

*Coaching during Challenging Times: An Exploratory study into the impact of the COVID-19
Pandemic on Coaching in Ireland*

**Nicola Kingston
19228872**

**Master of Arts in Human Resource Management
National College of Ireland**

Supervisor: Dr Conor Nolan

Submission Date: 15/08/2022

Submitted to the National College of Ireland, August, 2022

Abstract

Coaching is a relatively new practice that came to the forefront in the 1990s (Lee et al., 2005). The International Coaching Federation (ICF) started in 1995, and it now has over 35,000 members in 143 countries globally, including the Ireland Chapter of the International Coaching Federation (ICF Ireland, 2022). ICF Ireland's mission is to lead the Irish advancement of the coaching profession. They believe that coaching is essential to a healthy society in Ireland and that every ICF Ireland member represents the highest level of professional coaching.

Concerning the health of Ireland's society, it fundamentally wavered in March 2020. In response to the World Health Organisation declaring the COVID-19 outbreak a pandemic, the Republic of Ireland experienced one of the harshest lockdowns in the world. Governments worldwide imposed precautionary measures to protect individual and collective health, and many employers converted to remote working arrangements (Jarosz, 2021).

In addition, professionals were forced to abruptly embrace virtual techniques with little or no training due to COVID-19 (Bell, 2021). Research in the area of psychotherapy and counselling has demonstrated the potential implications of telehealth and, in particular, teleconsultation. The research examines the effects on the client–clinician relationship, overall service effectiveness and client issues best suited for telehealth services (Bell, 2021). The same level of research is not yet readily available concerning the coaching profession. However, previous research appears to examine the viability of virtual “eCoaching” versus in-person coaching. The research argues that in-person engagement may be required to establish a trusting relationship between the client and the coach, allowing the client to be vulnerable and discuss ways to improve their knowledge or performance. A lack of face-to-face interaction may also reduce accountability (Cilliers et al., 2022). Therefore, any existing research relating to the impact of the pandemic on a profession thus far seems to extend to helping professions such as psychotherapy and counselling. The effects on the coaching profession are restricted.

To address this, this study will aim to understand the impacts the COVID-19 pandemic had on coaching from the perspective of the coaching practitioners. Previous studies focus on coachees and how they perceive the coaching process; the coach practitioners are rarely the focus of the studies (Honsova, 2021). This research will rectify this omission by focussing entirely on the coach's experiences during the coaching process. The study will explore coaching during a particularly challenging time. In this context-specific study, the challenging time will be that of the global pandemic. Hence, this study will examine the experiences of coaches who coached during the COVID-19 pandemic.

As the coaching profession promotes itself as a key driver in maintaining a healthy society in Ireland, this study will bring valuable insight by examining whether the effectiveness levels experienced pre-pandemic were maintained during the pandemic. The author intends to investigate coaching effectiveness during the COVID-19 pandemic by interpreting the perceptions of coaching practitioners using inductive qualitative methods. Thematic analysis will be used to examine semi-structured interviews.

The results will show that coaching during the pandemic, although it had many difficulties, was a successful journey. The coaches have recounted their experiences and advised that coaching is doable virtually, effective, and practical. The pandemic impacted the coaching profession by forcing it to move online and magnifying its benefits to organisations within Ireland that have since begun to engage coaches to support their employees during the difficult period.

To conclude, this study will provide relevant recommendations for future learning and training for coach practitioners to equip them with the knowledge and skills required to navigate coaching clients successfully during challenging times.

Declaration

Submission of Thesis and Dissertation

National College of Ireland Research Students Declaration Form (Thesis/Author Declaration Form)

Name: Nicola Kingston

Student Number: 19228872

Degree for which thesis is submitted: Masters of Arts in Human Resource Management

Material submitted for award

- (a) I declare that the work has been composed by myself.
- (b) I declare that all verbatim extracts contained in the thesis have been distinguished by quotation marks and the sources of information specifically acknowledged.
- (c) My thesis will be included in electronic format in the College Institutional Repository NORMA (thesis reports and projects).
- (d) I declare that no material contained in the thesis has been used in any other submission for an academic award.

Signature of research student:



Date: 15/08/2022

Submission Form

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

Student name: Nicola Kingston

Student number: 19228872

School: National College of Ireland

Course: MA in HRM

Degree to be awarded: Masters in Arts in Human Resource Management

Title of Thesis: *Coaching during Challenging Times: An Exploratory study into the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Coaching in Ireland*

An electronic copy of your thesis will be lodged in the Norma Smurfit Library and will be available for consultation. This electronic copy will be accessible in NORMA norma.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 (NORMA) are made available on open access.

I agree to an electronic copy of my thesis being available for consultation within 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 NORMA.

Signature of Candidate:



For completion by the School:

The aforementioned thesis was received by: _____

Date: _____

Acknowledgements

Firstly, I would like to express my gratitude to my supervisor, Dr Conor Nolan, for his invaluable guidance and direction throughout this research project. His knowledge and ongoing assistance made the process feel manageable and attainable.

To my Fiancé, Steven, thank you for your continued support and encouragement. I encountered several occasions where I felt overwhelmed with the scale of the project, and you reassured me to keep going. Thank you for everything.

List of Abbreviations

ICF International Coaching Federation

ROI Return on Investment

CBC Cognitive Behavioural Coaching

EMCC European Mentoring and Coaching Council

CEO Chief Executive Officer

Table of Contents

Abstract.....	I
Declaration.....	II
Submission Form	III
Acknowledgements.....	IV
List of Abbreviations	V
List of Tables	IX
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1 Background.....	1
1.2 Research aims	2
1.3 Research Objectives.....	2
1.4 Research Structure	2
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	3
2.1 Introduction.....	3
2.2 Specialisations of Coaching.....	4
2.2.1 Leadership and Executive Coaching.....	4
2.2.2 Career Coaching.....	5
2.2.3 Team Coaching	5
2.3 Benefits of Coaching.....	5
2.3.1 Improved Employee Performance	6
2.3.2 More Productive Teams	6
2.3.3 Increased Engagement and Wellbeing.....	6
2.3.4 Successful Organisational transitions	7
2.4 Coaching Models	7
2.5 Core Coaching Competencies.....	8
2.5.1 Co-Creating the Relationship.....	8
2.5.2 Cultivating Learning and Growth	9
2.6 Coaching in Practice	9
2.6.1 Delivering Coaching during the Pandemic	9
2.6.2 The impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic.....	10
2.7 Conclusion	11
Chapter 3: Research Question.....	12
3.1 Research Questions.....	12
3.2 Qualitative Research	13
Chapter 4: Methodology	14
4.1 Introduction.....	14
4.2 Research Philosophy.....	14
4.3 Research Methodology	15
4.4 Sampling	15

4.5 Semi-Structured Video Interviews.....	16
4.6 Data Collection & Analysis	16
4.6.1 Data Collection	16
4.6.2 Data Analysis.....	17
4.7 Limitations	17
4.8 Ethical Considerations	18
4.9 Conclusion	18
Chapter 5: Findings.....	19
5.1 Introduction.....	19
5.2 Profile of research participants	19
5.3 Part 1 – Coaching Pre Pandemic.....	20
5.3.1 Theme 1 – Location	20
5.3.2 Theme 2 – Fostering the Coaching Relationship	20
5.3.3 Theme 3 – Coaching Models	21
5.3.4 Theme 4 – Effectiveness and Practicalities.....	22
5.4 Conclusion	23
5.5 Part 2 – Coaching during the pandemic	23
5.5.1 Theme 1 – Drop off in Clients	23
5.5.2 Theme 2 – Coaches' Wellbeing.....	24
5.5.3 Theme 3 – Coaching Delivery	24
5.5.4 Theme 4 – Clients' Wellbeing & Goals	25
5.5.5 Theme 5 - Effectiveness and Practicalities	26
5.6 Conclusion	27
5.7 Part 3 - The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Coaching.....	27
5.7.1 Theme 1 – Impact on the Coaching Profession	27
5.7.2 Theme 2 – Impact on Coaches.....	28
5.7.3 Theme 3 – Key Learnings.....	28
5.8 Conclusion	29
Chapter 6: Discussion	30
6.1 How practical and effective was coaching pre pandemic	30
6.2 How practical and effective was coaching during the pandemic	31
6.3 How did the COVID-19 pandemic impact coaching	34
6.4 Implications.....	35
6.5 Limitations	36
6.5 Conclusion	36
Chapter 7: Conclusion & Recommendations.....	37
7.1 Introduction.....	37
7.2 Literature Review Conclusions.....	37
7.3 Primary Research Conclusions	38

7.4 Limitations	38
7.5 Recommendations for practice.....	39
7.6 Recommendations for Future Research	39
7.7 Conclusion	39
CIPD Personal Learning Statement	41
Bibliography	43
Appendices.....	49
Appendix 1. Research Information Sheet	49
Appendix 2. Interview Consent Form.....	51
Appendix 3. Interview Questions.....	52

List of Tables

Table 1: Coaches Areas of Specialisation.....	19
---	----

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Background

Coaching is the world's fastest-growing profession today. Coaching is a distinct process that assists people in achieving their goals and creating a better life for themselves. Though it appeared in various forms until the early 1990s, it did not flourish until much later (Mukherjee, 2014). Coaching made its mark on history and, more recently, the business world when it ignited in the 1990s (Kinder et al., 2008). The roots of coaching can be traced back to three distinct streams: helping professions like psychotherapy and counselling, business consulting and organisational development, and personal development training (Kinder et al., 2008). The word “coaching” has a wide range of meanings and applications. Life coaches, performance coaches, spiritual coaches, peer coaches, health and wellness coaches, leadership coaches, executive and organisational coaches, and so on are just a few examples (Ciporen, 2015). For conceptual clarity, this study will concentrate on corporate coaching, mainly due to corporate coaching being acknowledged as one of the more mature sectors within the larger field of coaching practice (Ciporen, 2015). Coaches that consider themselves generalists in the corporate coaching field exist. In contrast, others specialise in areas such as executive coaching, behavioural coaching, career coaching, strategy coaching, and leadership development coaching, to mention a few (Boysen et al., 2018).

