Measuring the Relationship between External Executive Coaching and Employee Performance

A study with Executive Coaches, Senior Managers and HR Professionals in the Irish Financial Services Sector

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August 2019

A project prepared in partial fulfilment of the requirements of the Master in Business Administration

National College of Ireland

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Abstract

Research undertaken in this dissertation sets out to investigate specific factors of contention within the external executive coaching (from now on known as executive coaching/coaches) world as well as those that most influence employee performance. External executive coaching can be a significant and strategic component of a Human Resources (HR) strategy and to individual success, but there seems to be a significant lack of research in the area of measuring such success. Improving organisational leadership is becoming increasingly important with companies competing to recruit and retain the best talent due to growing competition particularly in a post global economic recession when this study has taken place.

The research is based on discussions and liaisons with a team of external executive coaches, employees who recently have had executive coaching and HR professionals who engage and employ executive coaches for specific requirements. All stakeholders have identified measuring the impact of executive coaching on employee performance as a key metric for this research.

This research focuses on four elements of executive coaching:

(1) Performance management

(2) Leadership development

(3) Change management

(4) Organisational Wellbeing

Through adopting in-depth qualitative research methods, including focus groups and individual interviews, the research sought to assess the specific factors that contribute to the effectiveness of executive coaching and to assess the extents it impacts on employee performance.

The findings are aligned to fundamental concepts and theories reviewed in the literature and cross checked against other sources of data. When the research surrounding the executive coaching is correlated to the research findings, it emerged that employees were more effective, motivated and engaged as a direct result of having had executive coaching.

Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

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Research Students Declaration Form

(Thesis/Author Declaration Form)

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Degree for which thesis is submitted: Master of Business Administration (MBA)

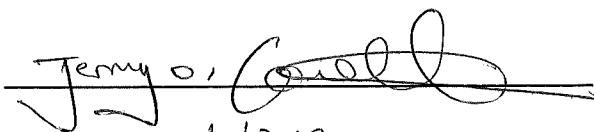**Material submitted for award**

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Acknowledgements

For Mom

Thanks for everything, I dedicate this to you in recognition for a lifetime of family dedication.

My Family, The O'Connell's in Kerry & Manchester and the Fahy's in Dublin for supporting me through the past three years in particular during the times of illness and hospitalisation. My aunts in New York, Nora O'Brien and my god-mother Ann Butler who have been constant sources of support throughout my life.

For my dear friend Mary Curran whom I first met in 1982 and who continues to inspire me by her energy and passion for all types of Coaching. To Jennifer Greer, Heidi Byrne and Carmel Wynne many thanks for your Insights.

My dissertation supervisor, Pauline Kelly-Phelan, my sincere gratitude. Your support, guidance and understanding throughout this research has been invaluable.

Finally, in loving memory of my siblings Elisha and John, my aunt's Elizabeth Milner & Margaret O'Connell and MBA class mates Kieran and Brian. "Ar dheis de go raibh an anam".

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Section 1: Introduction

This research is correlational whereby the relationship between executive coaching and employee performance is explored. Section one comprises five main sections that set the foundation for this research paper. Section one presents an overview of the research topic. Section two presents the problem statement which sets out the key issues that have initiated this study in the first place. Section three looks at the purpose statement. Section four discusses the significance of the study while section five presents the research framework, the research question and research objectives.

1.1 Overview of the Research Topic

There is a greater need to develop stronger business skills, leadership and management competencies in order to survive in what is now generally regarded as a truly global market. To this end employees must be energised, engaged with optimum motivation. This can be facilitated though the executive coaching intervention, that best serves organisational needs and the employees who drive the processes and overcome the challenges.

Leadership (External Executive coaching) coaching has only recently become an accepted mode of positive leadership development (Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001). With this increased presence of Leadership coaching in organisations and the associated time and costs incurred, it is imperative for both assessing the impact and outcomes of this leadership development intervention (summative evaluation) and also for improving program development and implementation (formative evaluation) in order to empirically advance coaching practices (Ely, Boyce et al, 2008). Little or no guidance exists on how to evaluate this unique leadership development practice.

In the UK, the Chartered institute of Personnel Development have reported that 64% of surveyed organisations have used external executive coaches. 92% of participants have judged the experience to be effective or very effective with 96% reporting that such coaching is an effective way to promote learning in organisations (Jarvis, 2004). Yet, there have been too few serious attempts to explore the active ingredients of coaching practices in a reliable and validated way (Grant, Passmore et al, 2010). Grant et al further purport that few robust quantitative and objective examinations of effective Leadership coaching exist and that in

order to develop a better understanding of coaching outcomes true scientific evidence must be produced.

1.2 Problem statement

This study focuses on a problem relating to how the executive coaching intervention impact is measured in conjunction with employee performance. The problem was identified by executive coaches and clients alike and is one of the key reasons that employers may be reluctant to invest in an executive coach for employees.

A critical review of research in the area of Leadership coaching is required in order to evaluate and measure the impact of the intervention and deliver an assurance of an adequate return on investment to clients. In 2014, organisations (75%), Leaders (34%) and internal coaches (65%) rated that "the Leader completes a satisfaction survey at the end of the coaching intervention" as the most frequent format for evaluation. The next most frequently used evaluation tool for organisations (73%), leaders (31%) and internal coaches (48%) was Human Resources checks with the leader (Coach Source LLC, 2014).

At a basic level, performance management should include goal-setting, goal direction, and feedback on performance (Armstrong, 1994). Most performance evaluations follow a predictable pattern where employees are invited to set out their achievements and where they need to develop, while managers write up assessments on their employee's performance (McKenzie et al, (2019).

Formal performance appraisals plans are designed to meet three needs - 1) Provide systematic judgements to back up salary increases , promotions and/or demotions and terminations 2) to inform subordinates how they are doing and suggest changes in behaviours, attitudes or skills 3) to be used as a basis for coaching or counselling employees (McGregor, D. 1957).

There is an argument that performance appraisals as we know them are outdated and not currently fit for purpose where it is more important to manage context than performance. Jones (1995) argues that the process of management by results with its' heavy emphasis on goal setting, measuring results and individual accountability linked to monetary reward is ineffective in today's business world. Also, that management by results creates a climate

perceived as judgemental, one of punishment and inconsistent with the push to employee empowerment. It is not forward looking but instead focuses on the past with an emphasis on what has not been delivered rather than what is needed in order to thrive.

1.3 Purpose statement

The purpose of this research is to (1) to identify the fundamental concepts and theories surrounding the impact of executive coaching intervention on performance management (2) to establish the extent to which these concepts align with perceptions around the practices set out by the executive coaches, employees and HR professionals. (3) To ascertain the extent to which the perceptions impact employee performance and engagement.

These will be assessed from the viewpoints of Senior Managers and Executive coaches through focus group interviews and individual one to one interviews. The reason for choosing this approach is to identify factors that contribute to or impede the impact of the executive coaching intervention. Some research has been conducted in this arena but it mainly limited to the United States and United Kingdom. This paper is looking at research in a purely Irish context and to investigate if any new theories and approaches are emerging.

1.4 Significance of the Study

It is worthy to note that this study has been completed in a post financial crisis era in Ireland where the economy has started to grow again. This study is pursued initially from the observations by the researcher in his work environment and by personal development undertaken.

Staff at the Senior Manager level through periodic Pulse surveys felt that the current Learning and Development programme was out of date and not in line with requirements for a changing organisation. A more targeted approach to developing high performance teams along with a change of mind-set and indeed culture change was required in order for the business to be "fit for the future". A People and Environment Directorate was established following an organisation restructure to better equip the organisation deal with strategy implementation and associated blockers. One of the key objectives of the new Head of this Directorate was to establish a Leadership development programme to address the senior

management concerns and by transforming processes to be able to attract, engage and retain employees – to become an employer of choice.

The unifying ethos amongst coaches, Senior Managers and HR Professionals is that more leaders now routinely deal with ambiguity, disruptive changes and pressures to perform in an increasingly global and diverse context. Leaders are asked to be both strategic decision makers and masters of managing people in environments where the pace and magnitude of change puts professional relationships under strain. A lack of personal development in order to deliver effective leadership is absent as leaders proclaim to be "too busy". Into the breach has stepped the executive coach who is tasked with helping leaders and management towards betterment (International Journal of Coaching in Organisations, 2007).

The examination of worth occurs within the realm of Human Resource Management (HRM) and Strategy (Kumata, 2002). Human Capital, the idea that people represent more than tangible assets and are in fact organisational investors in a knowledge economy, rather than organisational costs (Davenport, 1999). This looks at HRM purporting a "decision science" set of programs that helps leaders gain the most from their and others' people –related investments (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2005). Yes coaching helps individuals but does it help the business? Leaders must assess with regard to which interventions are likely to create the most value for the business and its' key stakeholders such as investors or customers. Non-financial results from executive coaching like those involving change of leadership behaviour are easier to measure (Fillery -Traves & Lane, 2006).

Research has not kept pace with the growth of workplace coaching in practice and the lack of evidence with regards effectiveness is one of the most frequently cited problems in the field (Grant, Passmore, Cavanagh and Parker, 2010). As more research into the area was undertaken it appears that there has been limited exploration of theories that promote the value added by Executive coaching. Grant et al (2009) found that executive coaching significantly enhances goal attainment, resilience and workplace wellbeing. Theeboom et al (2013) found that executive coaching had positive impacts on performance while Jones et al (2014) reported a greater impact on performance compared with other popular development methods.

1.5 Research Objectives and Assumptions

Research Objectives

A tripartite framework as set out below outlines the key elements of executive coaching impacting performance. The overall objective of this study is to delve deeper in to these components and set out some conclusions and recommendation resulting from this research.

EXECUTIVE COACHING IMPACT ON PERFORMANCE THROUGH:
->>>>>> LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT & BUSINESS RESULTS
->>>>>>> CHANGE MANAGEMENT
->>>>>>> ORGANISATIONAL WELLEBING
Fig. 1 Tripartite Framework

These three elements form the focus for the research methodology and data gathering. The framework is used to determine the perceptions of all three sets of stakeholders. The findings are then aligned to established theories and associated with key drivers of employee performance.

The value of an executive coaching outcome may be in the eye of the beholder and indeed contingent on the situation that the individual being coached is in at that point in time. Also in some organisations especially mission driven ones, measures of return solely based on economics may not give the full or correct picture of what's being achieved. Return on Investment (R.O.I.) remains one key indicator of success.

It is against this background that the research objectives can be articulated as follows:

1. To gain insightful views in relation to behaviours and capabilities that are focused on in executive coaching across individuals and within businesses
2. To identify business outcomes and development of leadership skills thought to have been improved as a result of the executive coaching intervention
3. To look at the perceptions of the quantitative and qualitative outcomes/value of the executive coaching engagement

Research Assumptions

There are four working assumptions underlying the research and methodologies:

1. There are costs associated with executive coaching and opportunity costs associated with not having the coaching intervention i.e. where a competitor has better results at a firm's expense due to better leadership decision making. Costs include outlays to the executive coach, time spent by other stakeholders such as Managers, HR professionals and the Coach's activities as result of suggestions by the coach.

2. A hypothesis that coaching normally results in value creation. Given the many different perceptions that abound the executive coaching intervention multiple value assessments are likely to be more appropriate than just one solution.

Value based outcomes can be set out as follows

- Operating Profit & Loss and Balance Sheet Position – increase in revenues, costs savings, accumulation of assets etc. The annual report and accounts at year end along with associated narrative sets out these results

- Business Results such as shareholder value, market share, customer satisfaction and other key performance indicators such as service or product development

- Strategic results such a culture evolvement, leadership and transition management that allowed the business to compete effectively

- Development of Human Capital and organisational effectiveness – talent acquisition and retention, succession planning , the long-term nature of Human Resource management as some results make take years to materialise

3. Assessing the impact of executive coaching is not impossible but it is difficult. The researcher is open to the use of multiple estimates from multiple stakeholders.

