [4] meaning CRITICALLY IMPORTANT and [1] meaning NOT IMPORTANT:

.... Page 1

Highly skilled coaches	4.0
Report and trust in the coaching relationship	3.9
Confidentiality of discussions	3.9
Senior management support and engagement	3.8
Participant engagement and commitment	3.8
Management of ethical considerations	3.8
Careful matching of coach and participant	3.8
Sponsor/supervisor support and engagement	3.7
Individually tailored program content	3.6
Rigorous coach selection procedures	3.5
Careful participant selection	3.5

The seven factors ranked most important all had average ratings of above 3.7, and differentiation among them in terms of importance was minimal. The need for highly skilled coaches was rated “critically important” by all the HR professionals.

The factors making the top half of the list were related to:

- engaging highly skilled coaches,
- the selection, preparation and commitment of the executive,
- the quality of the working relationship, including the match between coach and executive,
- management and environmental support for the individual and the coaching,
- the management of ethical issues, and
- adaptation of the delivery to meet the needs of the executive.



For each of the following program factors please indicate the relative importance of each using a 4 to 1 scale, with [4] meaning CRITICALLY IMPORTANT and [1] meaning NOT IMPORTANT:

.... Page 2

Varied range of coaches	3.4
Informal review and debriefing	3.3
Determining clear goals in advance	3.2
Sponsor involvement in review process	3.1
Subsequent follow - coach / participant	2.9
Participant choice in the selection of the coach	2.8
Formal measurement and reporting processes	2.8
A standard structure for coaching programs	2.4
Use of psychometric tools and inventories	2.2
Collation and presentation of EC results	2.2
A standard model for the delivery of content	1.9

The four lowest ranked factors all received average ratings of less than 2.5. These factors were: having a standard structure for coaching programs, the use of psychometric tools and inventories in the content of each program, collation and presentation of executive coaching results, and having a standard model for the delivery of content.

4. IMPLEMENTATIONS: NOTES AND QUOTES

4.1 Defining executive coaching

The HR professionals were asked to indicate how well Kilburg's (2000) definition of executive coaching matched with their ideas. Thirteen of the 17 said "very well" and the remaining 4 said "quite well."

They also had some interesting comments about what executive coaching was and was not.

Quotes:

- "It's about the development of leadership capability leading to significant organisational outcomes."
- "It's not just a 'feel-good' exercise, unless 'feel-good' helps the organisation."
- "We define coaching as working towards future goals and counselling looks to the past."
- "Our definition of executive coaching ... covers all life aspects. We often need to look backwards before we can look forwards. The definitions we use are very similar [to Kilburg's], but broader. Personal issues can present as professional blockers."

Executive coaching is ...

"a helping relationship formed between a client who has managerial authority and responsibility in an organisation and a consultant who uses a wide variety of behavioural techniques and methods to assist the client to achieve a mutually defined set of goals to improve his or her professional performance and personal satisfaction and consequently to improve the effectiveness of the client's organisation within a formerly defined coaching agreement"

(Kilburg, 2000, p. 66-67)

4.2 Quality of coaches

- "[There is a problem with the] quality of coaches - so much depends on good selection"
- "[One of the major detractors from program success is] coaches who use lots of theories and models rather than [working with the particulars of the individual]. These are the weaker coaches"

Finding and selecting coaches:

- "Do you have 10 pages?! It was a journey of enlightenment. I thought it would be easy. We put out an expression of interest document and then conducted interviews. It was a horror show - the shallowness, the fad nature of it all. Everyone had a different model, and a lot were totally unskilled. I abandoned the notion of one service provider, but the process gave me enough information to find what I was looking for."

Credibility:

- "[I am looking for] credibility, expertise, and clarity around what he is coaching. [Coaches need] the ability to deal with the most senior levels in the business."
- "The greatest concerns are the calibre of the coaches and credibility and acceptance. The executives all think they are special. It's elitism - 'no-one knows my job.' The coach must be able to identify with the pressures of senior executive roles and have previous experience. This is important."

Formal qualifications:

Only four of the HR professionals thought that formal qualifications were important, with a further three indicating such qualifications were helpful.