The COVID-19 pandemic put pressure on workplaces. Organisations restructured their processes to allow for remote work. Employees faced challenges associated with working from home, such as preparing their workstations, adapting to new technology tools, and finding themselves in virtual reality. Uncertainty concerning job security, increased stress, a lack of work tools, technical problems, difficulties building relationships with colleagues, and a disrupted work-life balance negatively influenced employees' performance (Bienkowska et al., 2022). Employees were experiencing high levels of stress and anxiety coupled with a heightened fear of redundancies. Employee disengagement due to the pandemic became a topic for research and study; as such, a situation has never been encountered before. The research found that employees cannot concentrate on their jobs, resulting in lower employee engagement. Employees found it increasingly difficult to remain fully engaged and passionate about their jobs (Snehashis et al., 2021).

The research tells us that during a pandemic, the HR department gains importance in the organisation. Its primary task is to mitigate the adverse effects of a global pandemic among employees. The HR department focuses on soft HRM practices, such as training employees to learn new skills needed to work in new environments. Furthermore, they make an effort to provide activities such as coaching, which positively affect employee well-being even in crises (Bienkowska et al., 2022). The research proves that coaching was adopted as a mitigating tool during the pandemic. However, little is known

about coaching practice in workplaces where societal pressures cause stress among employees. This study is therefore critical in terms of its potential to appreciate practitioners' perspectives on workplace coaching in challenging times and inform the development of context-specific training and support for coaches, with subsequent benefits for coachees.

1.2 Research aims

There is an extensive literature gap regarding coaches' experiences coaching during unprecedented and challenging times. It is crucial to gather data to understand if the profession experienced any impact due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These are times when the clients' pressures, stress and anxiety are at an all-time high. Not only are the coaches coaching during an abnormally challenging time for clients but also a challenging time for themselves. Therefore, the central aim of this research is to explore the effectiveness of coaching during times of crisis and uncertainty. This study will discuss the insights and experiences of coaching during the pandemic compared to coaching pre-pandemic from the coaches perspective.

1.3 Research Objectives

The research aims to explore coaching practitioners' experience of coaching during a challenging time; in this study, the challenging time is the COVID-19 pandemic. By examining the coaches' experiences and identifying any notable impact, the researcher aims to provide insights not readily available in the current coaching literature. This study can be utilised in the future for professional development purposes to understand what coaching during a crisis can entail.

In an attempt to provide insight, the following research objectives were chosen:

- i. Through primary data, the researcher aims to gain an insight into the impact of COVID-19 on coaching in Ireland.
- ii. Evaluate the perceptions of coaching practitioners concerning their experiences of coaching during the pandemic compared to coaching pre-pandemic.

1.4 Research Structure

The study will examine and interpret current coaching literature with a particular focus on the effectiveness of coaching. The following section will clarify the research's aims and objectives. Following that, the research approach will illustrate qualitative techniques and how they apply to this research. The study's key findings will be presented, followed by a discussion section detailing any discoveries. The conclusion will discuss the study's limitations and potential future research recommendations. Finally, the study will close out with a personal learning statement and an appendix.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Hamlin et al. (2008) reported the emergence of the coaching industry in various countries, which appears to be rapidly expanding and developing with ample new coach practitioners entering the coaching world. However, the increase in interest has not been matched by a rise in research, prompting many to express concern about the lack of empirical validation of coaching practices (Berry et al., 2011). The practitioner and academic literature do not speak to coaching during challenging times. Therefore, there is ample room for research that focuses on coaches' experiences coaching during challenging times. In the context of this study, the challenging time will be that of the COVID-19 pandemic. This chapter will review current research and findings concerning the coaching profession, particularly coaching in practice. When reviewing the literature, we must keep our research question in mind.

“Coaching during Challenging times: An Exploratory Study into the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Coaching in Ireland.”

As the question suggests, the research will aim to explore the COVID-19 pandemic and the potential impact on coaching. There is a need to address the relevant findings available in recent case studies. Many results show that coaching provides a return on investment (ROI), and clients can reap the many benefits (Bachkirova et al., 2015). This study will address the effectiveness levels of the coaching during the pandemic.

The literature review will be thematically organised to summarise the research to highlight the most critical aspects of the coaching process. These themes will be as follows:

- 1) **Specialisations of Coaching** - will focus primarily on the wide range of specialisations and niche areas in which coach practitioners offer services.
- 2) **Benefits of Coaching** – will focus primarily on the perceived benefits expected to be experienced by clients who engage in coaching.
- 3) **Coaching Models** – this will focus primarily on the typical coaching models employed by the coach in the coaching sessions.
- 4) **Core Coaching Competencies** – this will focus primarily on the attributes and competencies a coach must possess to be a successful coach.
- 5) **Coaching in Practice** – this will focus primarily on the coaching process. Several areas relating to the practicalities of coaching will be explored, such as the coaching delivery and the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic.

2.2 Specialisations of Coaching

Passmore et al. (2018) stated, "one might suggest that a search for a coaching definition is an academic pursuit". There has been a broad agreement over the years on what coaching is; however, different perspectives and definitions have been adopted by academics. As defined by two coaching pioneers, Laura Whitworth and Thomas Leonard, coaching is a "relationship of possibilities... based on trust and confidentiality" (Passmore et al. 2018).

The earliest forms of formal coaching psychology are documented in business literature (Boysen et al., 2018). Formal coaching became popular in the US in the 1990s, and since then, many specialisations and subsets have developed (McInerney et al., 2021). Coach practitioners have differing work experiences and backgrounds, leading them to a niche area of specialisation in their coaching offerings. For this study, we will explore corporate coaching. Ciporen (2016) commented that corporate coaching is acknowledged as one of the more mature subsets of the broader field of coaching practice.

2.2.1 Leadership and Executive Coaching

Organisations commonly utilise leadership coaching as continual learning and development tool for performance improvement (Mukherjee, 2014). Working with a client to help them realise their full potential as a leader and to propel others toward the achievement of defined organisational goals is essentially what leadership coaching entails (Mukherjee, 2014). Clients in people management positions or those about to take a leadership role may benefit from leadership coaching to hone their skills. To achieve goals, the coach may work with the client to improve their ability to form relationships and collaborate more effectively with their team. Strong leadership is essential to organisational success in all businesses (Kiel, 2015). The literature argues that coaching appears to be the tool organisations are using to chart their way forward, pioneering a new way of working, as people around the world look to their leaders for more accountability, integrity, and authenticity (Wilkins, 2014).

Leadership coaching is a subset of executive coaching. Executive coaching can be defined as a professional relationship between a client with managerial responsibility in an organisation and a coach who uses various techniques to assist the client in achieving mutually defined goals to improve professional performance and personal satisfaction, and thus the effectiveness of the client's organisation (McInerney et al., 2021). Executive coaching has evolved from a standardised process to a profession with measurable outcomes and a credentialing process (Boysen-Rotelli, 2020). Exploring the evolution of the coaching psychology intervention as a profession reveals that executive coaching has a connection to the business world and truly began to define itself in the 1990s. Its roots clearly define its strong ties to the field of organisational development as a positive-focused development tool, as evidenced by numerous coaching outcome studies (Boysen-Rotelli, 2020). Executive coaching is more exclusive than leadership coaching because it is primarily used by senior management and C-level

executives. The executive coach creates a safe, structured, and trustworthy environment where the client can freely discuss and share. Studies have been conducted, such as that of Mukherjees (2014) study which examine executive coaching outcomes at an organisational level. However, none of these studies speaks to the effects experienced when the coaching is conducted during times of external societal constraints, such as the COVID-19 pandemic. It would be hoped that the present study will shed light on the outcomes at an individual level, specifically the effects during challenging times.

2.2.2 Career Coaching

Career Coaching focuses on the client's current circumstances to generate action plans and objectives for career advancement (Ebner et al., 2018). It includes activities contributing to self-awareness and exploring job market demands and opportunities. Personal attribute knowledge facilitates career choice by promoting the perception of fit between individual characteristics and job market demands.

The term “the great resignation” was first coined by Klotz in 2021 when approximately 4.3 million American workers left their employers (Sheedy, 2022). Since then, extensive literature has emerged relating to the mass exodus of employees who left employment during the pandemic in America. The pandemic was difficult for many, allowing them to pause and reconsider their careers. This example of a unique event such as the great resignation has created a gap in the coaching literature in Ireland. We know little about career coaching during the pandemic and if a similar event occurred in Ireland. This study will explore coaches' perspectives and experiences of coaching during this time, including the coaching themes or goals that clients presented.

2.2.3 Team Coaching

Today's organisations frequently rely on teams rather than individuals to solve their most complex problems. Organisations invest time and money in team development interventions such as team coaching to improve team processes and performance (Traylor et al. 2020). The coach can assist with not only team reflection but also the activity of strategising and planning new ways to achieve success (Farmer, 2015). Team coaching in a business context is typically conducted face-to-face. The HR department engages coaches to complete the coaching intervention in person. There is a research gap in the literature concerning the delivery mode of team and group coaching. Berry et al. (2011) indicated that psychotherapy literature has begun investigating communication methods, delivery methods and therapy outcomes. This study will highlight the coaching delivery methods team coaches prefer to utilise and their effectiveness.

2.3 Benefits of Coaching

There are several methodologies to evaluate the effectiveness of coaching in the literature, such as quantitative outcome research, financial return on investment (ROI) evaluations and wellbeing and

engagement frameworks (Grant, 2012). However, a full review of the research reveals much like defining coaching, evaluating coaching is similarly indefinite. Some factors exacerbate this, including the coach's highly individual approach, which prevents more explicit knowledge of the process, and the confidentiality surrounding specific details of the goals and subsequent outcomes (Bachkirova et al. 2015). Even given the difficulty in evaluating coaching, the research broadly demonstrates the positive effects of coaching in organisations as companies are increasingly considering a variety of coaching avenues to promote the growth of entire teams (Nabors et al. 2016). The current research is limited concerning the general effectiveness and necessity of coaching. The research does not exist in the specific context of the effectiveness and benefits of coaching during challenging times. For this study, we will discuss a selection of the benefits outlined in the coaching literature. The benefits discussed are prime examples of why coaching has recently grown in prominence.

2.3.1 Improved Employee Performance

The first benefit that comes to the forefront when reviewing the literature is the impact coaching can have on improving employee performance (Niza et al., 2020). Many organisations are investing heavily in their employees to ensure they are supported to perform and successfully drive the company's objectives. Coaching motivates employees at all levels to seek feedback and take proactive steps to improve their performance. Openness to constructive feedback fosters a healthy work environment in which problems are addressed head-on with positive solutions. Highly coachable employees, by definition, engage in increased feedback seeking, receptivity, and feedback transfer behaviours to facilitate individual development and improve performance (Merrigan et al., 2021).