4. Costs of Executive coaching can be compared to valuations to estimate various types of ROI. This would look at outcomes in relation to Human Resource Management also.

An environment supporting the ethos of continuous improvement with value creation at the core seems essential no matter what the circumstances. Organisations participate for a variety of reasons but value creation rather than formal ROI measurement remains the focus.

Section 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

The purpose of the Literature Review is to explore existing research in relation to Executive Coaching in relation to performance management and the context of this work. It is envisaged that this review will take a critical perspective of knowledge already published and will be critically evaluated in the context of the research question.

The review comprises four main sections. The first provided an overview and definition of Executive coaching and performance management. The second explores the impact of Leadership development and business results due to the executive coaching intervention. According to the DDI Global leadership Forecast 2014/15 two of the most critical skills for future leaders are managing and successfully introducing change and coaching and developing others. The third section therefore looks at Productivity in times of change while the fourth looks at Employee engagement, retention and wellbeing.

Each section reviews concepts and theories relevant to the particular topic. These concepts and theories form the basis onto which more recent practices have evolved. The researcher will endeavour to assess whether the theories align or deviate with/from current practice and if gaps exist in the literature.

Latham and Locke (1990) purport Goal Theory which looks at research on setting goals in the workplace which leads to performance delivery. This theory contributes to Business Results, the second part of the first element in the tripartite framework. Equity Theory (Adams, 1965) looks at performance assessment.

2.2 Performance Management Overview

Performance Management is a continuous process of identifying, measuring and developing the performance of individuals and teams whilst aligning performance with organisational strategic goals. Five components are put forward - agreement, measurement, feedback, positive reinforcement and dialogue (Aguinis, 2005). A planned process, the aim of performance management is to incrementally improve performance in order to achieve goals. Performance appraisals aim to eliminate or significantly reduce the risk of employees failing

in their roles to deliver but some have proposed abandoning performance appraisals altogether in favour of instant feedback tying back to individual goals (Capelli P. Tavis, A., 2016).

Performance Management Theories

Goal theory highlights mechanisms that connect goals to performance outcomes (Latham & Locks, 1979). Goals are set for the future with those of the individual being linked to the goals of the organisation. Goal setting also helps to develop action plans designed to guide people and businesses. Research has shown a positive correlation between goal setting and improved results as the theory purports building efficient organisations. Locke & Latham (2006) put forward five principles to allow effective goal setting - Clarity, commitment, Challenge, Feedback and Task complexity, being used at individual and an organisational level. Limitations of goal setting theory include being time consuming, expensive in application and internal competition risk (where employees compete against each other) where the objectives of the business are secondary at the expense of individual achievements.

Control theory focuses attention on central mechanisms of control (such as organisational structure, norms and policies and the performance management systems with feedback as a means of shaping behaviour). Three types of control systems are put forward –

- Behaviour where the employer monitors and evaluates employee actions
- Output Control where employee performance is controlled by rewards or sanctions
- Input Control which involves selection and training of employees

Control theory can be seen as too mechanical and bureaucratic, while the business environment today is more dynamic, challenging and competitive.

Social Cognitive theory (Bandura, 1991) describes two mechanisms that are used to regulate performance in relation to personal goals. Discrepancy reduction where people monitor their work to reduce any discrepancy between goals and performance. Discrepancy production occurs when people meet or exceed goals and then set a more challenging goals i.e. creating

a discrepancy between their current performance and their goals so they achieve a higher level of performance.

According to Bandura (1986), high self-efficacy is a vital determinant of discrepancy production. This concept is important as it suggests that feedback recipients can set goals to improve their performance even after receiving favourable multi source feedback.
Smither et al, (2003) suggest that nearly all feedback recipients set one to three development goals.

Performance improvement is likely only for feedback recipients who take appropriate action (like working with a coach, discussing ones feedback with others and participating in the development activities) in response to their feedback. Action on feedback helps employees establish and follow through on appropriate goals to enhance performance effectiveness and address skill deficiencies.

Coaching Employees

Coaching is part of the daily interaction between a supervisor and employee allowing reinforcement of actions and contributions that contributes to business success. Regular coaching brings performance issues to an employee's attention with feedback assisting correction of issues before they become significant detractions from performance. The goal of coaching is to solve performance problems and to improve the work of the employee, the team and the department. Regular meetings evaluate how well the employee is performing in achieving performance goals that were set out in the performance plan.

Managers can also use performance coaching to help employees who are effective contributors improve further and create an environment of continuous improvement. It is ironic that many managers find that they spend the majority of time with troubled or under-performing employees. This is despite the fact that the most significant value form their time and energy investment comes from the opposite priority.
Two studies suggest that working with an executive coach can be helpful for feedback recipients. Luthan and Peterson (2003) found that self-ratings managers remained the same

over time but co-worker ratings increased. Also, both managers and their employees work attitudes improved following the feedback-coaching intervention. Smither et al (2003) found that managers who worked with an executive coach were more likely than other managers to set more specific goals and solicit ideas for improvement.

Walker and Smither (1999) found that mangers who met with direct reports to discuss their upward feedback improved more than other managers and improved more in years when they discussed the previous year's feedback with direct reports than in years when they did not discuss the previous year's feedback with direct reports.

Finally, Hazucha et al. (1993) found that managers who participated in training programs and other development activities (such as receiving coaching and feedback) after receiving multi-source feedback were more likely to improve than other managers.

In summary, these studies provide evidence that taking action is positively related to performance improvement after receiving multi-source feedback.

GROW Model

A list of the more popular Performance Coaching models include GROW, SUCCESS, STEPPA, WHAT, TGROW, OSKAR and CLEAR (Cortes, 2011). Looking at the GROW model specifically; this was developed in the 1980's by business coaches Graham Alexander, Alan Fine and Sir John Whitmore. G – Goal, R – Reality, O-Options, W – Will or Way forward i.e. Establish the Goal, Examine the current Reality, Explore the Options and Elaborate on the willingness or how to move forward. Goals and objectives of a coaching relationship focus on five general areas: Knowledge acquisition, skill building, personal/life balance, performance and development/ stretch (Berg & Karlsen, 2007). Also a foundation of trust is key to developing the coaching relationship (Bloomgarden, 2007). Bloomgarden goes on to define trust as being open, honest, respectful and considerate with the key characteristics of a trusted leader ; listens actively, delivers results, acts ethically and is transparent.

There is a school of thought that traditional coaching, built around outdated change models (such as GROW) falls well short of developing lasting measurable behaviour competencies. The "one size" fits all simplistic approach ignores individual behavioural patterns that control the execution of the skill to be advanced (Zeus and Skiffington, 2003).

2.3 Leadership Development & Business Results

Leadership coaching is a partnership where both the executive coach and the leader agree upon the destination. The aim is to bring about sustained behavioural change to transform the leader's working and personal life.

Leadership coaching is not technical guidance, counselling, consulting, mentoring or training. The Executive coaching handbook defines executive coaching as "an experiential and individualised leader development process that builds a leader's capability to achieve short and long term organisational goals. It is conducted through one-one-one and/or group interactions, driven by data from multiple perspectives, and based on mutual trust and respect. The organisation, an executive, and the executive coach work in partnership to achieve maximum impact". It is designed to bring about more effective high performing organisations. Hence, when leaders improve their performance, such benefits spread throughout the organisation. Improved interactions cascade down through the organisation. Coaching has become a viable option for businesses looking to operate at peak performance. While training is general in nature, coaching is specifically tailored to the leader. Coaching challenges the leader whilst encouraging the leader to being open to change and be more responsible corporate citizens while improving the bottom line. The leader often uses the coach as a confidential thinking partner.

Coaching for leaders tends to fall into two main categories (a) Development coaching and (b) Coaching to resolve problems and risks.

(a) Development coaching is about improving skills and knowledge whilst providing frameworks for effective work life balance as well as developing sound emotional intelligence. At an interpersonal level a coach can support a leader in a new role by setting the bar for

excellence in behaviour. At an organisational level coaches can support the succession planning process by helping people realise their potential and help fast track those leading transformational change.

(b) Coaching to resolve problems and risks help prevent career derailment and reduce stress or other emotional factors that might get in the way of effective performance. It can also involve reducing conflict between team members or resolve company politics issues.

Goleman (2000) makes both business and scientific cases for Emotional Intelligence as the active ingredient in strong leadership. He proposes four tenets that build emotional intelligence. Confidence or certainty in ability and understanding of one owns strengths and weaknesses requires self-awareness. Self-management or staying calm under pressure is the second tenet. The third is empathy both cognitive empathy (understanding how others think about the world) and emotional empathy (sensing immediately how another person feels). The fourth is relationship skills where common competencies for outstanding performance include teamwork and collaboration, influence and assisting others build their leadership abilities. An executive coach can design a programme for a leader around these four elements.

Leadership coaching has seen significant growth in recent years due to;
- The frenetic pace of change in the world. There is pressure on leaders to keep transforming their thinking to keep on top of current realities in order to keep the bottom line buoyant
- In the past organisations were of a hierarchical nature based on command and control whilst now we have leaner and flatter structures requiring greater emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills
- To retain human capital and inspire/develop new talent to bring about high performing teams. Leadership caching is used as tool to keep and grow talented staff.
- People are promoted more rapidly to senior roles compared to the traditional way slow moving up the chain. Such meteoric rises to the top mean leaders need support and guidance on this rapid rise.

- Being at the top is a lonely job, a leadership coach is there to talk and confide in, to use as a sounding board.

- With increased emphasis on Corporate Governance, business has become more legalistic with associated stresses which require new strategies for dealing with these challenges.

Return on investment (ROI) - Business results

The Collaborative Action Coaching Model for Leaders (Cook, 2011) is designed for the sustainability of learning (Wasylyshyn, Gronsky and Haas (2006). Coaching could be criticised as being an expensive conversation. It is challenging therefore to find an evidence based approach that works towards a return on investment and moves away from the expensive conservation. ROI can be described as achieving business alignment through a robust evaluation process attempting to show organisational investors the direct impact on business goals and objectives.

The Kirkpatrick model of evaluation as amended by Phillips (2013) can be applied. The model consists of four evaluation levels:

1. Reaction - Measure participants initial reaction to the coaching intervention
2. Learning - Measure how much information was effectively absorbed and map it to the individuals leadership role
3. Behaviour - Measure how the intervention has influenced behaviour and application to the role
4. Results - Measure impact at the business level

The most challenging aspect of coaching is to measure its' return in terms of numbers (euro, dollars etc.). With clear goals success can be judged by whether these goals can be actually met. However goals often change as the coaching engagement evolves and the impact can become intangible or the impact may not be felt for some time into the future. Also a measure is the satisfaction of the leader with the impact of the coaching intervention.

Effron et al (2004) found that companies with stronger leadership practices outperformed industry peers in the longer term both in terms of financial growth and return on investment.

Executive coaching was singled out as a factor that separated the top companies. This study found that 47% of the top companies regularly assign coaches to their high potential staff while just 10% of the remaining 300 firms surveyed made a similar claim.

McGovern et al (2001) found executives estimated their coaching to be worth 5.7 times the initial investment, based on a conservative formula for estimating ROI (Phillips, 1997). Significant organisational and personal benefits were also found. These include better productivity (reported by 53% of participants) quality (48%), customer service (39%) and retention (32%). Also cited are improvements such as cost reduction (32%), and profitability (22%). Personal benefits reported included improved relationships with direct reports (77%), peers (63%), better team work (67%) and increased job satisfaction (61%). This evidence suggests leadership coaching is a powerful tool to accelerate the performance of successful executives and in turn the business as a whole. Also the authors recommend that in order to remain at the forefront it is imperative that executive coaching be amongst the development tools in a training kit.

Goal Assessment Scaling (GAS) – Business Results

A different way of evaluating success of a coaching programme is reviewing the pursuit of specific organisational goals or outcomes and the progress towards such goals would be a useful measure of coaching success compared to more speculative ROI measures (Spence, 2007). GAS is widely used in broad range of contexts including education, medicine, social work and nursing and is considered to be an effective and valid measure of outcome (Mackay et al, 1996). However GAS has not been widely used in relation to executive coaching within organisations to date.