- “I am open about formal qualifications, but prefer to see something. I am not convinced about some of the qualifications offered in the marketplace. I want to see some management and some psychology qualifications.”
- “I like to understand the coaches’ work that they have done on themselves. Self-awareness is a very important part of this... They have to be able to model what we are seeking to develop in our own people.”

Psychologist:

Only four of the HR professionals indicated that registration as a psychologist was an important selection criterion, although another six indicated that such registration was useful.

- “I started out thinking you have got to have psychology training, but have been proven wrong.”
- “I have a preference for psychologists, and would prefer some psychology qualification.”

4.3 Matching

Half of the HR professionals provided executives with a range of suitable coaches and allowed the executive to make the selection. One practitioner offered an insight into this preference, saying that “you [the executive] have to choose. I’m not going to be responsible.”

The remaining HR professionals made the selection on behalf of their executives in the belief that they were the best positioned to understand the coaches, the issues and the executives’ needs.

Although the quality of the match ranked 7th of the 22 items (average rating 3.8 out of 4), participant choice in the selection of the coach ranked 17th (average rating of 2.8).

That is, the quality of the match was critical – executive choice in the selection of the coach was less so.

4.4 Participating executives

- “Individual willingness to change [is critical] - an understanding of themselves and motivation to change.”
- “It’s not about the coaching, but about the courage of the individual. [Otherwise] you can have a great coach who can achieve not very much.”
- “With regard to talent, either [the executives] have it or they don’t. The talent is within the person and coaching cannot create talent that doesn’t exist.”

4.5 Organisational issues

- Executive coaching in this organization was complex to implement due to “a general culture of not having rigorous and regular transparent performance discussions. These are not happening enough and this would support the executive coaching. Executive coaching would be more powerful if we could get this right.”
- Lawyers “really love documents. Without these they struggled to understand what executive coaching is.”

- “Scientists need hard facts. Was there value in behavioural change?”
- “When you work with engineers you need hard data to prove your results.”
- Program success was affected by “whether they let [colleagues] know what they are working on. Influencing the system around them can really help. ‘I know I can be a [deleted], but I’m really working at trying to change that.’”

4.6 Confidentiality

All except three of the HR professionals indicated that confidentiality matters were negotiated explicitly with each executive, and, in all except one program, this occurred prior to the first session. Only one HR professional discussed issues around confidentiality breaches:

- “[Confidentiality breaches] happen all the time. [During the selection interview with the coach, the coach is asked to] ‘tell me about your coaching experience,’ and the coach offers names and positions of executives from previous work.”

4.7 Organisational agendas

Issues raised included when:

- The coach is engaged “to get a particular outcome that the organisation desires – the manager setting the agenda to get a particular outcome, and HR is complicit. ‘If you get this person to leave that would be great.’ [This dynamic] breaks down confidentiality... I would rather tell [the executive] directly myself [that he or she should leave].”
- “The coach identifies organisational blockers, and the organisation does not listen or change,” which can create a second ethical dilemma. “It would be career suicide [for the coach] to speak up.”

4.8 Dependency

- “We’ve had experiences of a level of dependency. Four years of intervention and relationship and they should have moved on. The length of time and extent of growth - makes us wonder are we flogging a dead horse?”
- There can be problems with “coaches reinventing themselves for more business and then getting deeper into the organisation and it has been really messy. They are then less able to assist the individual, and have less objectivity.”

4.9 Goals

Most of the HR professionals indicated that goals for the individual programs tended to be set both prior to the first session *and* allowed to emerge and change as the coaching occurred. Only two of the HR professionals indicated that goals were set prior to the program’s commencement and were not subject to amendment as part of the normal course of the assignment. (One of these HR professionals was responsible for the only program to use detailed measurement processes.)

“Determining in advance clear goals for each individual program” ranked 14th on the list of 22 efficacy drivers (average 3.2).

- “You have to have an initial goal but that may change. You’re not going to have issues from difficult past family relationships as one of the starting goals.”

5. INTERPRETATION

To this point, the information presented has been a description of data collected in the research project. The following section presents interpretations and extrapolations based on the data.