2.3.2 More Productive Teams

The use of team coaching to improve performance has grown in popularity in organisations, as evidenced by the growth of the coaching industry over the last decade (Farmer, 2015). Team coaching is an interaction between a coach and a team to reflect on, define, and implement new strategies to achieve team goals (Dimas, 2016). Today's organisations frequently rely on teams rather than individuals to solve their most complex problems. Organisations invest time and money in team development interventions such as team coaching to improve team processes and performance (Traylor et al., 2020). A team's organisational commitment is expected to change positively in response to coaching interventions and seeing progress toward team goals. Because workplace coaching addresses both the coachee's and the organisation's developmental needs, self-set goals will likely gravitate toward developmental areas also valued by the company (Russo, 2021).

2.3.3 Increased Engagement and Wellbeing

Coaching not only improves and drives workforce performance, but several other factors such as wellbeing, motivation, career development, employee engagement, and a few others play a significant

role in boosting coaching efforts (Niza et al., 2020). According to a recent survey of what employees value most in their workplaces, successful companies enable employees to thrive by caring for their well-being and career. Therefore, coaching is one of the tools organisations can use to support employees' well-being in the workplace and realise their full potential (Russo, 2021).

2.3.4 Successful Organisational transitions

The literature regards executive coaching as very useful, particularly when an employee transitions into the Chief Executive Officer (CEO) role. The research implies that coaching is one mechanism to ensure a successful transition (Gill, 2017). The challenges that chief executives face are daunting even for the best and most experienced leaders; however, new CEOs who lack the necessary support can be problematic and drain morale. Coaching has been evidenced to make a significant contribution in this area by assisting and facilitating the development of newly appointed CEOs, thereby helping in the retention of the leaders required to deliver transformational change and enabling them to rise to the challenges (Gill, 2017).

2.4 Coaching Models

Chapman (2020) alluded that the coaching models utilised in the coaching engagement are primarily related to the coach's experience, style and approach. Chapman (2020) also commented that models provide a framework for learning for new and inexperienced coaches. Models assist coaches in visualising a process, simplifying complexity, and breaking down information. Coaching models give a framework for effective coaching; however, it's vital to remember that they are just that. They aren't a rigid framework with no room for flexibility and can often be used interchangeably. Models also have the advantage of creating an evidence-based approach that can be stated and explained, contributing to measuring coaching outcomes (Boysen-Rotelli, 2020). Coach-coachee relationships, problem identification, goal setting and transformational process are all critical components of coaching models (Carey, 2011). It is unknown how many theoretical coaching models exist in the current literature as new models appear and old models are redesigned.

The GROW model is an example of coaching based on behavioural psychology, which offers coaches a focused and directive framework for guiding a coachee through the stages of behavioural change in a simple step-by-step process (Panchal, 2020). The model is a four-step process involving setting goals, looking at the reality of the situation, analysing options and deciding what the client will do. Ultimately, the coach will ensure the conversation becomes action-oriented, and the client will commit to tangible steps to realise their goal.

Alternatively, cognitive coaching is a form of coaching psychology that aims to stimulate and develop a person's thoughts, emotions, and behaviours and provide methods and strategies that the person can

use when the coach is not present (Gyllensten, 2010). However, research tells us that coaches commonly use both psychologies, cognitive behavioural coaching (CBC) (Gyllensten, 2010). Oana et al. (2016) defines CBC as focussing on assisting clients in developing emotion-regulation skills and changing unproductive behaviours.

2.5 Core Coaching Competencies

Boundaries in coaching serve several purposes, the most important of which is to provide clarity for practitioners regarding acceptable practice and to assist them in determining expectations (Mosteo, 2021). Such boundaries are often called core coaching competencies or competency frameworks. Hammack et al. (2011) comments that coaching competencies are the abilities, behaviours, and skills used in the coach-client relationship to achieve predetermined goals. As such, coaching competencies are the tools that coaches use to achieve their objectives. The ICF core competencies help coaches understand the skill level expected of accredited ICF coaches (ICF, 2019). There are four main core competencies: foundation, co-creating the relationship, communicating effectively and cultivating learning and growth (ICF, 2019). For this section, we will focus on the competency of co-creating the relationship and cultivating learning and growth. We will delve deeper into the coaching literature, particularly the views on the necessity for a competency framework.

2.5.1 Co-Creating the Relationship

Despite growing interest in the coaching relationship and its significance in coaching, the subject remains under-researched (Braun, 2022). The literature review depicts that the coaching relationship is one of the essential factors in determining a successful outcome (Crosse, 2019). However, (Braun, 2022) suggests that little is known about the interaction between coach and client or how these interactions form the coaching relationship. Several authors acknowledge the importance of long-term relationship-building skills and emphasise the importance of coaches being specific when discussing goals (Crosse, 2019). Braun (2022) found that the connection was central to coaching and gave clients a sense of purpose. Coaches reported feeling at ease when immersed in the coaching process, experiencing an effortless flow state, and having intuitive insights. Relationship skill is the ability to build, maintain, and carry on solid functioning connections with individuals. The connection becomes a separate entity that emerges from the act of association and has its own expectations. The dynamics of the process begin from there. The coach must use their skills to manage this closely during the coaching process as the coaching relationship grows and changes throughout the sessions (Gupton, 2012). This study will build on the current literature by exploring fostering a coaching relationship during complex circumstances.

2.5.2 Cultivating Learning and Growth

Coaching should focus on the coachee's goals, hopes, and curiosities—goals are unfulfilled ambitions, while hopes and curiosities are the raw material for future aspirations (Mosteo, 2021). Coaching is for the coachee's benefit. To put it another way, a great coach focuses on assisting the coachee in moving forward with a desire or tying into something they want to achieve. Coaching differs from preaching, counselling, and therapy in that it is based on your point of view and serves your aims as the coachee. An effective coach speaks little, listens intently, and aids the coachee's thought process. The focus of a coaching conversation differs from that of a regular business conversation: an exchange can be about anything. Coaching focuses on the coachee and the objectives they are attempting to achieve (Haneberg, 2016). Boysen-Rotelli (2020) further understood the core competencies by stating that the coach works with the client to incorporate new awareness, insight, or learning into their worldview and behaviours, as well as design goals, actions, and accountability measures that integrate and expand new learning.

From a review of the literature, it can be argued that applying competencies in innovative and fast-paced environments limits inquisitiveness and exploration, resulting in a certain level of risk aversion where new emergent thinking is required (Ove Granstrand, 1997). Smith et al. (2015) states that arguments exist that competencies lead to a reductionist philosophy of learning that focuses on task completion rather than critical thinking. As a result, competencies are more likely to identify past successful behaviours rather than the mind-set required for the future. This study will highlight if the coaches have adopted their coaching styles or competencies whilst coaching during abnormally difficult times for the client.

2.6 Coaching in Practice

Conducting this research is purposeful as there is no straightforward approach to Coaching. It is a highly individualised and dynamic procedure that depends on the situation and the coachee's specific preferences and needs at the time. Furthermore, coaching goals might vary or be updated, altering the entire process (Honsova, 2021). Coaching's core activity usually follows a pattern of meeting with clients in one-on-one sessions for discussions to reach client objectives. Lightfoot (2019) argues that there appears to be no literature that considers the congruence of a coaching session as a whole and thus what a coaching session "looks like". In addition to a lack of understanding of session structure, there is no clear indication of the location of the coaching session or the actual coaching process. These decisions, it appears, are made mainly by the coach, who is guided by their own experiences. There seems to be no one-size-fits-all that will ensure an effective coaching outcome.

2.6.1 Delivering Coaching during the Pandemic

The coaching process can take place in person, over the phone, or on the internet, but it can also incorporate other kinds of communication (Gavin, 2017). As previously discussed, once the COVID-

19 pandemic hit, many health professionals quickly adopted telehealth and teleconsultation (Bell et al., 2021). The systemic case studies and literature in counselling and therapy are prominent, with noteworthy results evidencing that teleconsultation is an effective service delivery method. One negative impact Bell et al. (2021) highlighted was the health and well-being of the helping professionals. There is a shortage of literature on the effects of COVID-19 on coaching. It is feasible that similar experiences may have occurred in coaching environments, as coaching is a people-centred, behaviour-change profession; however, it warrants empirical investigation. Zielinski (2022) believes that coach practitioners were already transitioning from in-person to virtual coaching before the pandemic, which provided additional motivation for the transition. He also highlighted a recent ICF global snapshot survey; 87% of coaches believe virtual coaching will continue to grow after the pandemic (Zielinski, 2022).

The coaching environment tends to occur face-to-face in a neutral setting. In corporate coaching, a hotel lobby or meeting room is preferential. Many coaches rent office spaces where their clients can attend their sessions. The environment needs to be one with no distractions, and the coach and client can be present. Costs can be involved concerning the coaching environment, specifically where travel, overnight stays, hotel meeting room bookings and even office rental are required.

Despite the possibilities and potential benefits of remote coaching, there has been little research comparing the various coaching delivery methods and environments (Crawford et al., 2021). This study will explore if relationship building with clients was impacted by the coaching delivery method and the environment during the pandemic.

2.6.2 The impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic

COVID-19 caused severe disruption in people's lives in early 2020, generating an economic and social shock that altered how people live and work and businesses operate. As a result, one of the most visible shifts is remote working or the policy of flexible hybrid working. Working from home has a lot of advantages. Still, it also has some disadvantages, such as blurring the lines between work and personal life, leading to work overload, increased stress and anxiety, and reduced job satisfaction (Dodi et al., 2021).

Humans' physical and mental reactions to changes, events, and life are referred to as stress (Patil, 2021). Coaching is one of the workplace interventions used to deal with workplace issues, problems and stress (Ebner, 2018). According to the literature, coaching can help a person recognise the link between how external factors have been impacting them, which could be a viable method in the event of a pandemic (Jarosz, 2021). The literature is clear concerning the benefits of delivering coaching during “normal times”; however, no studies exist analysing delivering coaching during challenging times. The coach

must manage high emotions and stress levels throughout the sessions. The research will address if external societal factors such as the pandemic can impact the coaching process.

2.7 Conclusion

To conclude, the research area has been portrayed as coaching. The coach's perspectives, insights and experiences have been addressed within the coaching field. Specifically, the insights of the coach's who coached before the pandemic and during the pandemic in the Irish Context. This research will give novel and new empirical data on the experiences experienced by coaches coaching during the COVID-19 pandemic. This is a current gap in the literature that will be answered from the undertaking of this study. It will provide potentially critical learnings for future coaches as they embark on their coaching journeys. The following section will outline the research questions and identify the research objective.