2.4 Change Management

In a recent study conducted by the Human Capital Institute (HCI) and the International Coach Federation (ICF) respondents identified executive coaching activities (one to one and group/team coaching) as the most helpful method to achieve change management goals. Coaching activities are rated more helpful than e-learning and classroom training. Often

change managers do not anticipate how change is experienced at an individual level. Coaching is a powerful tool to address individual resistance to change and should be part of any organisational change strategy. Coaches have the skills to address challenges like:

- Fear of not meeting the new reality, fear of failure. Coaching can combat this by encouraging a growth mind-set
- Insufficient information about the change. Coaching can point out clients' non evidence based assumptions and encourage seeking out more information
- Imagining the worst possible outcome. Coaching holds the space to explore future possibilities, help surface and deal with fears, barriers and determine a clear path for their goals
- Status quo bias - Motivational interviewing is a technique to build intrinsic motivation and strengthen commitment to action by asking powerful questions to build awareness of the resistance and help frame the situation to one that is positive and goal focused.

A Structured Approach

A structured change management approach coupled with appropriate training is required for Organisational change. Prosci (2012), identified ineffective change management sponsorship from senior leaders as the primary obstacle to project success. Poor alignment between organisational direction and the objectives of the change along with competing priorities of sponsors were set out as the most common problems. Nevenhoven (2019) observed lack of ongoing, active and visible executive sponsorship as the key change leadership deficiencies to organisation-wide change transformations. This resulted in missed milestones, extended project timelines, increase project costs, frustrated employees and lower than expected return on investment.

Nevenhoven identified steps that can be taken by an executive change management coach to overcome these issues.

- Inform sponsors on how their own participation or lack of it impacts the change process and resultant productivity

- Share data from best practice benchmarking studies
- Provide Change management training
- Perform sponsorship assessments to evaluate strengths and weaknesses
- Design sponsorship action plans and targets individual ongoing coaching sessions

The biggest challenge facing sponsors is staying engaged throughout the life of the project. Competing roles, responsibilities, duties and priorities compete for their times and attention. Strategies that Nevenhoven found effective to address these challenges include:

- Identify the critical few activities that visually demonstrate personal commitment to the change or project
- Provide training and coaching on roles and responsibilities
- Ensure the sponsor controls their schedule to put time and effort into the change
- Provide feedback and continued reinforcement of successful sponsorship behaviours

These will allow the sponsor to make the personal transition during change just like everyone else in the organisation. The role of the coach is to take account of individual needs and then craft a coaching strategy along with a sponsor action plan that develops sponsorship knowledge and skills while enabling them to actively and visibly lead change.

Nevenhoven then delves into coaching employees through change to increase output and productivity. The coach would have worked with the leaders/sponsors to remove obstacles, leveraging and developing strengths, sharing information, instilling key behaviours and engaging employees in the growth and continuous improvement of the organisation. Change is guaranteed in today's business world alongside technological advancements such as digitalisation.

Change Readiness

Change readiness can be assessed using a seven point adaptation of the Coping with Change Scale (Judge et.al, 1999). This scale assesses the extent to which individuals cope with change uncertainties introduce into their professional lives. The Coping with Change Scale has been

shown to be reliable and valid demonstrating strong relationships with independent assessments of change and ratings of job performance (Judge et al, 1999).

In order for employees to perform their responsibilities differently and effectively they need effective coaching (and mentoring) as they progress through the change process. The change process will pave the way for employee engagement and ownership. The coaching sessions will allow employees to understand the "why and "what's in it for me" - be fully vested in the process and work together as a team. Three straight forward steps are outlined when coaching employees:

- Communicate the business need for change, connecting to the impact on their roles and give them a voice in the process
- Involve employees in the change process including the planning, design and evaluation stages
- Coach and mentor employees as they transition through the change removing obstacles and developing action plans

These steps will build a winning team, engage and inspire individuals and deliver higher productivity for the organisation.

Transfer of Training tool

Olivero, Bane and Kopelman (1997) put forward that coaching can maximise benefits obtained from training. Coachees were asked to retrieve and analyse data on their productivity levels at three points in time a) before training b) after training but before coaching and c) after coaching.

Their research findings showed amongst a group of 31 managers who undertook a leadership training program, productivity increased by 22% with this training alone and 88% following ten weeks of coaching. They promote coaching as the conduit that impacts the extent to which knowledge acquired during training transfers to the job. "Through coaching, employees have a safe personalised environment in which practice and feedback can take place".

In the study, a direct executive coaching intervention approach was employed emphasising 1, goal setting 2.collaborative problem solving 3 practice 4 feedback 5 supervisory involvement 6 evaluation of end results 7 public presentation. Component 7 of this approach - public presentation - was a central facet of the intervention. The coached managers were notified from the outset that a presentation and accompanying written report would be made to stakeholders outlining the impact of their chosen real work project. The real work project was set to enhance performance especially productivity, quality and effectiveness. Coaches worked individually with managers to monitor and enhance project progress, providing feedback and guidance during weekly hourly one to one meetings over a two month period.

Coaches provided knowledge data before and after coaching indicating a 20% increase in test scores. The key outcome criterion was an index of productivity computed as outputs divided by inputs. The 88% increase in productivity following the ten weeks of post training coaching combination underlines the key deliverable of devilling skills rather than merely transmitting knowledge. Also Goal setting and achieving concrete actions set by the coaching partnership together with positive reinforcement from all sources enhanced participant's self-efficacy. The fact the coaching culminated in the completion of an actual project was of particular benefit to the trainees.

Olivero et al (1997) conclude "The benefits from managerial training will likely to be suboptimal if there is limited follow up, feedback and measurement of outcomes (end-results). Executive coaching is an important way of ensuring that knowledge acquired during training actually emerges as skills that are employed at work".

2.5 Organisational Wellbeing

Much of the research on organisational wellbeing has been concerned with the interaction between the person and the organisation leading to the development of concepts such as Psychological contract, Organisational Commitment and Organisational Citizenship. Rousseau (1999) describes the psychological contract as the individual's beliefs as concerning the mutual obligations that exist between the individual and employer. If there

is a breach of this contract employees will exhibit negative behaviours such as low performance or low work motivations. Organisational Commitment (Steers, 1997) is a set of employee's attitudes and behaviours that can help the organisation achieve its goals while at the same time maintain a strong desire to remain within the organisation. Organisational Citizenship Behaviour can be defined as an individual's desire to do extra work activities beyond the actual tasks in the job description or measured by formal evaluation (Bateman & Organ, 1985).

The ripple effect of Executive Coaching

A significant increase in goal attainment, transformational leadership and psychological wellbeing measures were observed by those who received coaching (O'Connor & Cavanagh, 2013). The coaching ripple effect is proposed where they found that the closer any member of the network was identified as being connected to those who received coaching the more likely they were to experience positive increases in wellbeing.

Two key areas emerged from the researcher's literature findings in the area of Organisational Wellbeing:

- Managing the stress levels of leaders
- Increasing levels of employee engagement and retention

Leaders (who have had executive coaching themselves) can increase their own sustainability by coaching others. Coaching involves the exercise of care and compassion, which manifests in positive psychological effects that serve as an antidote to stress. (Boyatzis, 2006). Having received coaching leaders are able to attain goals, increase their personal resilience and workplace well-being whilst reducing depression and stress (Grant, Curtayne & Burton, 2009).

Leaders can work with a coach to develop their social intelligence and foster the neurobiological changes that create positive behaviours and emotions in their employees. For example, after one leader at a Fortune 500 organisation worked with a coach to improve personal behaviour, employee retention and emotional commitment in that directorate soared and annual sales jumped by 6%. Mood contagion stems from neurobiology. (Goleman

& Boyatzis, 2008). Positive behaviours such as exhibiting empathy create a chemical connection between a leader's and his or her followers' brains. By managing these interconnections leaders can deliver measurable business results.

Employee Engagement

Macey and Schneider (2008) see employee engagement as having attitudinal and behavioural characteristics being made up of 1.a state or psychological engagement (feelings of empowerment, energy and commitment) 2.behavioural (personal initiative, role expansion and organisational citizenship) 3.trait engagement (positive attitude to life and work, proactive personality and conscientiousness). They also purport "In a world that is changing both in terms of the global nature of work and the ageing of the work force, having engaged employees may be a key to competitive advantage. Ensuring staff performing to their full potential is how organisations will secure this competitive advantage. Investment in people is imperative for delivering business strategy and shareholders are going to look for evidence of this."

The executive coaching impact on performance activities can be seen as having both a direct and indirect influence on state engagement and behavioural engagement. According to Sisson & Storey (2000) key impacts on engagement and performance are:

- Objective setting derived from business units
- Performance evaluation
- Linking evaluated performance with reward and development so as to reinforce the desired behaviour.

In order to deal effectively with these issues leaders need to be able to stand back from the day to day corporate life and engage in the flexible strategic thinking necessary to understand and constructively react to emergent and unpredictable issues. Such reflexivity sits at the core of the coaching process (Day et al, 2008). Also effective leadership of others requires strong personal insight and coaching has been shown to increase such insight (Grant, 2007).

Resilience and Workplace wellbeing

Coaching programmes are also effective in reducing depression and stress whilst enhancing resilience in the workplace with leaders. (Grant et al., 2009). As individuals work towards their goals there are inevitable setbacks and challenges to be overcome. Dealing with such setbacks is likely to improve resilience and levels of depression are also likely to dissipate as individuals are likely to experience an increased level of satisfaction as they overcome such personal challenges. Findings have highlighted the importance of using a broad range of mental health measures in coaching that capture improvements in well-being facets.

The Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) is used as a measure of psychopathology while the DASS-21 comprises three sub scales measuring depression, anxiety and stress. As it is designed to be used with clinical and non-clinical populations it is a useful assessment tool for coaching (Brown et. al, 1997).

Resilience is assessed using the Cognitive Hardiness-Scale (Nowack, 1990) assessing the individuals' sense of personal control, their propensity to rise to meet challenges and commitment to action.

Workplace satisfaction is measured by the Workplace Well-Being Index - WWBI- (Page, 2005) and assesses the degree of satisfaction that individuals gain from their work using very dissatisfied and very satisfied as scale anchors. Questions include how individuals feels about the meaningfulness of their work, working conditions, recognition and with the job as a whole.

Mindfulness

"It is not that mindfulness is the answer to all of life's problems rather it is that all life's problems can be seen more clearly through the lens of a clear mind" (Kabat-Zinn, 1990). Mindfulness addresses the challenge of developing and maintaining focus (Passamore et al, 2006). Mindfulness influences ability to appraise and interpret events and allows gaining a more objective view to retain a higher control of responses. The concept allows organisations to train staff in the key techniques as a way of managing conflict and stress in the workplace.

Productivity (and performance) processes and learning as well as avoiding burnout have all been shown to be positively influenced by mindfulness (Langer & Piper, 1987).

Mindfulness can therefore provide people with the opportunity to get rid of unhelpful baggage and focus their attention on personal development and self-actualisation.

The executive coach has therefore an array of tools at their disposal to help evaluate the organisation's and individual's Wellbeing and subsequently to tailor the coaching intervention accordingly by delivering a programme to cater for the needs of both.

2.6 Conclusion to Literature Review

The literature review has unearthed key theoretical models and concepts that surround the impact of Executive coaching on performance within organisations. There are a number of principles forthcoming which should be followed throughout the coaching intervention in order to impact positive performance. The tripartite relationship between the coach, employee and Manager/Organisational Culture is crucial to impact and outcomes. The Literature review also revealed four key themes of focus to this paper. It demonstrated how these themes and concepts can apply in reality, the challenges posed and the outcomes and impact with regards to the value added by the coach. The next section summarises each of the four themes that underwent review:

Performance measurement

Theories explored include Goal Theory, Control Theory and Social Cognitive Theory in the context of managing performance. Goal theory highlights mechanisms that connect goals to performance outcomes while Control theory focuses attention on central mechanisms of control. Social Cognitive Theory describes two mechanisms that are used to regulate performance in relation to personal goals – discrepancy production and action on feedback.