5.1 Contrasts, paradoxes and interesting bits

The research highlighted a number of surprising contrasts and unexpected results:

- Individual vs organisational gains: The HR professionals were able to provide a long list of benefits for participating individuals, but struggled to define specific benefits to the organisations.
- Efficacy vs interest: The HR professionals rated outcomes, particularly organisational outcomes, as moderate and non-specific. They tended to consider coaching as expensive, and were reluctant to estimate the return on investment value of programs. Yet their interest in using coaching in the future was almost universally strong.
- Larger vs smaller programs: Although larger programs (which involved expenditure of more than \$1m in the preceding two years) invested in a greater number of sessions and more expensive providers, their returns were better, but not markedly better, than those of small programs (which had invested less than \$200,000). (N.B. This result should be interpreted with some care, as the study was not designed to compare large and small programs.)
- Value of structure and measurement: Although the HR professionals discussed a range of concerns regarding the structuring and measurement of programs, these factors were rated as less important to program success than many other factors. Structure and measurement, nevertheless, seemed to be important for the HR professionals for “selling” the programs to senior management, positioning with participating executives, and justifying ongoing expenditure.
- Goal-setting: Contrary to many research articles to date, having clear and tightly defined goals prior to program commencement was not rated as a comparatively important factor. Many of the HR professionals commented, however, that having a clear idea of the general purpose of the coaching was important. As indicated by the HR professionals’ preferences for allowing the specific goals of the program to emerge, it seems that clear purpose is important, but a successful coaching process seems to require the flexibility to refine and clarify the issues to be addressed.
- Executive gains: As evidenced by the strong interest in the future use of executive coaching, the HR professionals seem to have witnessed some extraordinary gains for some individuals. They seem to struggle, however, to *demonstrate* how these will benefit the organisation. Reviewing the gains for participating executives, it appears the list may be sequential. Those benefits rated as most common also seem to be internal and personal to the executive, and in large part related to self-awareness. The benefits further down the list appear to be more concrete and measurable, but are probably the result of the self-awareness gains. Many HR professionals also indicated they had few options other than coaching for developing their executives, or working with executive issues.

5.2 Hypothesis

These results combined to indicate a hypothesis about the conditions in which the very best coaching seems to function:



Hypothesis

Extraordinary executive coaching functions in a niche

- in which results are difficult to measure
- that sometimes produces extraordinary changes
- that is otherwise largely inaccessible

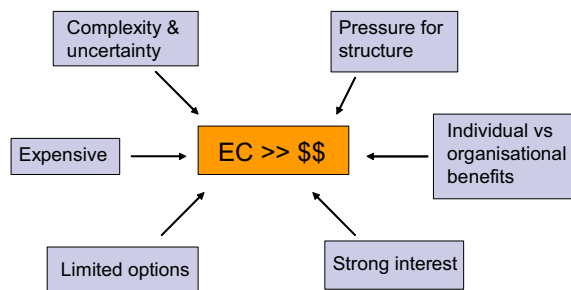
5.3 The real world

HR practitioners operate in a difficult environment. In attempting to introduce a coaching program, HR professionals are confronted with what looks like a “wild West” industry. In addition, they are under considerable pressure to provide measurable outcomes, not least of all to justify expenditure and to compete for resources.

The ability to demonstrate financial returns on executive coaching is affected by a number of factors:



The bind



- Complexity and uncertainty – a large number of factors influence results, and there are few guarantees for outcomes.
- Pressure for structure – not only are there organisational pressures for measurement and structure in executive coaching, but the coaching industry itself is moving towards commoditisation as a way of providing quality assurance, and a saleable product. These structured approaches emphasise the same variables that the HR professionals valued least when considering effective programs.
- Individual versus organisational

benefits – the HR professionals had difficulty tying individual gain to performance gain and organisational gain.

- Strong interest – the HR professionals had strong interest in using executive coaching in the future – presumably because they had experienced valuable outcomes from their programs.
- Limited options – the HR professionals indicated they had few other options for intervention with executives.
- Expensive – coaching is seen as an expensive option.

5.4 Organising the factors

In order to make sense of the large number of factors that affected executive coaching outcomes, the list was sorted from most to least important, and coded under six headings:

- the coach,
- the relationship between coach and executive,
- delivery and structuring,
- the organisational environment,
- the participating executive, and
- measurement.