Chapter 3: Research Question

3.1 Research Questions

Mitchell et al. (2020) comments that developing a specific research question requires a curious, questioning, and critical approach to coaching. To generate research questions, one must develop the ability to question current coaching literature regularly. Ideally, they are motivated by a desire to learn whether there are 'better' ways to deliver coaching or if there are gaps in the coaching literature that need to be filled. Even when the prevailing belief is that these questions have already been answered, there is an infinite number of questions in coaching that must be addressed through research.

From a review of the literature available, it is clear that several questions have been answered to some degree. The coaching literature predominately is informed by evaluating the coachee's experience, results and outcomes following participation in a coaching engagement with a coach. Similarly, case studies explore the insights from larger organisations whose HR departments have implemented a coaching programme, relaying the return on investment. The literature rarely considers the coach practitioners' experience or, more importantly, the complex climate in which the coach can on occasion deliver coaching.

Furthermore, the benefits and effectiveness of coaching, while well documented and answered in the literature in relation to coaching during "normal times", is not evident how the effectiveness and benefits translate to coaching during a crisis such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, these questions remain unanswered. As noted by Mitchell et al. (2020), if the question is appropriate and unanswered, the next step is to frame it in a way that can be addressed using research methodology.

As a result, the primary objective of this study is to investigate the first-hand experiences of coaches who facilitated coaching during a challenging time. The challenging time referred to in this study will be that of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The purpose of this study is to gain a better understanding of coaching practitioners' experiences and insights into coaching during times of crisis and uncertainty in Ireland. It is essential to ensure the coaches who are interviewed are coaches who coached pre-pandemic and throughout the pandemic, as they will be best equipped to give the most valuable insights. The researcher believes that answering the following questions will aid in advancing research in this field. In general, research concerning coaching can be conducted using a quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method approach. This study will utilise the qualitative research method to answer the questions.

1. How practical and effective was coaching pre-pandemic?

2. How practical and effective was coaching during the pandemic?
3. How was coaching impacted by the pandemic?

3.2 Qualitative Research

The overarching objective of this research study is to explore the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on coaching in Ireland. This study seeks to further the findings of relevant and recent research completed by Choppin (2021), who conducted coaching research by interviewing and gathering experienced coach practitioners' views and data.

Qualitative research is the method that previous researchers have chosen, and it is also the preferred method for this particular study. The participants and their data typically determine qualitative research. It is inductive, hypothesis-generating, and embraces complexity and participants' perspective. Qualitative research is more likely to allow for a more adaptable method of gathering and recording evidence (Walle, 2015). Qualitative interviews allow respondents to share information in their own words, making the method ideal for gathering detailed information and comprehending social processes.

Chapter 4: Methodology

4.1 Introduction

This chapter aims to present the methods of analysis used to answer the research questions. The methods approach chosen for the research will be justified, explaining why and how a qualitative analysis will be used. The sample questions will be rationalised, and a copy of the interview questions will be included in the Appendix. The sample size and reasons for selecting the candidates will be clarified.

4.2 Research Philosophy

The science and philosophy that underpins all research are known as the research methodology (Adams et al., 2014). It enables us to comprehend the various ways knowledge can be generated. The concepts underlying the subject of 'methodology' also allow us to be critical and analytical when 'knowledge' is presented as 'fact' (Adams et al., 2014). While a method or technique may be used in various research studies, it is critical that a specific philosophical perspective underpins all research and that the entire research methodology be congruent with that underpinning philosophy (Adams et al., 2014). Saunders (2019) defines research philosophies as a set of beliefs and assumptions concerning the advancement of knowledge.

Constructivism is a method of investigating how people understand their worlds or their paradigm (Denicolo, 2016). Constructivism, as a philosophy, refers to the methods or techniques that most effectively elicit data representing a person's constructed sense of reality. Constructivists start with the assumption that they don't know what might be and make no assumptions about what might be. Instead, they try to set aside their personal opinions, beliefs, or biases and remain open to the many possibilities presented by the research. Constructivists seek to understand a person's internal experiences from that person's perspective rather than the researcher's (Denicolo, 2016). It is essential to reconfirm that the researcher is not a coach practitioner and, therefore, will not make assumptions regarding the research questions. The 8 coach practitioners participating in this study will share their knowledge and experiences to answer the research question.

Rapley (2018) describes how interpretivism arose due to positivism's perceived inability to meet the needs of social scientists. Simply put, different people from different cultural backgrounds create and experience other social realities under different circumstances and at different times. Interpretivism criticises positivist attempts to discover definite, universal laws that apply to everyone (Saunders, 2019). Its goal is to investigate the complexities of social phenomena by gaining an empathic understanding of how the research subjects perceive the world based on findings from a relatively small sample size (Collis, 2014). Positivism was used in the past to conduct studies during "normal times" when positivists viewed social norms as the foundations of behaviour (Rapley, 2018). However, this study wishes to explore a challenging time for coaches. Therefore interpretivism will be adopted in conjunction

with constructivism to complete a non-scientific, qualitative method to analyse the coaches' experiences.

4.3 Research Methodology

Kumar (2015) defines research methodology as the scientific or systematic method by which a researcher or investigator conducts research to achieve the desired goals and objectives. Typically, researchers will utilise three primary forms of research methodology; quantitative, qualitative, or mixed-method. Choosing the appropriate research methodology allows the researcher to collect relevant and accurate information or data for the parameters under consideration.

As the title of the research suggests, this is an exploratory study. Therefore qualitative research is the chosen research method. It is well established that one of the primary advantages of using qualitative versus quantitative methods in theory development is that the role of context can be examined and considered when interpreting results (Adams et al., 2014). As a result, qualitative research may yield more specific, explanatory, and relevant theories than would otherwise be possible (Elsbach, 2009). Qualitative research is an unstructured and exploratory study in which information is gathered from small samples, focus groups and one-on-one interviews with respondents (Agarwal, 2015). For the research in question, a qualitative method of semi-structured interviews was used as the need to gather context-rich data was paramount to the success of the research. The context is that of coaching during a challenging time in Ireland. The qualitative method will allow 8 coach practitioners to give comprehensive and detailed recounts of coaching during the pandemic in Ireland.

4.4 Sampling

Participants who met specific criteria required to investigate the research's objective were chosen as part of the sampling strategy. This can be known as judgement sampling, where the sample selected by the researcher conforms to some criteria (Adams et al., 2014). The requirements included accredited coaching practitioners who have experience coaching both before and during the pandemic in Ireland. The expertise concerning coaching techniques, models, and theory is the rationale behind why accredited coach practitioners were considered. The author has many connections through her HR network. The author was put in contact with coaches through her HR network. The initial aim was to have a sampling size of between 4 and 6 coaches. The final sample size was a total of 8 coaches.

The researcher's goal is to explain, describe, and interpret the phenomenon rather than to generalise from the sample to the population (Adams et al., 2014). As a result, sampling is a matter of information richness rather than representative opinions. In qualitative sampling, appropriateness and adequacy are critical (Guetterman, 2015). When determining sample size, the researcher must use their judgement

when determining the sample size (Guetterman, 2015). Morse (1994) suggested a sample size of 6 participants when trying to understand the essence of an experience.

4.5 Semi-Structured Video Interviews

The researcher believed that video interviews would be well received by participants. It was expected that the willingness of participants to partake in the study would be far more significant in comparison to utilising face-to-face interviews as the approach. Video interviews removed geographical barriers, which became evident when the researcher conducted a video interview whilst travelling abroad.

There is no doubt that qualitative interviews are a versatile and effective tool for capturing voices and how people make sense of their experiences (Rabionet, 2011). Semi-structured interviews enable the researcher to focus on specific areas or topics. A completely unstructured interview risks not eliciting context-rich information from participants about topics closely related to the research questions under consideration (Rabionet, 2011). For this study, the context-rich data will come from the coaches telling their personal experiences from coaching during the pandemic. As a result, to elicit conversation, the researcher will use the format of open-ended questions. The interview questions can be found in Appendix 3.

4.6 Data Collection & Analysis

4.6.1 Data Collection

The data in this research project has been collected through primary and secondary data collection methods.

Primary data collection entails gathering information from first-hand experiences and previously unavailable sources (Guetterman, 2015). Primary data can be collected through surveys, interviews, focus groups or experiments. In research, face-to-face or video interviews are frequently used (Adams et al., 2014). It allows for a large amount of data to be collected, albeit it is time-consuming and has small sample sizes. As a result, while detailed information is obtained, the representativeness of the findings may be called into question (Adams et al., 2014)..

For this study, one-one video interviews allowed the coach practitioners time and space to openly and honestly discuss their past experiences. The video interviews were conducted via the Microsoft Teams software, with video recording and automatic transcription functionality.

Secondary data is information gathered by someone else; a wealth of secondary research is available through books, libraries, and the internet (Guetterman, 2015). Secondary data is frequently employed to validate the researcher's sample (Adams et al., 2014). The secondary data collected in this study were

predominately through the National College of Ireland library. The library has an exhaustive collection of books, ebooks and academic journals. Websites created by internationally recognised coaching bodies such as the ICF were also utilised in the secondary data collection process. Researchers can use secondary data to investigate specific hypotheses. Large secondary data sets frequently provide researchers with access to more information than primary data sets (Vartanian, 2011). Secondary data was collected for the purpose of gaining knowledge and expertise in relation to the research topic. This data allowed the researcher to critically analyse the literature and identify research gaps.

4.6.2 Data Analysis

Qualitative analysis is an essential tool for creating new theories. The researcher faces a challenge in reducing what can feel like an overwhelming amount of data gathered from in-depth interviews, observations, and written documentation in qualitative research (Adams et al., 2014). A total of 8 transcripts were automatically populated via the Microsoft Teams software.

Analysing interview data entails three stages: data reduction, data reorganisation, and data representation (Roulston, 2014). Making sense of qualitative data requires creativity throughout the entire process. Patterns and themes do not usually emerge from complex data. The difficulty is reduced by being open to multiple possibilities or ways of thinking about a problem, changing thought patterns, and connecting seemingly unconnected dots (Suter, 2012).