Further studies provide evidence that taking action is positively related to performance improvement after receiving multi-source feedback. The GROW model was set out as a way

of developing a plan of action for coaching clients but critics purport that traditional coaching, built around outdated change models such as GROW falls well short of developing lasting measurable behaviour competencies.

Leadership & Business Results

Leadership coaching can be split into development coaching or coaching to solves problems (also known as "Fix it" coaching). Goleman (2000) makes both business and scientific cases for emotional intelligence as the active ingredient in strong leadership i.e. self-awareness, self-management, empathy and relationship skills.

The Kirkpatrick model of evaluation looks at a way to measure success of the coaching intervention on ROI and is portrayed as possible way of measuring value. Also explored is GAS (Goal Assessment Scaling) as an alternative method of evaluating success of a coaching programme.

McGovern et al (2001) found executives estimated their coaching to be worth 5.7 times the initial investment, based on a conservative formula for estimating ROI (Phillips, 1997). Significant organisational and personal benefits were also found.

Change Readiness

The greatest barriers to implementing change successfully lay with Fear of the change, imagining the worst possible outcomes and status quo bias (preferring the current situation).

Prosci (2012), identified ineffective change management sponsorship from senior leaders as the primary obstacle to project success. Nevenhoven (2019) observed lack of ongoing, active and visible executive sponsorship as the key change leadership deficiencies to organisation-wide change transformations.

The Coping with Change Scale has been shown to be reliable and valid demonstrating strong relationships with independent assessments of change and ratings of job performance (Judge et al, 1999). The steps of communication, Employee involvement and Coaching will build a

winning team, engage and inspire individuals and deliver higher productivity for the organisation.

Olivero et al (1997) concluded that the benefits from managerial training will likely to be suboptimal if there is limited follow up, feedback and measurement of outcomes (end-results). Executive coaching is an important way of ensuring that knowledge acquired during training actually emerges as skills that are employed at work.

Organisational Wellbeing

Concepts such as the Psychological Contract, Organisational Commitment and Organisational Citizenship are relevant to Organisational Wellbeing. The coaching ripple effect is proposed where they found that the closer any member of the network was identified as being connected to those who received coaching the more likely they were to experience positive increases in wellbeing. The executive coaching impact on performance activities can be seen as having both a direct and indirect influence on state employee engagement and behavioural employee engagement. Various scales measuring Depression, Anxiety and Stress, Resilience and Workplace satisfaction were reviewed. Mindfulness can provide people with the opportunity to get rid of unhelpful baggage and focus their attention on personal development and self-actualisation.

Section 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This section sets out the research that was carried out and describes the way the researcher gathered, recorded and analysed the data. The study was designed to identify specific factors that measure the impact of executive coaching on performance. The aim was to gain knowledge of the perceptions that surround executive coaching from the view point of Executive coaches, Senior Managers and HR professionals. Detailed research was conducted to draw out feelings and viewpoints from participants. The method of research was designed with the purpose of gaining genuine insight and feedback.

Firstly the specific research objective – assessing the contribution of executive coaching to increase levels of performance – is presented followed by a description of the research design. The design takes an exploratory qualitative approach and the rationale for choosing this approach is also discussed. The sample of participants and ethical considerations are then presented. Finally, the research materials and process are outlined and description of the data analysis. While there is some mainly international research on executive coaching, very little exists in an Irish context.

The study is focused on knowledge professionals who are experts in their field. They are defined as people who add to an organisation's products and services by applying their knowledge (Drucker, 1993). In a knowledge based economy the focus is on the motivation and performance of participants. Due to the importance of financial services to the Irish economy, this study focuses on how executive coaching can help senior managers perform at their best and contribute to the value added of the sector. Financial services professionals are widely sought in the current environment with the possibility of relocation post Brexit of major financial institutions from London to Dublin. Highly skilled financial services professionals will seek opportunities for career advancement, reward and challenge.

The paper is topical in these uncertain economic times. The findings will help stakeholders gauge the value of executive coaching in addressing challenges faced by financial services

professionals in the current and impending economic climate. The researcher seeks to identify the concerns of financial services professionals and how working with executive coaches can propel them to be their best self and deliver future success.

3.2 Research Question and associated Objectives

As mentioned in Section 1.5 of this paper the objective of the study is to explore the contributions executive coaching makes on to performance. The tripartite framework set out below outlines the key elements of focus for this study. These elements are at the core of the research methodology and data gathering.

EXECUTIVE COACHING IMPACT ON PERFORMANCE THROUGH:
->>>>>> LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT & BUSINESS RESULTS
->>>>>>> CHANGE MANAGEMENT
->>>>>>> ORGANISATIONAL WELLEBING

Fig. 1 Tripartite Framework

This framework forms the basis for the data gathering procedure design. By keeping the above framework to the fore of the study the research aims to answer the following question:

What are the specific factors within Executive Coaching that influence performance and allow measurement of value directly attributed to the Coaching intervention?

The following objectives are explored to help the researcher address this question;

- To assess if stakeholders are satisfied with the returns from an investment in executive coaching and if so how do they measure such returns
- To identify how executive coaching develops leadership and subsequent business results
- To determine how executive coaching impacts change readiness and change management
- To ascertain how executive coaching contributes to organisational wellbeing

3.3 Research Design

The researcher decided on a qualitative approach to the research design as this would yield more quality outputs. The qualitative approach requires the researcher to avoid imposing his own perception of the meaning upon the respondent (Banister et al, 2011). The aim is to investigate how the respondent interprets their own reality (Bryman & Allen, 2011).The researcher can also develop questions throughout the process to ensure that the respondent expands further. Qualitative research leads to understanding the world of human experience (Myers, 2000).

Qualitative methods often include a contribution by focus group interviews and semi structured one to one interviews. Quantitative studies do not consider the "Why" factor which is most important for constructing the reality of this study. Theories and concepts can emerge from collection of data from these studies. The objective is to draw conclusions to the findings and relate them back to the literature review that has been conducted.

Based on the tripartite framework as outlined in Section 3.2, the researcher started the process by the development of a conceptual framework and building on existing theory through the literature review. Sander's research onion provides an effective progression through which a research methodology is designed .It's usefulness lies in the adaptability for almost any type of research that can be used in variety of contexts (Bryman, 2012). The research onion was designed by Saunders et al (2007) to describe the stages through which the researcher must pass when formulating.

3.4 Sample of Participants

The study comprises of three sets of interviews 1. A Focus group consisting of eight Senior Managers who work in the Financial Services Centre in Dublin 2.One to one interviews with four Executive Coaches all based in Dublin 3. One to One interviews with two HR professionals.

Regarding the focus group, the researcher has chosen samples across core Directorates i.e. Finance, Risk & Compliance, People & Environment, Strategy, Operations and Retail. These

Directorates are all based in the Irish subsidiary of an International Banking Corporation based in the International Financial Services Centre in Dublin but also delivering services globally.

These Senior Managers report to C-Suite executives all based in Dublin but occasionally work on cross functional global projects and in particular with colleagues from their outsourced partner. Five of the eight participants are members of the Institute of Banking in Ireland and hold an MSC in Banking or Financial Services from University College Dublin. The rational for choosing this sample of Senior Managers is that it spans a cross section of the organisational set up in Dublin. Secondly, all of these people are highly skilled and manage teams that range in size from six to fifteen and are experienced with managing performance across their teams for at least two years. Half of these Managers are very ambitious with aspirations to make C-Suite positions within the next five to seven years. Appendix 7 provides an over view of all three categories of participants.

3.5 Ethical Considerations

The research undertaken for the purpose of fulfilling requirements of the dissertation adhered to the European Code of Conduct for Research Integrity (Allea, 2017).The communication of the confidentiality declaration was an important consideration for the researcher. Focus group participants were provided with scribble pads to set out comments that they may not want to share with the group. The researcher wanted to gather as straightforward, impartial and honest feedback as possible, the researcher assured participants that no names would be used and identity would always be protected. The information gathered would remain fully confidential and the research would be used in an entirely academic capacity.

An ethics information sheet detailing the purpose of the study, participant requirements and confidentiality of the research was provided to all research participants to allow them decide whether they are prepared to sign off on the associated consent sheet for the research (Fisher, 2010).

The researcher facilitated the focus group using sticky yellow pads and flip charts to outline the issues and capture group responses. The researcher conducted one to one interviews with

the aid of a questionnaire which was presented to participants upon arrival. Interviews were conducted in a private office in a secure environment. All participants understood the ethical concerns of the researcher and participated fully and willingly.

3.6 Research Design Feasibility

Access to the study participants to gather the data was not a problem. The researcher being a member of the Institute of Banking and Life and Business Coaching association of Ireland (LBCAI) was able to draw on fellow members to take part in the study. The HR professionals were ex colleagues both whom were willing participants for the study. As full time employees, time was a restriction in terms of focus group participant schedules where the researcher had to plan an evening that did not interfere with their work duties. Initially six participants agreed to participate in the focus group with two as back up. On the said evening all were available to take part in the focus group at their office.

The executive coaches who took part in the one to one interviews usually meet once a month with the researcher as part of a book club designed as a vehicle for continuous professional development. These one to one interviews took place in the researcher's place of work over a two week period. The interviews with the HR professionals took place over Skype due to them having moved abroad.

Despite being known to some participants socially, the researcher was conscious to use an objective and unbiased approach, remaining detached from discussions, context and ideas expressed by participants. The focus of the discussion was kept in line with the tripartite framework to draw out the most accurate and honest responses.

While the researcher had studied and maintained regular contact with participants socially, the researcher remained distanced from the discussions. This was achieved due to the researcher having trained as a LEAN facilitator in a past career role. A helicopter approach was therefore applied. The researcher had worked in the financial services sector so had an understanding of some of the specific issues raised by the focus group. The researcher had an

understanding of some approaches used by executive coaches but had never worked in a HR role.

3.7 Procedure

In order to delve deep into the perceptions surrounding executive coaching and its impact on performance and gain the most accurate data to answer the research question, it was decided to use a three pronged approach of a focus group consisting of senior managers who lead teams, practicing executive coaches and HR Professionals to reflect a strategic aspect from an organisational perspective.

Due to the explanatory nature of the research a Focus group seemed appropriate. The group consisted of 8 participants in line with Bryman and Bell (2007) who suggest a focus group should consist of between six and twelve participants to develop an understanding of why people feel the way they do. The participants shared characteristics in terms of their professional status. The focus group can yield important information that may not be as achievable through individual interviews. The focus group allows participants to probe each other's viewpoints to issues that some may not have considered as important to the topic under discussion. Views are challenged which results in a more realistic view of what people think.

Open ended questions used in the discussion were related to the tripartite framework and research objectives. Questions were displayed on flip chart to help keep focus. Sticky pads were also supplied to allow grouping of ideas and some note paper supplied so that views of a sensitive nature could be recorded and passed to the researcher later. The focus group questions and associated verbatim answers can be found in Appendix 3.

One to one interviews was the second method applied to enable the researcher to drill down where elaboration was required. Examples of probing the issues included "Please elaborate further on this" and " Are there further reasons that you think that way?" This was not possible to do in the focus group where flowing conversations were the order of the meeting.

The questions for the executive coaching one to one interviews were designed differently to those of the focus group. The information gathered from these interviews helped validate data obtained from the other sources. The interviews with the HR professionals related specifically to the tripartite framework and if this was appropriate from a strategic organisational perspective.

3.8 Analysis of the Data

One to one interviews were hand written down directly from oral and grouped under key headings. The hand written format was typed and set out in a schedule for analysis. Data clusters were identified from recurrent responses. These clusters provided the primary data. The data clusters emerged from the identification of key statements which were grouped into appropriate categories which allowed the researcher to draw out themes and phrases. This is known as triangulation of the data to develop rich empirical outputs from which inferences can be drawn. Brannick and Roche (1997) put forward that this gives rise to an increase in knowledge and understanding.