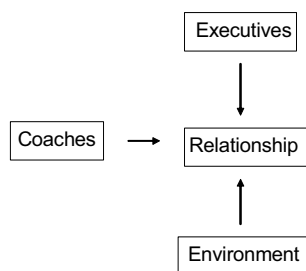
What makes EC effective?

		coach	relationship	delivery	environment	participant	measurement
4.0	skilled coaches						
	rapport						
	confidentiality						
	snr mgmt support						
	exec engagement						
	other ethics						
	matching						
	spnsr support						
	flexibility						
	coach sel'n procs						
	exec selection						
3.3	range of coaches						
	informal review						
	clear goals						
	spsr inv'd in review						
	6 mth f/up						
	part choice of cch						
	formal meas'ment						
	std structure						
	psychometrics						
2.0	prestrn of EC results						
	std model						

The HR professionals rated all factors related to **measurement**, and the factors related to **delivery and structure** except ethical matters and flexibility, in the bottom half of the list of factors that predicted executive coaching program success.

5.5 Theoretical model

The following model presents an interpretation of how the factors predicting executive coaching success interact in achieving coaching outcomes.



The strongest predictors of success were factors related to the executives, the coaches, the environment, and the coaching relationship. Drawing on research from psychotherapy, it seems likely that the influence from any of these factors on individual development will be mediated through the coaching relationship.

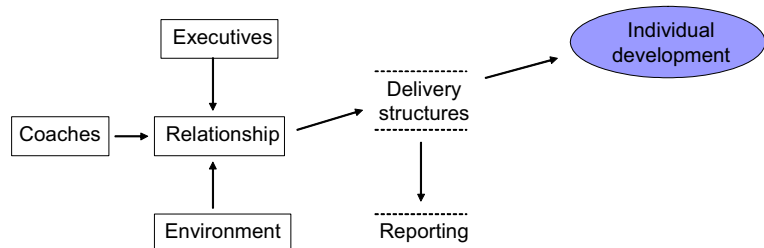
For example a particularly skilled coach may be ineffective in helping an executive if either the executive or the environment is not supportive of the program. The effects of this lack of support are likely to surface in the coaching relationship.

Delivery structures, although considered less important for program outcomes, can nevertheless both limit the program success, and have an influence on the extent of measurement and reporting that is possible.

For example,

- if discussions between coach and executive are not confidential,
- if there is little flexibility in the delivery of coaching services,
- if the program is too short, or
- if the program has no general direction or goal,

then it is unlikely that even an excellent working relationship will generate the sorts of outcomes that could be expected if those impediments were not present.



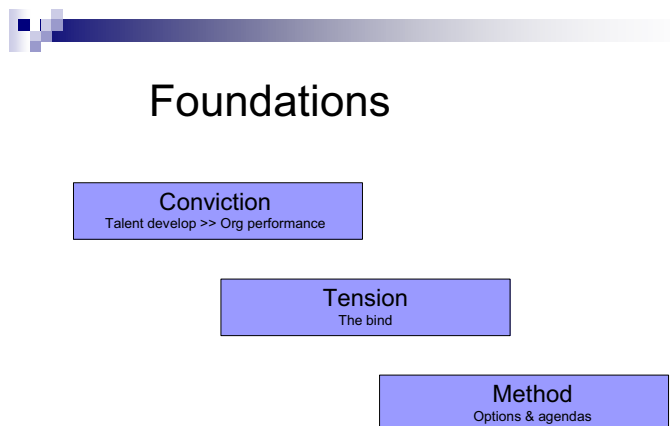
Appendix: UNSOLICITED ADVICE FOR APPLIED PRACTICE: A BULLET-POINT SUMMARY

The following is a brief summary, drawn from the research, of factors to consider when initiating an executive coaching program.