The researcher utilised the art of coding and thematic exploration for data analysis. Coding in qualitative research refers to the processes that allow collected data to be assembled, categorised, and thematically sorted, thereby providing an organised platform for meaning construction (Roulston, 2014). Coding methods use processes to reveal data-embedded themes, implying thematic directionality toward categorising data through which meaning can be negotiated, codified, and presented (Williams, 2019). Once the data was collected, the researcher compiled the research findings through a detailed analysis of each theme and its relationship to the research question.

4.7 Limitations

The main limitation concerning conducting interviews as the research method was the time. The researcher did not consider the time needed to reach out to potential respondents to participate in the research. The interviews themselves were time-consuming, averaging 45 minutes per interview. Finally, the data analysis was time-consuming and challenging for the researcher. Mainly when the researcher aimed to complete between 4-6 interviews and, in reality, conducted 8.

One apparent limitation was the email correspondence with participants before conducting the interview. Some coaches agreed to participate; however, on a follow-up to schedule the time and date, they did not respond.

The researcher found recruiting respondents challenging as there was no additional benefit to participating other than informing the research. The researcher relied on contacts to introduce coaches who may be willing to get involved.

4.8 Ethical Considerations

Informed consent is an internationally recognised ethical requirement that requires research participants to be informed of all relevant aspects of the research, particularly any potential risks to them, as a condition of consenting to participate (Newman et al., 2021). All respondents were asked to read the research information sheet and sign the interview consent form. The consent form informed the respondents that they would be kept anonymous throughout the process, not identified to the other respondents and also not identifiable in the thesis itself. Concerning data protection, the respondents were informed they would be recorded for the research and that the recordings would be deleted following completion of the study.

Virtual field research methods must be carefully considered and planned, both ethically and logistically, in the context of numerous possibilities and advantages of using online platforms and potential risks (Newman et al., 2021). The interview transcription documents were downloaded onto a file and saved in a folder on the drive of the researchers' computer. The respondent's name was not used in the title of the transcript file to ensure confidentiality. Similarly, the video recording was not downloaded from the Microsoft teams platform as there is no need to have the recording saved and accessible in more than one location.

4.9 Conclusion

To conclude, this chapter provides the research methodology and philosophy the researcher will use to address the research questions. The most appropriate philosophical approach was determined to be interpretivist and constructivist. The qualitative data collection method was chosen for the research by using semi-structured interviews to investigate the experiences of the 8 respondents thoroughly. The data will be analysed using coding, allowing for thematic data collection. When conducting primary research, the research limitations and ethical challenges were considered. The findings from the 8 interviews will be discussed in the following chapter.

Chapter 5: Findings

5.1 Introduction

This chapter will present the findings from the primary research gathered through semi-structured interviews. A total of 8 coach practitioners were interviewed who are not only qualified coaches but also practice currently in Ireland. The semi-structured interviews comprised of three parts and 18 questions. All questions were open-ended to allow the respondents to elaborate on their coaching experiences during the Ireland pandemic. The primary research aimed first to understand what coaching was like for the coach in normal times, followed by coaching during the pandemic and lastly, the impact of the pandemic on coaching.

5.2 Profile of research participants

In the interview, the first 5 questions were curated to establish the background and experience levels of the coaches participating.

1. Gender

The coaches comprised an even gender split of 4 males and 4 females.

2. Age

The age range of the coaches varied from 40 years old to 76 years old, with 3 coaches in their 50s and 3 coaches in their 60s.

3. Years of experience coaching

In terms of years of coaching experience, 3 coaches had 5 years experience or less, 3 coaches had between 14 and 17 years experience, and finally, 2 coaches had over 20 years experience.

4. Coaching Accreditation

All coaches were qualified coaches who had completed formal training, and many had memberships with recognised bodies such as the EMCC, ICF and the Coaching Institute of Ireland.

5. Area of Specialisation

Table 1: Coaches Areas of Specialisation

Coach Codes	Specialisation
C1	Motivational and Lifestyle Coaching
C2	Executive and Career Coaching
C3	Leadership Coaching
C4	Executive and Entrepreneurial Coaching
C5	Career and Personal Coaching
C6	Neurolinguistic Programming(NLP) Coaching
C7	Leadership Coaching
C8	Leadership Coaching

5.3 Part 1 – Coaching Pre Pandemic

Part 1 of the interview, “Coaching Pre Pandemic”, was comprised of 5 open-ended questions. From the 5 questions, some themes relating to coaching pre-pandemic became apparent.

5.3.1 Theme 1 – Location

The first question of part 1 asked, “tell me what coaching was like for you pre-pandemic? “. Many coaches became reflective and reflected on their experiences coaching pre-March 2020. Five out of eight coaches were only conducting coaching in person at that time. The five coaches were travelling to meet clients and incurring expenses such as booking meeting rooms in hotels and renting office space. Three coaches were conducting a mix of virtual and in-person coaching then.

C2 discussed that they had never completed virtual coaching during pre-pandemic times,

“It was never online. It was always face to face. I didn't do online stuff because I don't know if people would have been as receptive to it”.

C1 noted that they had an office space outside their home where clients would come for their sessions. C1 was unhappy with clients coming to their home address,

“It was more invasive, really. People weren't coming into the home, but they were still coming, and I was never really happy with it”.

The findings suggest that in-person coaching was time-consuming for the coach when travel was involved. This point was solidified by C3, who conducted virtual coaching pre-pandemic.

“I had pretty much graduated by then to virtual coaching. If you live somewhere like I live about an hour out of Dublin, I mean, I'm spending an hour and a half with the client. I'm probably spending the whole day for one appointment.”.

5.3.2 Theme 2 – Fostering the Coaching Relationship

Braun (2022) suggests that the coaching relationship is the essence of a successful coaching intervention. Question 2 of Part 1 was designed to understand how the coaches fostered the relationship and built rapport with their client's pre-pandemic.

The research highlighted the usage of chemistry calls or meetings before beginning the coaching sessions as the primary mechanism for fostering the coaching relationship. The chemistry call allowed the potential client to talk to the coach and decide if they were the right fit for them before proceeding.

C1 always completed a chemistry call by telephone and used this opportunity to advise the client of the type of coach they are,

“I always had a chemistry session, a discovery call as I would call it. I always told people out straight the type of coach that I am. You always try and build a rapport, do the chemistry call, find out if you suit and let them know upfront”.

C5 similarly described the usage of a chemistry session and the need to clarify what coaching entails,

“I would always have a chemistry call. Clarify what coaching was about. Remove a lot of misconceptions about what coaching was. Some people thought you were going to tell them solutions and obviously, I had to clarify that was not my role and I wouldn't do it”.

The research findings all depicted the same concept: the chemistry session was the beginning of the partnership, and the onus was on the client to decide if the coach was the right fit for them.

C7 stated that coaches really should be able to coach any client that comes to them. The coach should be impartial and non-judgemental by putting aside initial opinions regarding the client. This clarifies that the chemistry session is a time to allow the client to decide whether the coaching relationship is right for them.

“ There was always a chemistry session for them to decide whether you're the right coach. As a coach, you should really be able to coach anybody. You should be able to put your values and your likes and dislikes for somebody to one side and treat them in an unconditional positive regard. The key is for the client then to decide whether you are the right person for them”.

The literature matches the research in that with a solid coaching relationship from the outset; the coaching relationship will flourish.

5.3.3 Theme 3 – Coaching Models

As discussed in the literature review chapter, there are many coaching tools and models available to coaches to step through with clients to help them reach their goals and frame the coaching conversation. Question 3 aimed to understand the popular tools used pre-pandemic. Question three asked “Can you name coaching models/techniques that you would regularly utilise with clients?”

A common theme arose when four out of eight coaches mentioned using the Grow model when coaching pre-pandemic.

C6 expressed their appreciation for the grow model,

“There's only one genuine model that I've ever chosen in coaching work because it's so effective and that's the grow model. That helps me focus very quickly on where the person is and what they need most in that moment”.

C7 detailed how the Grow model structures every coaching session,

“I'd say always a coach is using grow as a basic concept of how we structure every session. So always thinking about what is it you want to achieve with me, what's happening now”.

The grow model dominated the responses. Other models mentioned were the wheel of life, the career wheel, the Soar model and psychometric assessments. The answers supported the research by showing that coaches do utilise coaching tools and techniques as part of their coaching practice to evoke a meaningful coaching conversation.

5.3.4 Theme 4 – Effectiveness and Practicalities

Question 5 asked, “Any additional thoughts on how practical and effective coaching was for you as a Coach pre-pandemic?”.

The research findings conveyed that coaching ultimately was not effective nor practical in terms of the coach facilitating and delivering coaching sessions to the client. At the time, it was standard practice to travel around the country to meet clients face to face and now, reflecting on that time; the coaches can conclude that it was not practical.

C2 described how time-consuming face-to-face coaching was pre-pandemic,

“A lot of time taken to meet people, time to organise it, time to book wherever you want to book, book meeting rooms or book venues. Yeah, so it's a lot more time to do it, it wasn't practical”.

C7 depicted that clients could cancel as you are on the way to meet them, which was ineffective in trying to run a viable coaching business.

“That was the way it was. I travelled to meet my client. But even just going into the city to meet a client, the most you could do in a day was two clients to be really honest. And then if you're halfway into the city and someone cancelled on you, which you know, these are busy people. So when I reflect back on it, it was not effective”.

5.4 Conclusion

The coaches incurred high overhead costs such as travel expenses and rent. Travelling to and from coaching sessions meant that coaches could not see more than two clients per day, restricting their income.

It is also conclusive that during normal times, many coaches were conducting face-to-face coaching only. A minority were beginning to transfer to virtual coaching at that time. Coaches mentioned they did not conduct virtual coaching as they felt clients were not receptive to it.

The common theme of chemistry calls and the Grow model were evident throughout the semi-structured interviews conducted with the 8 coaches.

5.5 Part 2 – Coaching during the pandemic

Part two of the interview, “Coaching during the pandemic”, was comprised of 9 open-ended questions to answer the research question “How practical and effective was coaching during the pandemic”. The prominent themes from part 2 of the interview will be detailed further in this section.

5.5.1 Theme 1 – Drop off in Clients

The question “Tell me what coaching was like for you during the pandemic?” allowed the coaches to describe what happened at the very beginning of the pandemic. The common theme was many coaches had a drop-off in clients. Coaches who had an in-house group or team coaching arrangements with companies saw the work cancelled.

C1 described how coaching stopped for them at the start of the pandemic,

“March, April 2020 was just gone. Just dead. There was no such thing, to be honest”.