The reliability of the data was cross referenced by interviews with the HR professionals who would have had input into Human Resource strategies and have a deep knowledge of performance issues. Data was therefore reviewed in the light of Focus Group data, Individual interview data and HR Professionals interviews. Triangulation is considered useful where multiple sources of data is used to study social phenomena and leads to greater confidence in findings by way of cross checking.

Section 4: FINDINGS

Before presenting the findings from the research, a profile of participants and their professional environments is outlined as this will help provide context to the findings.

4.1 Profile of Participants

The Focus Group participants and their Environment

The participants are employed by the Irish branch of a leading European financial services organisation that is listed on several stock exchanges such as FTSE100, Frankfurt DAX and New York Stock exchange. The organisation delivers financial products and services to a global client base and depend primarily on the sustainability of the intellectual capital of its workforce. Workers must therefore be highly engaged to operate in a fast paced culture where employee autonomy and professionalism prevails.

The Dublin branch was established in 1994 and includes Corporate Banking together with providing global client solutions and Asset Based Finance. The Executive Management Structure is the Irish Management team known as the MT. The MT is responsible for the day to day operations of the branch in line with delegated authority from Group HQ. This includes managing the business performance to achieve approved objectives. All business unit and support activities operate under the direction of a C Suite executive (See Appendix 1) The MT approve strategic plans, annual business plans and policies as well as other local country related matters.

Global Client solutions arranges and participates in tailored structured finance solutions for corporate clients specific financial objectives, which may have particular credit/solvency, fiscal, accounting or legal/regulatory issues.

The eight focus group participants come from across the spectrum i.e. Finance, HR, Risk, Operations, Marketing and Strategy and are at the senior manager grade, all reporting into a C-Suite member of the MT. Their performance assessments are primarily competency based with ratings being determined by scores obtained on a scale of 1-5 from ten contributions across the business (See Appendix 2). Also considered is the direct report C-Suite executive's assessment of the senior manager's performance against the set objectives.

The Executive Coaches and their work

The researcher conducted four one-to-one interviews with self-employed executive coaches specialising in corporate coaching. This involves coaching individuals or the entire organisation to achieve goals whilst focusing on the vision, mission, values and strategy. Results are measured against the performance requirements (including specific Key Performance Indicators) of the organisation. When conducted from the top level down the executive coaches emphasised that when a top down coaching approach is used, a positive effect on performance and culture ensues. Working in times of change and significant challenge, the coach would encourage an examination of behavioural patterns, beliefs, emotions and attitudes.

Once identified and worked on, this leads to greater commitment and engagement from everyone involved. Employees develop clarity on career development opportunities and an awareness of the organisation's commitment to their future. An example would be for succession planning; Future leaders need to be identified and develop the necessary skills and confidence to enable them to reach their full potential. Areas for future development can be identified for the employee and opportunities capitalised on for the business.

As well as having the appropriate coaching accreditations, all four coaches had other qualifications at a Masters level in various disciplines i.e. Business, Financial Services, Arts and Social Science. Coaches specialised in a combination of Career coaching, Life Coaching, Business Problem solving or Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP). All rated having Emotional Intelligence (E.I.) as one of the most important skills to have as an executive coach. All coaches have worked with people in the Financial Services Sector in Ireland. Appendices 4 and 5 set out the questions posed to Executive Coaches and associated collated responses.

The HR Professionals and their Perspectives

As recommended and discussed in *Human Resource Champions* (Ulrich, 1997) the HR Professionals interviewed saw three aspects to the their role in the organisation;

- Strategic Partner
- Employee Advocate

- Change Champion

The HR professional contributes to the development and accomplishment of the organisation-wide business plan and objectives by designing work systems in which people succeed. Impacts here include hiring, reward, recognition and strategic pay; performance development and appraisal systems; and employee development. The HR Professionals interviewed are business savvy with strong grasp of finance and accounting and have delivered cost reductions along with measurement of HR programs and processes.

As an employee advocate the HR professionals creates a work environment in which people chose to be motivated. Fostering effective methods of goals setting and empowerment though responsibility builds employee ownership. They create and influence the culture where people have the competency and commitment to serve customers well.

The constant evaluation of effectiveness leads the HR professionals to frequently champion change through the execution of successful change strategies. They also champion the identification of organisational mission, values and vision, action plans and goals. Finally the success measures will ultimately tell if change has been successful.

The Findings section is based on the outputs from the focus group interview, individual Executive Coaches interviews and HR professional interviews. Appendix 6 sets out the detailed responses from the HR professionals.

4.2 Focus group interviews

The focus group questions evolved from the research question and associated tri-partiate framework. A section on specific experience with their coach was also added as the coaching relationship plays a key role in the effectiveness of subsequent actions and ultimately performance of the participants. As facilitator, the researcher was cognisant of Group think (where people form immediate views in line with group consensus which can impede people acting objectively and independently).

During the session, there were periods when although perceptions were the same, conflicting ideas emerged which were then explored further. A considerable amount of time was spent

discussing the organisational competencies and the impact executive coaching had on improving these competencies and how the associated behaviours impacted on stakeholder relationships. At times, discussions got heated in relation to specific work issues, which as a facilitator, the researcher acted to inform the group that this was outside the scope of this forum.

The following items emerged from the focus group discussions:

- Impact on Performance
- Behaviours and Relationships
- Competencies - measurement and evaluation
- The coach and the process

Item 1: Impact on Performance

Participants acknowledged that the organisational structural changes effected the previous year had proved challenging. New roles had been created and a lot of new staff had been recruited in order to deliver the digitalisation strategy. Initially, some people found this *"drastic and overwhelming"* and that the work with the coach helped them cope with these changes by finding ways forward. This work also helped in conflict resolution, how to have difficult conversations and build morale. The majority of the group looked to the coach to help develop and improve competencies so expectations could be met or exceeded. The issue of work life balance was also raised where the coach helped them develop strategies to ensure they delivered at work whilst maintaining a happy and healthy family life. It was felt by the majority of participants that the criteria for assessing performance was blurred and inconsistent and this was something the coach couldn't do much about. The noticeable culture change, Values and Behaviours and subsequent impact on performance was discussed and explored further later. In general, participants felt that the reward package was fair in line with the current market rates and did not have a major impact on performance.

Item 2: Behaviours and Relationships

The discussion on this item centred on Communication and how to deliver constructive criticism/feedback up and down the hierarchy in order to raise the bar, lead and motivate teams. A number of participants were involved in contract negotiations with an outsourced partner and depended on information from other internal colleagues. Discussions got heated when some members appeared to criticise teams in other departments for delivering inaccurate and untimely information upon which they based decisions. Responses to these criticisms were directed at last minute demands, unrealistic expectations and clarity around requirements. It was agreed to take this issue offline but that coaching could help all involved resolve these issues.

Participants articulated that having more empathy, being more organised with Planning and working collaboratively were issues raised as possible topics that can be explored in coaching sessions which could help them all. In terms of leadership, examples were given of how successful ideas explored in coaching were subsequently put into practice. These included encouraging team members to get involved in cross functional projects and governance committees. Similarities also existed amongst participants in how they now dealt with demanding C-Suite executives and found the role play coaches carried out with them was very beneficial in this respect.

Item 3: Competencies - measurement and evaluation

All participants brought end of year performance reports to coaching sessions. Participants also shared their competency ratings at year ends both prior to and after coaching with the researcher. Participants agreed these ratings were useful measures that contributed to the evaluation of their coaching sessions. The researcher has tabulated these ratings but not to the associated participants (see Appendix 2). There was a lengthy discussion around competencies such as; Teamwork, Leadership, Improving Business performance, Problem solving and Customer Focus.

Evidence of impact on performance emerged as the central point of discussion. The staff satisfaction (employee engagement) index, 360 feedback and how people felt about themselves emerged as the key indicators. One participant attributed to having *"done*

something amazing, I presented at the annual conference" down to the work with the coach and another that the coach was *"like having a personal trainer at the gym, I felt i was getting more done"*. Being self-assured and having more confidence lead another to push for a better deal when negotiating contracts by pushing for savings which directly impacted driving down costs. Some agreed the fact the CEO was an advocate of coaching was a measure that is must be worthwhile.

Item 4: The coach and the process

"What could the executive coach have done differently?" was an extremely powerful question to prompt and probe discussion. A number of participants wondered if the coach was really objective, was judgemental at times and may have had the interests of the director at heart rather than their own particular needs. *"She did not challenge me enough as she didn't understand the complexities of my role"*. Others felt that they were allowed to wander off on tangents and the coach should have cut to the core of the issue quicker. Clarity around accountability and over enthusiasm of the coach also emerged as issues from the group. Two managers mentioned the coaching intervention was like a chat and wouldn't pay for it themselves and felt they had to *"tick the box"* by going to the coaching sessions.

The overarching sentiment though was that the coaching interventions were in effect targeted one to one self-development where the participants could bounce ideas off an external facilitator to explore options in a safe environment. Personal development plans and goals/objectives could be tested and a plan evolved with the aim of achieving success.

4.3 Executive Coaches one to one interviews

The individual one to one interviews were conducted with four Executive coaches in order to gain their perceptions on the impact of their interventions and how they evaluate and measure same. The outputs from the Focus group provided a basis for the questions used with the Executive coaches to offer another angle in answering the research question.

Three broad areas were pursued:

- Characteristics of an Executive Coach
- Measurement/Evaluation of Impact
- Organisational Considerations

Three female and one male executive coaches were interviewed, two had spent all their career in Ireland and two had experience working abroad (UK and EU). Three were Irish nationals and one was European. Three were full time Executive coaches also delivering training and one was working as a part-time executive coach while undertaking a Masters in Coaching at a UK University.

Area 1: Characteristics of an Executive Coach

All four coaches had a diverse range of academic qualifications. All four had qualifications at Masters Level, two in business related areas (Accounting and Marketing) and the others in Arts and Social Science. One person had almost 20 years of experience the others less than five. All four felt that gender was not an issue when an executive coach being employed for an assignment. Areas of expertise included Career and Lifestyle & courage coaching, achieving peak performance and business problem solving. It was clear though that clients rarely have one area they want to focus on and came with a variety of issues.

All four coaches were accredited by the LBCAI (Life and Business Coaching Association of Ireland) and had undertaken much continual professional development. Emotional Intelligence (EQ) came to the fore as the key skill for an executive coach. Other knowledge areas mentioned were Neuro Linguistic Programming (NLP), Mindfulness and Organisational Psychology. Communication and Active Listening skills were personal attributes as a must for any executive coach.

Area 2: Measurement/Evaluation of impact

It was evident from their experiences that coaching interventions are not formally evaluated correctly but are mostly based on anecdotal feedback from clients. Evaluation forms were always given to clients but most were ticking boxes. On the corporate side most businesses did not evaluate the coaching programmes specifically again giving verbal feedback based on evaluation forms.

Myers Briggs, DISC profiling and psychometric testing were used as assessment tools to evaluate skills, knowledge and attitudes pre and post a coaching intervention. These can prove extremely time consuming as they go into minute detail and all need to be discussed at great length with the client. These tools can be very insightful when designing an evaluation methodology. Coaches reported that goal orientated, setting objectives and outcome measures in writing as well as assessing the impact on reactions by behavioural change were ways of evaluating an executive coaching methodology. Only one coach mentioned return on investment.

A summative outcome relates to the outcome of a programme whilst a formative outcome looks at participant development at a particular point in time. The coaches were mixed in their description of evaluation outcomes. Two felt it was formative "first and foremost" while the others felt it was a mix of both formative and summative. Meeting the client's desired outcomes was the ultimate objective "although this is not always possible due to unrealistic expectations of the client".