A.1 Successful program foundations

Some key foundational assumptions seem to underpin successful programs:

- Senior leaders hold an explicit **conviction** that development of senior talent will necessarily benefit the business despite the difficulty in isolating and measuring outcomes.
- Program advocates recognise that **tension** exists between the organisational demand for measurable results and the need for flexible, highly personal, and confidential approaches for individual program success – and that this tension will need to be actively managed.
- **Method** – executive coaching is selected as the intervention of choice for sound and explicit reasons. Important considerations include:
 - environmental considerations including cultural factors related to secrecy, responsibility, communication, and feedback,
 - the available time, both to achieve results, and the amount of time the executive can invest in the program,
 - clear understanding of whether the issues are skills-based, or matters of inclination, motivation, or attitude,
 - consideration of any hidden agendas,
 - the level of senior management support including how much they understand about coaching, and how they might interpret coaching if it were for them,
 - cost, and
 - consideration of other intervention options.



A.2 Complexity

There are multiple factors that influence outcomes –

- executive selection, preparation, and expectation-setting,
- careful positioning with senior management, and management of the environment,
- highly skilled and credible coaches,
- structures for delivery, and
- measurement and reporting.

A.3 Participants

- Coaching doesn't work for everyone.
- Executive readiness and buy-in are key.
- Have clear your reasons for the work (differentiate remedial and developmental reasons).
- Mandated coaching creates a more difficult scenario for achieving successful outcomes.
- Have discussions with the executive (and the supervising manager if possible) to prepare the executive and position the coaching.
- Be clear about the level of participation required from supervising manager. If you suspect the coaching may amount to outsourcing of management responsibility, then it may be more appropriate to arrange coaching for the supervising manager.

A.4 Environment

Positioning – organisationally and with senior executives

- Use the language of the organisation.
- Establish the ground rules early and explicitly (e.g. confidentiality).
- Take account of cultural and systemic issues, including the perception of coaching in the organisation, the quality of feedback and communication, and the interpersonal style of the supervising and senior leaders.

Expectation-setting – coaching:

- is necessarily personal,
- relies on individual commitment and readiness,
- is a process and, therefore, occurs over time, and
- provides few miracles – change is a result of effort.

A.5 Coaches

- Good coaches are available, but there is a broad assortment of skill levels in the industry.
- Credibility and skill are BOTH important - one does not predict the other.
- Beware of coaches offering guarantees or single models.
- Get to know your coaches.
- In making a selection, remember you are choosing a person (rather than a model or an organisation).

A.6 Coaching relationship

- Exercise care in the matching of coaches and executives.
- Consider who is best placed to make the matching decision.
- Provide an explicit “divorce clause” for the executive in case of a bad match.
- Stay in touch with executives and monitor progress.

A.7 Structure

- Give coaches sufficient scope to work – flexibility seems to be important.
- Confidentiality and ethics – negotiate issues explicitly and upfront; consider reporting demands in relation to the required level of confidentiality.

- Goals – coaching needs to have a purpose (which may include finding the purpose), and should include the flexibility to modify goals as required.
- Structure provides assurance (if not outcomes). Consider contracting for the length and cost of the program, scheduled review points, reporting, location of the sessions, broad goals, and explicit commitment.
- Psychometrics and feedback are often a valuable part of participant preparation and a way of linking the work to the performance requirements.

A.8 Reporting and measurement

- Follow up with both coaches and executives. Stories and experiences, particularly from the executives, provide a particularly potent source of data.
- The level of reporting will influence the level of future program support – particularly from those who are not familiar with the program.

A.9 Conclusion

Yes, executive coaching is effective for executive development, but it is not an easy process, nor are results guaranteed. Although coaching has been used successfully for a number of purposes, organisations only gain through the individual development of the executives, and that can be hard to measure. The results, nevertheless, *can be* remarkable, as indicated by the commitment of the HR participants in this study to the future use of coaching.

In the end, executive coaching is about people addressing fundamental and personal aspects of themselves. If it were easy, then they would have done it already. Giving attention to the range of factors that can influence program success will improve the chances of achieving positive outcomes.

Dr. Gavin Dagley

Gavin is a Director of Perspex Consulting, and is a psychologist, researcher and practitioner working with business leaders and elite athletes. He holds undergraduate and Masters degrees in psychology, and completed his Ph.D. studying career transitions in elite sport.

Gavin is also an experienced senior executive and was Company Secretary of a large, privately owned retail company prior to returning to psychology study. Gavin has also held senior financial roles in businesses operating in the wholesale, manufacturing, construction, and service sectors.

Email: gavin.dagley@bigpond.com