C7 both expressed how their team coaching work and other corporate engagements were cancelled at the start of the pandemic,

“The companies just cancelled all of it, so my income was gone. So it just literally fell off a cliff. That was terrifying. Absolutely terrifying. First time in 23 years, of having a mortgage, I didn't have the cash flow to pay the mortgage”.

The findings show how the coaches experienced coaching during a challenging time, particularly at the very beginning of the pandemic in Ireland. The coaching work stopped for many, and it was a very uncertain and difficult time for the coaches as their livelihoods were at risk.

5.5.2 Theme 2 – Coaches' Wellbeing

Question 5 asked, “As a Coach did your wellbeing/stress levels differ prior to the pandemic?”. Three coaches found coping difficult during the pandemic.

C1 stated that they found it difficult to engage in the coaching process with the client,

“I wasn't there. My brain wasn't there. I was just too taken up with the whole pandemic and the everything going on in the world”.

C8 found the need to practice mindfulness and grounding techniques regularly to try to cope with what was happening externally in the world,

“I was so overwhelmed. It was this almost pulsing complexity and uncertainty all of the time that I really had to figure out how to hold and anchor myself more than I'd ever done. There was times that I felt I wasn't capable of doing work myself. I had to get out into nature everyday like I would have had like mindfulness practice and yoga practice in my home and would have done that at just that didn't even sustain me”.

C5 noted that it was difficult to cope whilst coaching during the pandemic. The coach had a network of coaches that they relied on during that time to get them through it,

“Some of the sessions were quite difficult and I was left feeling somewhat raw and wishing I had a coach myself. I am part of a network of coaches and we discussed that and you know, we were all feeling that particular rawness as well and we supported each other and that was very useful to have that. To have the kind of the network to get through it, we helped each other”.

5.5.3 Theme 3 – Coaching Delivery

The literature tells us that many health professional moved to online consultation and telehealth during the pandemic (Bell et al., 2021). However, this research did not extend to that of the coaching profession. Question 1 and 9 allowed the coaches to delve deeper into the coaching delivery they adopted during the pandemic. All coaches moved to virtual online delivery as the world began to remote work and social distance.

C7 believed online coaching to be a game changer for both the coach and the client,

“Gradually it picked up and then it just took off. People were so much more comfortable with working remotely and it just became the norm and the practicality of not finding coffee shop or a hotel. It was just it was a game changer really”.

C4 described how the virtual coaching opened up the honesty and openness between the client and coach more than ever before as the client could see the coach's background on the camera,

“So with what we're doing now, I am making direct eye contact with you and vice versa. And I'm not looking at the camera, I'm looking at you. You have an insight into where I am. And I have an insight into where you are. I know about your life and you know about my life because you can see it over my shoulder. That would never happen before when coaching clients in the Hotel”.

C2 soon realised the need to verbalise more as you don't have the physical cues that face-to-face coaching brings. C2 overcame this challenge by asking the client how their body felt at that moment,

“Everything went online and it was actually fine when I think about it. Like you, you don't have that body language piece. So you have to verbalise more. What impact is that having on you? You know what are you feeling in your body now?”.

5.5.4 Theme 4 – Clients' Wellbeing & Goals

Question 4 and 6 allowed the coaches to discuss what their clients were experiencing during the pandemic.

Three coaches described their client's anxiety and stress levels as being high during the start of the pandemic. They saw more tears during the sessions and raw emotions.

C5 came across new concerns of clients that they had not previously seen in coaching sessions,

“There was a higher level of anxiety among clients and more tears because of the uncertainty about the feeling of not being safe, loneliness, isolation, working from home, which was a new thing.”

C8 saw a heightened level of emotions from their clients,

“I saw it in my clients just so much and like a lot of overwhelm, exhaustion, stress, burnout. Like just so much going on for people”.

During the pandemic, 5 coaches began to see a shift in the goals clients wanted to work on to achieve.

C1 had clients who were trying to maintain a work-life balance,

“It was how people were handling working at home. So it was a combination of working from home and work. So it was how are they going to get the work done with the children? How are they going to handle it?”.

C2 saw overwhelmed clients,

“Yeah, people have been overworked and not having time to focus on one thing. Then the family piece was coming in for people as in, OK, there's loads of work to do. Now I've got all the family stuff to manage and I'm not coping.”.

C7 had clients who wanted to reflect on their career paths during the pandemic,

“I think people discovered during the pandemic when you strip away all the fun of going into the office, being around people, you know, having all the distractions and people realised this is what my job is. So there was definitely more people wanting to look at their overall career or life direction.”

C3 saw clients who wanted to reflect on their life,

“I think I did a little bit more work around well-being coaching and around resilience, so I would have spent more time talking to people about how they can become resilient. Probably a little bit more work around whole-person coaching. Starting to challenge some of those areas of their life that weren't really working for them. COVID sort of stopped people and actually created that kind of breathing space for people to say, let's have a look”.

To conclude, the findings show that during the pandemic, coaches experienced clients coming to them with heightened emotions and high stress and anxiety levels. Some coaches also began to see an increase in new goals, such as life direction and work-life balance.

5.5.5 Theme 5 - Effectiveness and Practicalities

Question 9 asked “Any additional thoughts on how practical and effective coaching was for you as a Coach during the pandemic?”.

C8 believed coaching during the pandemic was practical,

“It was more practical, definitely and it was the kind of a testament and confirmation that the sessions can be done online.”.

C7 was able to offer more flexible hours to clients during the pandemic,

“Sometimes people like the evening I do quite a lot of coaching in the evening. That's one of the things that's really changed. I was never coaching anybody in the evening before. I wish people find the evening can be really helpful for them. Kids are in bed or they've got their own time for themselves”.

C2 described that you need to take time to help the client switch off before beginning the session,

“Definitely the best way to go. It's very handy. Just the only thing with people is slight delays of having them logging in. Even just that mental time of getting in the room. Ohh, I'm just off of meeting. Ohh, I'm just now into my coaching session. You're trying to get them to switch off from what they've just come from because they're still on the same laptop”.

5.6 Conclusion

The coaches felt the pandemic impacted their well-being and stress levels, with 3 coaches detailing the difficulty they experienced coping during that time.

Similarly, clients presented with heightened emotions and anxiety which the coaches had to manage during the coaching sessions. New concerns were emerging in coaching sessions not previously seen by some coaches as clients began to reassess their career and life paths and also tried to cope with the uncertainty of the pandemic.

5.7 Part 3 - The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Coaching

Part 3 of the interview “The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Coaching” was comprised of 4 open-ended questions. The prominent themes that arose from part three of the interview will be detailed further in this section.

5.7.1 Theme 1 – Impact on the Coaching Profession

Question one asked, “Do you believe that external societal factors can have an overall impact on Coaching?”. The findings indicate that the coaches felt the pandemic had given coaching the platform that it was missing. The pandemic has brought to light the value of coaching. Coaches noted that the coaching culture in America is much more mainstream than here in Ireland; however, coaching in Ireland has grown during the pandemic.

C6 believed that many people turned to coaching during the pandemic,

“I think one effect the pandemic has had is to throw everything up in the air and the cards are falling down differently. And I think people are beginning to recognise that talking to someone, even if it's online, can actually help. When it's a skilful conversation there's some real value in it”.

C1 also felt that the pandemic has allowed coaching to become more mainstream,

“I think COVID certainly has had a great impact on making coaching more normal”.

C7 also discussed Coaching in Ireland becoming more mainstream,

“Working with American organisations they see coaching as really important. I don't know an American in the corporate world that hasn't got a coach. Ireland I think has brought coaching more into the mainstream where it wasn't before. Hopefully you're a manager of people or you're the CEO and you've had good coaching, you understand the value, but you'll want everyone to have that experience”.

5.7.2 Theme 2 – Impact on Coaches

Question two asked, “Did the pandemic impact you as a Coaching practitioner?”. The findings showed that coaches were financially in a better position than pre-pandemic. And some experienced better work-life balance as a result.

C1 has begun coaching clients abroad,

“Well, yeah, it means I can get more clients, because I coach people over in Belgium and Poland”.

C8 was financially in a better place, but also terms of well-being and work-life balance, they moved into a better space throughout the pandemic,

“Well, financial immediately and then I think my own energy and my own overwhelm and trying to navigate everything that was going on in that time. And for my business, my family, myself so, I mean, yeah, it has been a game changer and the business changer in so many”.

C2 was able to work with more clients than they previously had,

“You can get a lot more sessions in when it's virtual. But max would be 5, but you can still do it, but it's just a matter of having good notes”.

5.7.3 Theme 3 – Key Learnings

The last question of the interview asked “What are the two main learnings/takeaways you will take with you into the future from coaching during this challenging time?”. Below the common learnings are discussed.

a) Stress

Three coaches believed there is a need to manage not only your own stress as a coach but also that of your clients.

C1 called for a need for coaches to learn how to manage stress,

“I think when you're doing the courses there should be more emphasis on coaches learning how to manage stress and how to develop people's ability to manage stress”.

b) Rapport

Three coaches learned it is very doable to foster the coaching relationship and build a rapport with the client virtually.

C3 stated that a rapport can be built virtually,

“This whole thing about coaching in person versus coaching virtually a lot of people believe that, it had to be face to face that you couldn't build rapport with people unless you were with them face to face And COVID categorically proved that to be wrong”.

C) Adaptive

Five out of the eight coaches were surprised to learn just how resilient and adaptive coaches and clients can be when dealing with uncertainty.

C8 noted,

“Change is a constant, and you know the better that we actually get at adapting to and working with uncertainty and change, the better”.

C6 discussed how all clients are different, and as a coach, you must adapt your coaching style and approach,

“The most important skill fundamentally that I have is the skill of flexibility, of being able to create a response in the moment.”

To conclude, the coaches learned they could adapt to new delivery methods and build a rapport virtually.

5.8 Conclusion

The results of 8 coach practitioner semi-structured interviews were presented to the reader in this chapter. The author aimed to present the findings with no interpretations. The results obtained were presented via narrative and thematic style. The narrative style included direct quotes, highlighted using inverted commas and italics. Each coach received a code to ensure they remained anonymous and allow the reader to follow and assemble the coach's interview responses accordingly. The next chapter will analyse the results further, and the author will aim to interpret the results based on the research questions.