Key components to ensure an evaluation is accurate include the gathering of un-biased data and honesty within the Co-active coaching relationship. Qualitative and Quantitative measure can be used, with assessments being carried out periodically based upon clearly set out aims. Evidence based was felt to be best - assessing skills and behavioural development with appropriate back up documentation and demonstration.

Area 3: Organisational considerations

The stakeholders included in the evaluation process would depend on the contractual agreement and of course whether the client is an individual, a team or an Organisation. Mainly these include individual participants, Human Resource (HR) departments, Line Managers, CEOs and the coaches themselves. In terms of Organisational learning the coaches felt that external executive coaching fits well with Learning & Development (L&D), well-being and change management. Also pertinent is the impact on Leadership and helping align HR strategy and Knowledge Management within the overall business strategy.

On Leadership specifically, thinking for leaders was introduced as a new initiative for building resilience to enable them tackle the unexpected when it happens i.e. the coach acts as a sounding board. The coaches discussed what they perceived as leadership success stories where they felt that their intervention helped the leader foster and develop teams whilst enhancing self-awareness and implementing strategies. Emotional Intelligence again came up as key element of effective leadership by "looking inward to gain perspective" in order to achieve results in an ethical and moral way.

4.4 HR Professionals one to one interviews

Perceptions articulated by the two HR professionals were powerful insights into the role the Executive coach plays in the context of Leadership and Organisational development. The four questions asked related to the objectives of this research:

- Appropriate measure for an executive coaching intervention
- Developing leadership
- Change Readiness
- Individual and organisational well-being

Item 1: Appropriate measure for an executive coaching intervention

"Hard and soft measures coexist that ultimately impact on the bottom line" said one professional. The coaching is multifaceted impacting leaders to coach all the way through the structural hierarchy and not just peer related. Through coaching the customer experience can be impacted (internal and external customers) which ultimately impacts the Profit & Loss account. Seeing people progress up the ranks with the help of coaching can be measured by increased staff retention numbers and employee engagement scores. Delivery of the coaching program objectives by the coach for the organisation is another success measure.

Item 2: Developing leadership

Coaching can get rid of self-doubt, improve self-confidence and self-awareness to help people *"move away from tasked focused management roles and into greater vision leadership roles.*

This then helps reinforce demonstration of key values where leaders then go on to coach other leaders with passion and enthusiasm, empowering others to make confident decisions". This professional is now working with an organisation whose strategy is "Invest and inspire" and uses executive coaching interventions regularly as a support tool for the C-Suite.

Item 3: Change Readiness

Both interviewees felt that executive coaching facilitates and helps people understand the change, the challenge and effectively prepare teams to work through the changes, helping teams and individuals overcome the barriers to change by challenging the status quo. *"The coach can probe into the future and challenge where are the gaps? the short, medium and long term planning and how to fill the gaps to ensure delivery of strategy".* So the coach can explore what new skills will be needed in the work place and if there is sufficient capability within the current Organisation structure to deliver. The coach can also bring out knowledge and the *"Recency of knowledge"* in a wider context such as what's current in a particular sector.

Item 4: Organisational well-being

"In the financial services world, there is a lot of big egos, male dominated, I have seen coaches work with women to enable them break through that glass ceiling". This can lead to a more diverse workplace especially in the board room, developing and changing culture. Team Coaching also helps leaders work more effectively together so that leaders feel valued, more confident and on the same page. Coaching can also create that *"space to vent"* to bring challenging day to day issues that executives find they are unable to deal with by themselves. *"This leads to the integration of Life and Business coaching where problems can be reframed in the mind by eliminating the emotion, separating the issues and giving a licence to be confident".* Coaching can therefore motivate an executive to be and give their best.

One of the professionals did caution that *"there can be too much talking, too much self-analysis no challenging and so no subsequent action, then the coaching becomes just a very expensive conversation".*

4.4 Discussion of Findings

The analysis of the findings sets out the similarities and dissimilarities that evolved over the course of the Focus group interview, individual coaches and HR professional interviews. While the focus group generated the most responses group think may have been at play. While the researcher felt the individual coach interviews were on a deeper level they also had a vested interest in promoting their profession. The HR professionals delivered a very objective approach from the perspective of an employee advocate and strategic partner to the business. While the focus group provided a broad range of substantive data, the individual interviews provided a deeper insight and on a personalised level as participants here were interviewed on their own and had more space to express their thoughts.

Across the board though all participants broadly shared the same perceptions. After considering and analysing the main themes it appears that there are various perceptions on how the impact of executive coaching on performance can be measured and evaluated. Furthermore, the objectivity of the coaching process emerged as an issue from the focus group while Coaches felt their interventions are not being properly measured by clients.

The findings that are most relevant to this research are those that impact on the coaching relationship and ultimately achieving the client's objectives; three topics emerged as most prominent from the research into the impact of Executive coaching on performance:

- Hard and soft measures of evaluation coexist
- Emotional Intelligence - all stakeholders
- Holistic Wellbeing

The findings around the **Hard and soft measures** indicated that executive coaching can improve competencies and so align HR strategy with overall business strategy. Employee engagement is at the core and resultant performance is very much dependent on engagement. Hard measures include bottom line Profit and Loss, Key performance indicators (KPI's) and Share price. The softer measures centre round the behaviour changes and relationships improvements that executive coaching foster. The soft measures can be amplified and evolve organisational culture when Leaders who have received coaching

permeate coaching up and down the organisational hierarchy. The coaching process also allows for future probing so that gaps can be identified in order to deliver organisational strategy. There can also be an opportunity cost associated with not doing this but this is harder to measure.

Emotional intelligence (EQ) refers to the ability to identify and manage one's own emotions as well as the emotions of others. Goleman (2000) puts forward the five pillars as self-awareness, self-regulation, motivation, empathy and social skills. Coaching increases EQ by helping clients reduce negative emotions. Throughout all the interviews these pillars kept surfacing. In the focus group they appeared in the context of behavioural impact and relationships as well tracking these changes to measure and evaluate the coaching intervention. This was reiterated by coaches in their interviews where it merged as one of the key skills that a coach should possess in order to have impact. The HR professionals mentioned EQ in terms of leadership development.

Holistic wellbeing refers to the welling of individuals both at work and at home as well as the overall wellbeing of the Organisation.

When evaluating the coaching experience the focus group voiced staff satisfaction and employee engagement and competency as contributing factors to wellbeing. One participant expressed gratitude to the coach for *"helping me achieve the work life balance I strived for"* and that *"being better at home and at work has resulted in me achieving my best performance rating in the past four years"*. Also mentioned was the role the coach can contribute to building morale and helping people overcome fears such as presenting leading one participant to *"doing something amazing, I presented at the annual conference"*. Addressing Conflict resolution, working collaboratively and being encouraged to progress can also be deduced as contributing to both organisational and individual wellbeing.

The coaches described the essential skills they possess in terms to help with well-being. These included Mindfulness, NLP and organisational psychology. Most coaches also mentioned formative development outputs in putting the needs of client development at the fore of the coaching intervention.

The HR professionals set out that coaching facilitates personal change for the individual and helps develop and understanding of organisational change by preparing and working through proposed changes with teams and then later, with assisting and removing obstacles to change such as fear of the unknown or fear for the future. A space to vent challenging operational issues and reframing of problems so the client can claim back control of situations was also outlined. The integration of Life and Business coaching was put forward as a crucial role for the coach in addressing overall wellbeing.

Triangulation of the data; the experiences of the researcher's international career in the financial services sector formed the basis for this study and the associated issues which required further analysis. For the specific research a focus group consisting of Senior Managers working in the Irish Financial Services sector and individual one to one interviews with executive coaches were employed for gathering data.

Further interviews were then conducted with HR professionals who in their careers have been responsible for developing HR strategies as strategic business partners and who have worked with executive coaches. The aim of the latter interviews was to seek an external viewpoint outside of the co-active coaching relationship between the coach and coachee. The researcher felt that these two interviews would help with objectivity and collaborate the views from the focus group and one to one interviews.

Historical Context is important in the light of the above findings. Executive coaching as a profession is a recent development in an Irish context where a standardised approach, credibility and a code of ethics is now established. The LBCAI was founded in 2001and the profession has grown rapidly in the past 15 years both in Ireland and internationally. The researcher felt that not enough research had been done in an Irish context to affirm credibility of executive coaching in Ireland and give assurance to businesses that employing an executive coach is a worthwhile investment.

Section 5: Conclusion

5.1 Conclusions and Recommendations

This research found that there are various perceptions on how the impact of executive coaching on performance can be measured and evaluated. The key topics that emerged in the findings (centred around achieving the clients objectives) were 1) Hard and soft performance measures and evaluation co-exist 2) Emotional intelligence is a major constituent for successful leadership to deliver business results especially in times of change 3) the Co-Active coaching model delivers holistic well-being.

Awareness of key theoretical models and concepts by an executive coach leads to the development of a plan of action for the client that sets out a way forward to achieve the set objectives by taking action. The GROW model (GOAL, REALITY, OPTIONS, WILL) is widely used by coaches as a technique to formulate the plan of action. Taking action is positively related to performance measurement after receiving multi source feedback which leads to competency improvements as demonstrated in the focus group findings.

A case is made for emotional intelligence (EQ v IQ) as the active ingredient in strong leadership. The fusion of self-awareness, self-management empathy and relationship skills develops confidence in the leader that consequently yield decisions that deliver success in both an organisational and personal capacity. The coping with change scale was shown to be a reliable measure of demonstrating strong relationships with independent assessments of change and job performance ratings. Benefits from training will be hampered unless there is follow up, feedback and measurement of outcomes. Executive coaching is an important way of ensuring that knowledge acquired during training emerges as skills deployed in the workplace.

The impact executive coaching has on performance activities is also evidenced by having a direct and indirect influence on state and behavioural employee engagement. A coach can build resilience and workplace satisfaction through Mindfulness and confidence building

techniques to reframe problems leading to personal development and self-actualisation - holistic wellbeing.

It is recommended that experienced executive coaches who possess both coaching accreditation and academic qualifications along with an appropriate and diverse professional background are employed to work with organisations and individuals. It is also recommended that Coaches work on building emotional intelligence with clients to ensure strong leadership permeates right through an organisation. The coaching ripple effect found that the closer that a member of a network was identified as being connected to those who received coaching, the more likely they were to experience positive increases in wellbeing. Implementing a culture where coaching permeates up and down the hierarchy is the most important recommendation of this research.

The study sought to explore the specific factors within executive coaching that influence performance and allow measurement of value directly attributed to the coaching intervention. Both hard and soft measures indicate that executive coaching improves competencies and aligns HR strategy with the overall business strategy. This alignment is crucial. Key performance indicators (KPI's), Return of Investment (ROI) and Goal assessment scaling (GAS) provide quantitative measures. Behavioural changes and improvement in relationships that executive coaching fosters are amplified and evolve cultural change provide qualitative measures.

Conclusions and recommendations can therefore be set out under the following categories.

First executive coaches employ the Co-Active coaching model where the client sets the agenda and the coach asks the powerful questions that invite the client to look from an honest perspective at what the client is willing and ready to do to achieve the desired goals and associated performance outcomes. The insights that occur from reflecting on and answering questions contribute to successful and life changing decisions. As executive coaching is a personal experience, the impact it makes will be judged by personal experience and the value judgements of the people who work with the leaders.

Second a cultural shift to a holistic approach to organisational well-being. A coach can use a tool called "the wheel of life" to empower the clients to believe that they can dip into their wellsprings of untapped potential, bringing the client to realise how self-care, recreation and work life balance impact on their career and quality of work and home life. To invite the client to set the criteria at the intake session and then work to the client's agenda. All leaders should be accountable for organisational wellbeing.

Third to equip leaders with emotional intelligence and emotional resilience to deal effectively with critical internal and external business events and to building competencies that develop high performing teams, high employee engagement and a great place to work. Removing obstacles to change, hard and soft performance measures can be put in place and monitored to ensure targets are met.

"Transformational change in ourselves, the teams and companies we lead is ultimately all about relationships. Executive coaching provides the tools, skills, strategies and ethical frameworks, changing lives and changing the world" (Celeste Schenck, President, University of Paris).

This research synthesised the contributions of Executive coaches, Senior Financial services Managers and HR Professionals. The overwhelming consensus was that executive coaching is an investment in people and the return on that investment pays dividends in a variety of ways, inspiring them to be and give their best.

5.2 Recommendations for Future Research

The research was conducted at the Irish branch of a global financial institution which has just been through a major reorganisation. It is recommended that future research would incorporate a sample of employees from other branches within the group as a larger sample would provide more balanced findings. Also, as the organisational changes had just been

implemented, further research conducted at a later time, say in about 3 years, would be able to gauge improvements from further executive coaching interventions.

A larger sample of executive coaches would have given a broader perspective on the approaches used from their perspectives. Future research could delve deeper into the competencies required to be an executive coach. A measure to test emotional intelligence of executive coaches seeking a detailed inquiry into their clarity of purpose and passion.

It is also recommended that research is undertaken in to the increasing use of Skype and online coaching, whether the impact is different to the traditional in person coaching and whether this would work for both teams and individuals.

A future research study could also incorporate interviews with HR/People Directors and other C-Suite executives who participate in executive coaching. This would give rich sources of data from the top of an organisation regarding their experiences and expectations.

The most valuable future research would look at the impact executive coaching has on holistic wellbeing for both the organisation and the individual to help professionals everywhere pursue their lives with greater clarity, purpose and passion.

Limitations of the research

The scale of this research was limited to the financial services sector. Other organisations in different sectors could be studied and results compared against that of this organisation within the financial services sector. Furthermore, the research could be expanded to include in depth one to one interviews with the C-Suite executives who may have had very different views on the impact of executive coaching. As the researcher is in full time employment, time was also a limiting factor in completing the study.

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APPENDICES

Appendix 1 – Organisation Structure

CEO					
CFO	**CRO**	**CPO**	**COO**	**CMO**	**CSO**
Financial Control	Risk	HR	Partnerships	Sales	Planning
Business Insight	Compliance	Reward	Operations	Brand	Projects
Business Partners	Sustainability	L&D	B2B	Marketing	PMO
Financial Reporting	Continuity	Facilities	Contracts	Customer Insight	Op Change

Total Head Count across all functions in the IFSC office in Dublin – 240

Overall Operating Budget: 180million Euro per annum

Sales Target: 400 million Euro per annum

Net Assets: 13.5 BN Euro

INDEX of codes from: The MT or Management Team or C-Suite executives.

CEO - Chief Executive Officer

CFO – Chief Financial Officer

CRO – Chief Risk Officer

CPO – Chief People Officer

COO – Chief Operations Officer

CMO – Chief Marketing Officer

CSO – Chief Strategy Officer

The Focus Group Participants worked in the following Business Units & had the following number of direct reports -

- Financial Control   - 2
- Financial Reporting - 2
- Compliance - 1
- Partnerships - 2
- Marketing   - 3
- Operations - 4
- Projects - 2

Appendix 2 – Focus Group Competencies

Scores are based upon feedback gathered (by use of an online Questionnaire) from the following sources :
Where a score of 1 is minimum and 5 is maximum - each respondent has an equal weighting

Indvidual	1
Line Manager	1
More Senior Managers	3
Peers	2
Direct reports	1
Other stakeholders	2
Total	**10**

Before Coaching   Year ending 31-12-2016

Scores out of "5"   *Senior ManagerCodes*

Competencies	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Communication	4.09	4.15	4.03	4.40	3.98	4.01	3.55	3.96
Customer Focus	3.85	4.20	4.45	4.55	4.35	3.99	4.24	4.30
Delivering Results	4.03	4.45	3.97	4.20	4.01	4.25	3.68	4.00
External Focus	3.93	3.85	4.00	3.62	3.62	3.25	3.45	3.36
Improving Business Performance	3.94	4.05	3.25	3.55	3.96	3.99	3.39	4.15
Leadership	4.07	3.99	3.65	3.96	3.25	4.05	4.35	4.33
Solving Problems and Decision making	4.11	4.24	4.01	3.45	3.55	3.68	4.17	4.06
Team Working	4.22	4.35	3.87	3.88	3.68	4.16	3.48	4.24
Average score by employee - Team Score	**4.03**	**4.16**	**3.90**	**3.95**	**3.80**	**3.92**	**3.79**	**4.05**

After Coaching and some training   Year ending 31-12-2017

Scores out of "5"   *Senior ManagerCodes*

Competencies	A	B	C	D	E	F	G	H
Communication	4.21	4.21	4.13	4.34	4.11	4.11	3.86	4.14
Customer Focus	3.95	4.23	4.50	4.65	4.45	3.88	4.25	4.35
Delivering Results	4.03	4.48	4.18	4.25	4.25	4.35	3.99	4.25
External Focus	4.03	3.85	4.05	3.83	3.99	3.75	3.92	3.91
Improving Business Performance	4.06	4.15	3.75	3.69	3.75	4.02	4.11	4.25
Leadership	4.45	4.35	4.05	4.33	4.01	4.36	4.45	4.37

Solving Problems and Decision making	4.04	4.25	4.11	3.99	3.67	3.89	4.01	4.19
Team Working	4.35	4.45	3.99	3.88	3.88	4.17	3.94	4.25
Average score by employee- Team Score	**4.14**	**4.25**	**4.10**	**4.12**	**4.01**	**4.07**	**4.07**	**4.21**
% increase/(Decrease) since 2016 year end	#####	2.07%	4.90%	4.27%	5.63%	3.66%	7.32%	4.04%

Appendix 3: Focus Group Outputs: Verbatim

Question 1A: How has external executive coaching impacted your performance?

- Just been promoted to a "Head of Function" , the coach has worked with me on how I can tackle the various challenges associated with this role – Staff challenges as I now have a team of 8 (HR, L&D and Reward) ; Competing demands of various Executive Directors.
- Due to the change in strategy and the increased focus on Risk & Compliance half my team are new. The coach has worked with me on how to induct the new team members and integrate them into the business – build morale and work as a team to delivery to a very demanding timetable – also how to juggle input to projects and BAU.
- As Senior Managers most of us have been in post less than 18 months – the work with the coach has made me realise we need to work as a team also in order to help each other work collaboratively to deliver across the business – make time for meetings and informal lunches etc.
- The Organisational restructure has meant a completely new role – Digitalisation focused – a change of pace, working environment and expectations – initially found this quite drastic and overwhelming – the work with the coach set out a step by step path to help deal with the changes and I felt more confident going forward in the role
- Had some performance issues and personality clashes to deal with within my team which seems to be taking up most of my time – The coach and I came up with a conflict resolution strategy and how to have difficult conversations both individually at team level – this helped free up my time to concentrate on delivering key objectives which has improved my own personal performance and also the team performance.
- Coaching helped me achieve the work life balance that I strived for over the past few years especially since our second child arrived. This has helped me be better at home and at work with my performance rating this year improving and over all feedback the best in four years.
- I discovered the 80:20 rile through coaching as way to prioritise and focus on key deliverables which has improved my performance.
- Through coaching I was better equipped to deal with demanding and at times awkward stakeholders – my business relationships have improved and stand my ground more – Before I always said "Yes" which at times got me into problems with senior stakeholders.
- I have worked on my Emotional Intelligence and am happier at work
- The coach and I concentrated on my three lowest competencies – where I needed development – I now have exceeded on one and have met expectations on the other two – A measurable result!!
- Worked on the competencies that would have the most impact – I want to get to promoted to the next level so this lead me to work on key strategic projects as well as manage the day job – my profile and visibility has improved.
- It has had no impact at all – I have been a senior manager for 10 years now and feel this is as far as I am going to go – It's nice to chat with someone outside of work though who can be objective but sometimes I ask are they really objective – after all the company is paying them so they will be keen to show value for money

Question 1B Linking Question 1A – What were the key performance issues explored with the coach?

- Clarity around objectives
- Being fair when assessing performance – The bell curve issue
- Application of the criteria for assessment – eliminate bias
- Reward – being more creative
- Career progression expectations (Mine and others)
- Fit with strategy and CSR
- Values & Behaviours
- Culture and Change – need for change the price of change
- Impact of technology on the future
- Having difficult conversations
- Being too friendly with team members – open to favouritism and bias
- Problem solving and decision making competencies

Question 2A: How has external executive coaching impacted on your behaviour?

- Am more assertive
- Have more empathy – I listen better now –active listening the coach calls it
- Coach challenged me on my behaviour when I articulated how I responded in certain situations- time and space to reflect and then change going forward
- More organised and Planning better as noticed by the team and my boss
- Working more collaboratively and have got involved in a project
- Communication is much better – 1:1 with my team members , monthly team meetings I send out summaries of meetings and what's coming down the tracks - have even organised a team Away day to plan for the next year
- I have used coaching in my leadership style to be more adaptive given the situation
- A better listener and following up with actions
- Able to deliver constructive criticism without offending people – did role play with the coach
- Seen a leading by Exec Management now
- Took feedback I received to my coaching sessions – have addressed the issues raised which has lead me to being better equipped to motivate and lead others

Question 2B - Linking to Question 2A – what impact has the coaching had on relationships between you and your team and any other stakeholders?

- None really same as before
- Team have a more co-ordinated approach to our role within the business (I explain things better)
- Better understanding of operation and strategic role of the team
- Have stopped micromanaging and have allowed the team to grow and learn from mistakes
- Have encouraged team members to take part in projects and cross function committees like Product Migration and Pricing respectively – development of the team by expanding the role
- Can negotiate with outsourced partners more effectively
- More confident and relaxed at presenting – worked specifically with the coach on this
- Not "scared" of attending board meetings anymore
- Have worked on charisma and having impact at Board

- Can challenge more effectively without being coming across as being angry
- Have become a mentor a role which I really enjoy to see how it impacts the people I mentor
- Have focused on process improvement which has made life easier for internal customers
- My team are doing more soft skills training – especially around the customer
- I would consider my team high performing now – as referred some of them for coaching v training
- Better at promoting myself and the team
- Give regular feedback to the team at key pinch points

Question 3A - How do you measure and evaluate the impact of the coaching experience?

- Feedback from team and colleagues
- My end of year performance score
- How I am feeling about work /life
- Evidence – change in my behaviour
- Clarity – around the issues I had raised with the coach
- Done something amazing – presenting at the Company's annual conference
- More all-round confident person
- Personal development
- More self-assured – see this like going to the dentist – 6 month check up
- Like having a personal trainer at the gym – fitness improves over time get things done more accurately and on time
- Happiness of the team
- The Staff satisfaction index
- Built confidence so when re negotiating contracts pushed for savings – increased revenue reduced costs impact on my P&L
- Hard to put a monetary value on it
- Employee engagement score for senior management team increased 67 to 73% in a year
- I can see things from the other point of view
- Other colleagues testimonials – what they have said about the coaching experience
- The CEO rated it , is an advocate and has coaching himself regularly
- Improvement in competency scores

Question 3B - Linking to Question 3A – what competencies have changed as a result of the coaching intervention?

- Teamwork
- Leadership
- Improving Business Performance
- Delivering results
- Problem Solving
- Customer Focus

(See all the spreadsheet)

360 Feedback scores before Coaching and Training v After Coaching and Training.

Question 4A – What could the executive coach have done different?

- Made sure how objective the coach actually was – wasn't sure the coach was driving the People & Strategy director's/Organisational agenda – rather than mine – was confusing at times.
- At times I felt she was judgemental and I had to justify myself
- She seemed to know a lot about me – was she being briefed elsewhere?
- She allowed me to wander / ramble – she should have cut to the core of the issue sooner
- Should have concentrated on one or two main issues rather than jumping around
- Didn't challenge me enough she was too nice
- I didn't know who I was accountable to – the coach , myself or the business , my boss ?
- She didn't understand the technical points of my role within the Financial Services sector
- Was over enthusiastic about what we had achieved
- Could have scheduled the sessions better – too infrequent to follow up on actions
- Been more flexible regarding timescales to catch up
- Not try and "sell" me more coaching

Question 4B - Linking to Question 4A – what advantages (and disadvantages) of having an executive coach?