Chapter 6: Discussion

This chapter will compare and contrast the primary research findings with what was discovered in the literature review. The author will unpack the similarities and differences that arise. The author will present and discuss any new findings that emerge from the primary research. For clarity, the author will organise the discussions under the following headings:

- i. How practical and effective was coaching pre-pandemic?
- ii. How practical and effective was coaching during the pandemic?
- iii. How did the COVID-19 pandemic impact coaching?

6.1 How practical and effective was coaching pre pandemic

We must acknowledge pre-pandemic as “normal” times when reviewing the results. The current secondary research primarily tends to be based on studies completed during “normal times” (Ciporen, 2015). The respondents reflected on pre-pandemic times and discussed their coaching experiences.

The findings correlated and had similarities to that of the coaching literature. Wilkins (2014) noted that large organisations frequently utilise coaching to support their leaders and senior management. Five out of the 8 respondents had a niche or specialisation in executive or leadership coaching. Many worked with large organisations to coach their c-suite and senior leaders.

C3 regularly was engaged by organisations to coach senior leaders who were stepping up to join the c-suite,

“People who are graduating by moving from managing to leading typically and then people who are graduating from board position to c-suite”.

Another similarity arose from the coaching competencies outlined by ICF (2019) and Braun (2022). Both parties state that Co-creating the relationship is one of the most important skills a coach can possess. The respondents had similar practices to build trust and rapport with their clients. A chemistry call or meeting allowed clients space to decide whether they felt comfortable working with the respondents.

The literature discussed various coaching models and it was noteworthy that 5 coaches mentioned they use the GROW model (Corrie, 2013). Panchal (2020) tells us that the GROW model has been around since the 80s, and still, to this day, it is widely used in the coaching profession. Four respondents noted regularly using the GROW model in their client coaching sessions.

C5 mentioned that they always start the coaching session with the GROW model,

“Obviously, the one that I start with always is the grow model. I evoke awareness through questioning, powerful questions in particular”.

Finally, the coaching delivery that the respondents discussed was similar to that of the literature. Gavin (2017) noted that the literature suggests that face-to-face coaching was the favoured format for delivery. Six respondents conducted face-to-face coaching and frequently travelled to meet clients in hotel lobbies or rented meeting spaces.

C4 had a large number of senior clients who were travelling due to work and would expect C4 to travel to meet them for the coaching sessions wherever they might be in the world,

“I did 218 flights in 2018. and it's funny. I thought it was my life. I was traveling to Malta, Lithuania, Israel, France, UK, Israel, Tanzania, Spain and Portugal, they are my countries.”

When reviewing the results to answer the research question “How practical and effective was coaching pre-pandemic” it can be interpreted that the coaching sessions themselves were effective because the clients achieved their goals and desired outcomes from attending the sessions.

However, the respondents reflected on delivering and facilitating the coaching as a coach practitioner and did not believe it was effective or practical. The coaches expressed that it was time-consuming and costly to provide face-to-face coaching. They could not occasionally afford to coach more than one client a day because of the time taken to travel to a coaching location. One coach mentioned they had an office space at home, and they weren't comfortable having clients come to their home as it felt invasive.

6.2 How practical and effective was coaching during the pandemic

The coaches revisited their experience of coaching during a challenging time. In this context, the pandemic. The results have allowed us to address the research question, “How practical and effective was coaching during the pandemic”.

Firstly, similarities were evident in the findings compared to the coaching literature. Niza (2020) elaborated on the benefits that can be expected to be experienced from attending coaching. The literature maintains that coaching can positively affect the engagement and performance levels of clients and their well-being. The respondents all demonstrated that not only were the coaching interventions resulting in desired outcomes during the pandemic but also positively impacting their client's well-being.

C7 found that clients were very appreciative of the coaching sessions and used the session as a time for themselves to put the stress and anxiety of the uncertain world aside,

“I think for a lot of my clients, the coaching actually improved their wellbeing because that's the sort of thing they were saying to me. It was like the session has been amazing or, you know, I really needed that session, words like that. So I think people appreciated coaching more than clients would have done before.”

Similarly, the respondents advised that not much had changed concerning co-creating the relationship. They continued using relationship-building skills through chemistry sessions.

C5 noted,

“My approach continued to remain the same”.

The coaching models remained the same for the respondents throughout their coaching during the pandemic. However, two respondents made a note of tools they previously used in “normal” times that only worked in face-to-face sessions and have not yet been able to recreate virtually.

C8 referred to one particular tool that they could not employ virtually,

“I had a coaching tool that I used probably in almost every coaching program. I would bring a bag of toys and I would set-up coordinates and it was a whole systemic view for their life or their work. It was just so powerful, and I haven't been able to recreate that”.

Cilliers et al. (2022) advised there are not enough case studies analysing the effectiveness and viability of moving from face-to-face engagements to virtual ones. The findings from this study will now be invaluable in addressing this gap in the literature. The coaches moved to virtual once the pandemic began. The coaches expressed how many clients were not receptive to virtual coaching initially, and many coaches noticed a drop-off in clients. Once the initial hesitation subsided, the clients became accustomed to online coaching.

C1 was surprised at how much they embraced the move to virtual delivery,

“I love the virtual coaching. I still go meet people now but it tends to be more companies now and I'm doing team coaching and training things like that, but the one to one coaching to be quite honest, I'm doing it virtually”.

The respondents discussed clients reaching their goals and desired outcomes at the same level as pre-pandemic,

C5 noted,

“Generally speaking, I would say that clients met their goals to the same extent as before”.

The difference in results compared to the coaching literature saw a pattern of new goals or concerns arising that clients presented at the coaching sessions. McInerney et al. (2021) highlighted organisations commonly defined pre-set organisational or professional goals for leadership and executive coaching interventions. However, the findings show that the clients presented new concerns that the coaches had not encountered. The clients struggled with work-life balance, self-care, wellbeing, life and career direction, stress and anxiety. The coaches were managing heightened emotions during the sessions. These new concerns made it challenging for the coaches coaching during that time.

C4 explained that they had come across new areas of concern,

“I also came across alcoholism, spousal abuse, personal hygiene deterioration and weight gain, all of those things”.

C5 had clients who were working from home and feeling isolated,

“There was a higher level of anxiety among some clients with more tears because of the uncertainty about the feeling of not being safe, loneliness, isolation, working from home, which was a new thing”.

To answer the research question “How practical and effective was coaching during the pandemic” it can be interpreted that the coaching sessions themselves remained the same and were ultimately effective in the sense that the clients achieved their goals and desired outcomes from attending the sessions.

Once the initial issues subsided in the early months of the pandemic, the coaches agreed that coaching is very doable and practical. The only drawback is that team coaching was not delivered virtually by the respondents during the pandemic. The coaches also expressed that they were scheduling more client sessions in one day and had significantly reduced overheads and increased profit margins.

The literature concerning coaching during the pandemic is minimal. As noted, the literature predominantly focuses on health professionals moving to telehealth (Bell et al., 2021). Therefore, the

research conducted in this study was novel and of great value to the coaching profession. The respondents found that overall, coaching during the pandemic was effective and practical. This conclusion was apparent when the coaches described experiencing stress themselves. They found it hard to cope at the outset but soon settled into managing the client's new concerns and heightened emotions. The coaches were adamant that coaching is very doable online and that a rapport can be built online.

6.3 How did the COVID-19 pandemic impact coaching

Finally, the findings informed us that the pandemic had a negative impact on coaching in Ireland during the first two to three months of the pandemic. The results depicted that the pandemic impacted the respondents' well-being negatively. There was a need for respondents to adopt and develop coping skills and mechanisms to enable them to get through this period. One respondent spoke of grounding techniques such as getting out into nature, and another relied on a coaching network with fellow coach practitioners. The respondents also had a drop-off in clients and cancellation of any team building or group coaching.

As the months continued, the respondents detailed how the situation slowly began to turn around. Their clients were all remote working and were now comfortable with the virtual world and willing to resume coaching virtually. Once one-to-one coaching continued in the virtual world, the respondents began to see the positives. The move to virtual meant that sourcing clients was more accessible. The respondents experienced improved work-life balance by conducting coaching calls outside a typical 9-5 workday when required.

C7 described how they are now coaching in the evening,

“I do quite a lot of coaching in the evening. That's one of the things that's really changed. I was never coaching anybody in the evening before. People find the evening can be really helpful for them. Kids are in bed or they've got their own time for themselves”.

Zielinski (2022) believed that coaches were already transitioning from in-person to virtual coaching before the pandemic, meaning the pandemic provided additional motivation to transition. This belief is found to be valid from the findings in this study. Three out of the 8 respondents were completing a mix of in-person and virtual coaching pre-pandemic. One respondent, in particular, informed the author that they were transitioning to virtual. Once the pandemic began, all in-person coaching stopped and the virtual coaching began. The pandemic forced the coaching profession to adopt a virtual delivery

C3 informed the author they were transitioning to virtual pre-pandemic,

“I had pretty much graduated by then to virtual coaching. I was doing very little in house coaching”.

Finally, the research clarified that external societal factors could indeed have an impact on the coaching profession. In the context of this research, the external societal factor was that of the pandemic. The respondents felt coaching became more recognised and mainstream due to the pandemic as many organisations utilised coaching to support their workers during the uncertainty.

The findings of this study are similar to that of Russo (2021), who advised how coaching can improve employee engagement and well-being. The respondents felt that organisations were more aware of the positive impacts that coaching can have as a support for their employees. They noticed that the pandemic shed light on the coaching profession, and it brought coaching to the forefront for many people who had not considered having a coach before.

C1 noted,

“I think its had a huge impact, I think the amount of people that have become coaches since COVID, I don't know the numbers, but I imagine that it has multiplied”.

C1 continued to state,

“I think COVID has really brought out the importance of having a coach and I think Prince Harry has had a huge impact on the coaching world because he's putting it out there about how it's normal to have a coach”.

To conclude, the reader of this study has now been provided with a clear understanding of the respondent's coaching experience during the pandemic in Ireland. The reader has gained a novel insight into coaches' thoughts, opinions and experiences. The reader is now aware that external societal factors can impact the coaching profession and that the coaches encountered some negatives along the way; however, the positives prevailed.

6.4 Implications

As discussed, many similarities occurred concerning the pre-pandemic research and the findings. The current coaching literature broadly speaks to the pre-pandemic coaching, which we have noted as “normal times”. Part 1 of the interview asked coach's experience of coaching during normal times, and the findings are similar to those of previous authors such as Wilkens (2014) and Farmer (2015).