Advantages

- Like having a personal facilitator to reflect on issues, where you want to get to etc.
- Targeted one to one self-development – "unique for you"
- Bounce ideas off and explore options in a safe environment
- Helps with managing a change no matter how big or small
- Someone who listens "I can let rip" feel better and then I reflect
- Empowerment – feel I am getting somewhere
- Looked at all aspects of my life – like holding a mirror up to me
- A company perk – they're paying – helped me mentally sort some stuff out
- Works best after 360 feedback helped me develop my personal development plan (PDP)
- Tested my goals and my will to achieve them

Disadvantages

- I wouldn't pay for it myself – it's expensive and not sure what ultimate impact it has on the bottom line apart from an expense
- Not sure of the science behind the process
- There is no disadvantage
- Was told I had to do it – I did it to tick the box – think of it as a tick box exercise

Appendix 4: Executive Coaches Questionnaire

The relationship between external executive coaching and individual performance

For the purpose of an MBA dissertation written by Jerry O'Connell at the National College of Ireland, May-August, 2019. All information provided is for research purposes for this dissertation. And is treated as strictly confidential. This information will not be divulged outside of the dissertation.

COACH REFERENCE: (please give a code like your Initials)

Part A: General Questionnaire

a) Age of Executive Coach   25-35   35-45   45-55   55-65   65+

b) How long have you been coaching? < 5 years   > 5 years   > 10 years   >15 years

c) What other educational qualifications do you have? (Other than coaching)

   Leaving Cert   Certificate   Diploma   Degree   Masters   Other

   Please explain -

d) Gender   Male   Female

e) Have you found being male/female has influenced your engagement as an external executive coach?
   Please explain-

f) What (if any) areas of external executive coaching do you specialise in?

g) What skills and training do you as an external executive coach feel is required in today's coaching environment?

Part B: Measurement and Impact of external executive coaching

1. What is your experience in the evaluation/measurement of the impact of external executive coaching with organisations?

2. What (if any) assessment tools or pre post testing regarding skills, knowledge & attitude do you use to evaluate your external executive coaching intervention?

3. How would you design an evaluation methodology for an organisation's individuals who have had external executive coaching?

4. How would you describe the evaluation outputs? (Summative/formative)

5. What is the key component in ensuring that an evaluation is accurate?

6. What stakeholders are included in the evaluation of the external executive coaching process

7. In terms of overall Organisational learning where does external executive coaching fit?

8. How do you see external executive coaching impacting on leadership?

Appendix 5- Summary of responses from 1:1 interviews

- ## Executive Coaches

The relationship between external executive coaching and individual performance –

Part A: General Questionnaire (Abstract)

h) What other educational qualifications do you have? (Other than coaching)

Leaving Cert   Certificate   Diploma   Degree   Masters   Other

Please explain -

1. B. Commerce , MSC Finance , MBA & Diploma in IT Project Management with PRINCE 2
2. BA , MA in English
3. BA Marketing , Masters in Workplace Coaching
4. BSC Social Science, MSC Social Science, Diploma in HRM

i) Have you found being male/female has influenced your engagement as an external executive coach? Please Explain

1. Gender is irrelevant I work with people who are referred mainly by word of mouth
2. No
3. Clients have never asked or preferred a male or female executive coach
4. Not particularly

j) What (if any) areas of external executive coaching do you specialise in?

1. Business Problem solving and Career Coaching
2. Lifestyle and Courage Coaching
3. Career Change, Peak Performance but clients rarely have one area they want to focus on
4. Neuro Linguistic Programming

k) What skills and training do you feel an external executive coach is required to have in today's coaching environment?

1. Listening, Communication, Creativity and Engagement, Empathy, Emotional Intelligence
2. Mindfulness & NLP
3. Accreditation in Executive coaching, Emotional Intelligence, NLP Master & Organisational Psychology
4. EQI – Emotional Intelligence

Part B: Measurement and Impact of external executive coaching

9. **What is your experience in the evaluation/measurement of the impact of external executive coaching with organisations?**

   1. Mostly not evaluated formally – maybe anecdotal feedback but rarely an evaluation
   2. Rarely seen it done correctly but when it is done correctly it is insightful
   3. Time is saved by avoiding conflict ; people working in harmony saving time and money
   4. Impacts Career, personal goals – accountability to the coach – good for progress measurement

10. **What (if any) assessment tools or pre post testing regarding skills, knowledge & attitude do you use to evaluate your external executive coaching intervention?**

   1. Myers Briigs, 360 Feedback DISC and Psychometric Testing
   2. Myers Briggs DISC and 360 Feedback
   3. Temperament Profile Testing, 360 feedback and a Triangle contract
   4. Psychometric testing, EQ 360 coaching and assessment, EI & DISC profiling

11. **How would you design an evaluation methodology for an organisation's individuals who have had external executive coaching?**

   1. Establish what the goals were and develop metrics around this – also Kirkpatrick's model
   2. Not sure not interested in this area
   3. Goal orientated setting objectives and outcome measurements in writing
   4. Assess the impact on reactions, Behavioural change, Business Outcomes such as Return on Investment but also at Individual, Organisational and Programme Processes levels.

12. **How would you describe the evaluation outputs? Summative being the outcome of a program or Formative being participant development @ a particular point in time**

   1. Mostly Formative – individual development focused although this can lead Summative
   2. Both
   3. Both Summative would look at outcome measures Formative objectives and expectations
   4. To meet the clients desired outcomes i.e. expected changes and impacts are realised Q But who is the client? The individual being coached therefore it is Formative first and foremost

13. **What is the key component in ensuring that an evaluation is accurate?**

1. Gathering of unbiased feedback data, honesty within the Coactive Coaching relationship
2. Clear aims from the start – Half way assessments + Quantitative and Qualitative measures
3. Observation of client behaviour and results in relation to their communications and work Outcomes
4. Accountability, Assess Skills development, Behavioural changes over time and deciding where to allocate new resources, Documentation and demonstration (evidence based).

14. What stakeholders are included in the evaluation of the external executive coaching process?

1. HR Departments, Line Managers, participants, CEO/Board
2. Depends on the contractual agreement
3. Depends on the Organisation
4. Line Managers, HR , Head of the Organisation and The Coaches themselves

15. In terms of overall Organisational learning where does external executive coaching fit?

1. Learning & Development, Wellbeing and Change Management (Both Projects and Operational Change)
2. Learning & Development within the HR function
3. Comms, Leadership, Strategy and L&D
4. Learning to align HR strategy Knowledge Management and with overall Business Strategy so ALIGNMENT for sure

16. How do you see external executive coaching impacting on leadership?

1. E.I., Mindfulness, Thinking for Leaders , Problem solving and Resilience (to tackle the unexpected when it happens)
2. Achievement of Results and metrics, General Wellbeing and leadership enhancement
3. In fostering and developing teams, enhancing awareness and implementing strategies
4. Look Inwards to gain perspective and awareness + self-development and E.I.

Appendix 6: Interviews with two HR Professionals

1. **What would you consider an appropriate measure for an executive coaching intervention?**

- When the Client say HR in an organisation sets objectives for an Executive coaching program and the program delivers on the clients objectives
- Seeing people who have undertaken coaching progress up the ranks – Home grown talent -> increased retention and engagement numbers (savings on recruitment fees)
- Hard and Soft measures co-exist that ultimately impact the bottom line realisable
- Sales targets influenced by the customer experience due to targeted coaching
- Intangibles – not just peer related but multifaceted – Behavioural competencies
- Leader for Leaders coaching all the way through the structural hierarchy

1. **How does executive coaching develop leadership?**

- Gets rid of self-doubt and improves self-confidence and self –awareness
- Can be lonely at the top so this provides a safe environment – a sounding board to bounce ideas and discuss options as to the way forward
- Helps move the client from management to leadership (away from task focused and more to the greater vision).
- Help demonstrate the key values by then coaching other leaders with passion and enthusiasm, empowering others with confident decision making
- Invest and Inspire

2. **How does coaching contribute to Change Readiness?**

- Facilitates and helps people understand the change and the challenges and effectively prepare teams to work through the changes
- Help teams and individuals overcome the obstacles and barriers to change
- Enables challenging the status quo
- Probe into the future – To challenge where are the gaps? Short, medium, long-term planning how to fill the gaps and ensure on time delivery of strategy
- Explore what new skills will be needed in the work place and if there is sufficient capability in the current Org. structure to deliver
- Bring out Knowledge – "Recency of knowledge" – knowledge of the wider sector perhaps?

3. **How does executive coaching help individual and organisational well-being?**

- Can help develop and change culture – in the financial services world there is a lot of big egos, male dominated – can be difficult to "break through the glass ceiling".
- Can help leaders work effectively together so that top leaders are happy and feel valued, more confident and fulfilled
- Can provide a space to vent – then people feel better – make better decisions
- Work with people to improve relationships to make the organisation more effective

- There can be too much talking and too much self-reflection though
- By bringing challenging day to day issues that the exec finds unable to deal with on their own
- Life coaching integrating with Business coaching
- Develop Learning & development plans especially in relation to Behaviours
- Releases pressure of the day to day operations
- Reframing of problems in the mind of the executive in a confidential environment
- Can eliminate the "emotions" and allow the executive to be more objective – separate the issues and give a licence to be confident in dealing with things
- Can motivate the executive to be and give their best

Appendix 7: The research participants

The Focus Group's organisation -

Total number of employees; 240

Business Units – 24

Average number of people per team: 10

Average age of sample participants: 40

Average length of service: 3.5 years

Gender ratio of participants: 50:50

Nationalities: 4 Languages spoken 3

Current staff turnover rate: 8.5% (considered slightly above average)

The researcher wanted to present a sample that reflected a cross section of the wider business population and who had at least two years of service with the Organisation. This ensured that these Senior Managers were adequately familiar with performance issues across the business and would have formed an adequate picture of opinion as to where they fitted in both now and in the future.

Profile of the Executive coaches- After the focus group interview concluded, individual interviews with Executive Coaches took place over the following week. Each Coach is a member of the Life & Business Coaching Association of Ireland (LBCAI) and is QQI accredited. All are self-employed and also deliver training to various organisations across Ireland.

Average age of sample participants: 51

Average length time coaching: 14 years

Gender ratio of participants: 3 female; 1 male

The HR professionals Skype interviews were conducted with the HR professionals based in London and New York. Both are female, average age 42 & have been working in HR on average for 20 years.

Appendix 8: The Library Form

Submission of Thesis to Norma Smurfit Library, National College of Ireland

Student name: Jerry O'Connell   Student number: 16101553

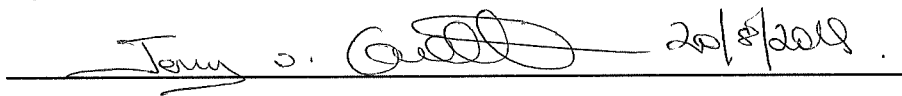School: Business School National College of Ireland: Course: MBA

Degree to be awarded: Master of Business Administration (MBA)

Title of Thesis: Measuring the Relationship between External Executive Coaching and Employee Performance

One hard bound copy of your thesis will be lodged in the Norma Smurfit Library and will be available for consultation. The electronic copy will be accessible in TRAP (http://trap.ncirl.ie/), the National College of Ireland's Institutional Repository. In accordance with normal academic library practice all theses lodged in the National College of Ireland Institutional Repository (TRAP) are made available on open access.

I agree to a hard bound copy of my thesis being available for consultation in the library. I also agree to an electronic copy of my thesis being made publicly available on the National College of Ireland's Institutional Repository TRAP.

Signature of Candidate

_____

For completion by the School:

The aforementioned thesis was received by_____ Date:

_____

This signed form must be appended to all hard bound and electronic copies of your thesis submitted to your school