The findings diverge from the literature when the research enters the stage of gathering the coaches' coaching experiences during the pandemic. The current coaching literature specific to that of the pandemic is limited. The findings are therefore novel and of great value to coaching literature going forward. This study will thus contribute to the broader topic of coaching in Ireland and will be invaluable to the coaching profession. This study proves that one-to-one coaching is effective and significantly more practical when delivered online. Coach practitioners can use this research to defend their preference for delivery coaching virtually.

6.5 Limitations

Firstly, the reader must consider a geographical limitation as the respondents are coaches based in Ireland. If this research was conducted elsewhere, for example, in America, one could argue that the results may have been different. During the interview, one coach discussed how America has a “coaching culture” and coaching is more advanced and valued there than here in Ireland.

C7, advised the author that coaching is embedded in organisations in America,

“American organisations see coaching as really important. I mean, I don't barely know an American in the corporate world that hasn't got a coach”.

This is a noteworthy thought as American coaches could have experienced coaching during the pandemic differently than the coaches in Ireland.

The second limitation that is worth noting is the size of the sample. The sample size inclusive of 8 respondents was relatively large. The time taken to conduct 8 interviews and pull the patterns and themes from the data gathered was vast. Should a similar study be conducted again soon, the author advises that multiple authors work together to interview more significant numbers of coaches to deliver a truly holistic view of the coaches' experiences of coaching in Ireland during a challenging time. Eight coaches could be argued as a small representation of the thousands of coaches qualified in Ireland.

6.5 Conclusion

This chapter has discussed the findings concerning the topics outlined in the literature review for the author to reach and achieve the research objectives. The discussion shares many similarities with the literature review concerning coaching during normal times; however, it includes nuances not previously found in the coaching literature. Chapter 7 will address the conclusions and recommendations drawn from the findings and the literature review.

Chapter 7: Conclusion & Recommendations

7.1 Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is for the author to outline and state the most significant conclusions derived from the literature review and the primary research findings. The conclusions will be related to the research questions defined at the beginning of the study. Any further limitations of the study will be presented along with future recommendations for practice and research.

7.2 Literature Review Conclusions

The literature illustrated how coaching has grown in popularity over the last few years. The coaching profession has been well documented since the 1990s, and several specialisations have emerged since then (McInerney et al., 2021). In the broader field of coaching, corporate coaching, in particular, is widely recognised and researched. Corporate coaching tends to be evaluated heavily due to organisations investing in coaching for their employees and the need to prove that coaching has a positive return on investment. Nabors (2016) advised that the research demonstrates several positive effects and benefits to organisations that promote coaching internally, such as increased productivity, retention and organisational performance. Clients can expect many benefits, such as improved well-being, motivation, career development and engagement (Niza, 2020).

The literature describes coaching models and tools available to the coaches in terms of the coaching session itself (Corrie, 2013). These tools can be utilised to structure the coaching conversation to evoke a meaningful thought process by the client. Coaching tools combined with a qualified and competent coach will ensure a successful coaching session. Hammock (2011) defined coaching competencies as the abilities, behaviours and skills used to build the coach-client relationship to achieve desired outcomes. The relationship-building skill, specifically the ability to build rapport and trust with the client, is one of the essential competencies noted in the literature (Crosse, 2019).

The literature is limited to “normal times” and portrays face-to-face coaching as the favoured format for delivery. Several authors such as Lightfoot (2019), Cilliers et al. (2022) and Crawford (2021) all commanded the need for further research in the field of coaching. There was little evidence to show various coaching delivery methods and what a coaching session “looks like” Lightfoot (2019).

The literature showed that coaching has many positive impacts for organisations and clients. The literature required coaches to be trained in the core competencies and coaching models to ensure a successful intervention. However, beyond this the coaching literature began to dilute and become more evasive. Studies conducted to explore the impact of the pandemic were elusive.

7.3 Primary Research Conclusions

The primary research findings, which explored 8 coaches' coaching experiences during the pandemic, found that all coaches believed it was both an effective and practical experience. The coaches saw no change in many practices they utilised in “normal” times, such as co-creating the relationship. The coaches also didn't see any difference in clients' motivation or the outcome of the coaching itself. The coaches all noted that their clients reached their desired outcomes and met their goals.

The coaches depicted the impacts they suffered at the start of the pandemic. The coaches' well-being suffered, with one coach noting that they were unable to work then. The coaches noted some online coaching limitations, such as the loss of body language cues, and it took longer in some cases to build the relationship than in-person. Similarly, the coaches advised that team coaching or group coaching is deliverable in-person, meaning that only one-to-one coaching was viable during the pandemic.

The consensus was that coaches learned they are adaptable and resilient and overcame all obstacles to deliver effective and beneficial coaching to their clients during the pandemic. Cilliers et al. (2022) mentioned that studies analysing the effectiveness of moving from in-person to virtual delivery are lacking. This study proves that virtual delivery is effective and is now the preferred method for many coaches.

One can conclude that the pandemic has undoubtedly impacted the coaching profession. It has affected the coaching profession by bringing recognition to the practice. Many organisations are now engaging coaches as a direct impact of the pandemic to support their employees during these uncertain times. Employees look to their leaders for answers during challenging times, and those leaders also require support.

Finally, the pandemic impacted clients as many presented new concerns or goals not previously seen by the coaches. The client's well-being suffered during this time as they portrayed heightened emotions during the coaching sessions. It was a challenge for the coaches to coach clients who were experiencing severe stress in their work and personal lives.

7.4 Limitations

As stated throughout this study, the coaching literature severely lacks context-specific case studies. The author of this study wished to fill this void by conducting a study directly related to a challenging time, in this case, the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, the field of study was relatively unexplored, and the author had difficulty locating credible studies and sources for the literature review. Furthermore, the author found it extremely difficult to find participants willing to participate in the research who met the criteria, so the study is on a small scale. The author underestimated how time-consuming semi-

structured interviews would be as the data collection method. Finally, the word limit hampered the inclusion of valuable information due to the large volume of rich responses and information.

7.5 Recommendations for practice

The author draws the following recommendations for the coaching profession;

- i. It is recommended that coaches receive training on virtual platforms such as zoom and MS teams for successful coaching delivery.
- ii. It is recommended that coaches receive training on building the connection via virtual delivery. e.g. don't look into the camera at the top of the screen; look at the client and make eye contact. Don't blur your background; give the client that insight to build trust. Verbalise more frequently to understand how the client is feeling in the absence of physical cues.
- iii. It is recommended that coaching diplomas and qualifications build into their training programmes how coaches can help their clients manage stress.
- iv. It is recommended that coaches receive training on how to manage their well-being and stress levels, e.g. coping mechanisms and grounding techniques.
- v. All coaches to have access to a coaching network where they can help each other cope and get through challenging times together.

7.6 Recommendations for Future Research

The author draws the following recommendations for future research in this area;

- i. This case study was limited to 8 respondents; the author would recommend conducting an extensive investigation to gain a more in-depth understanding of the coaches' experiences.
- ii. The study interviewed coaches practising in Ireland; it is suggested that other countries be included in future research.
- iii. Given the time constraints of this study, the author would recommend a longitudinal study lasting 2-3 years. This will allow future researchers to dig deeper into the responses.
- iv. It is recommended that further research be conducted in the area of team or group coaching. An investigation should occur as to whether or not team coaching can be undertaken effectively virtually.

7.7 Conclusion

This chapter summarised the study's most important findings. It acknowledged the author's limitations and made recommendations for implementing the coaching practice and for future research. Finally, this chapter discusses how the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted coaching in Ireland. To conclude, the findings regarding pre-pandemic coaching agreed with the literature review as the views and opinions were supported. On the other hand, the findings regarding coaching during the pandemic were novel

and had not previously been explored in the literature. This resulted in insightful and valuable first-hand accounts from the coaches who coached throughout the challenging time of the pandemic.

CIPD Personal Learning Statement

Coaching is a field of study that I have become greatly aware of since the beginning of the pandemic. I moved employer during the pandemic and to my joy, joined an organisation that provides a host of supports to their workers. In my role I was tasked with implementing a coaching service offering for the workers. From here my interest grew as I began to talk to workers who have undertaken coaching and have greatly benefitted. I was interested to see that coaching was being delivered virtually during the pandemic rather than in the office space the coach had previously used. I was keen to talk to coaches directly who were coaching during this time to understand what it was like and what key learning they had gained. Based on the results, this project has evolved to become part of the evidence to show senior leaders in my organisation that coaching virtually is effective and to ensure we continue to have budget for this service going forward. I have learnt a great deal from the research, but what seemed to stick out to me the most is that all coaching sessions are different and the coach must be flexible and adaptable in their approach. You can't go into everyone coaching session with a structure that you want to follow, you must let the session flow naturally for the best results.

I have provided several recommendations based on the findings for coaching bodies to provide further training to coaches and prospective coaches in areas such as virtual delivery of coaching sessions and additionally training on how to help clients manage stress.

In terms of financial costs, adding training of this nature to the current coaching programmes will incur minimal financial cost other than resources to develop and curate the training materials. The coaching institutions will need to employ an external consultant with expertise in these specific areas to develop the materials. I would recommend employing the consultant for 10 days in order for them to fully understand the learning content and deliver high quality materials. The daily rate of the consultant will be the cost incurred here. The coaching institutions can expect to be charged a daily rate of approximately 300€ to 500€ by the consultant. Meaning the financial cost incurred will be roughly €5,000.

In terms of timelines, the external consultant will take approximately 5 days to create the training materials. For the remaining 5 days, the consultant will work with the coaching institution to upskill the in-house trainers on the materials that created. The trainers therefore will be adequately educated in this area and confident in delivering the new materials in their classes. The trainers will take the time during the Christmas break to build in the new content into the pre-existing programmes. The training will therefore be ready to be implemented into training programmes and rolled out for the first intake of prospective coaches in January 2023.

Bibliography

- Agarwal, B., 2015. *Comprehensive Research Methodology: Focused on Marketing & Applied Research*. s.l.: NEW AGE International Publishers.
- Agnieszka Bienkowska, A. K. A. S. a. K. T., 2022. COVID-19 Oriented HRM Strategies Influence on Job and Organizational Performance through Job-Related Attitudes. *PLoS ONE*, 17(4), pp. 1-29.
- al, C. e., 2022. Can virtual replace in-person coaching? Experimental evidence on teacher professional development and student learning. *Journal of Development Economics*, Volume 155, pp. 2-13.
- Allison Traylor, E. S. a. E. S., 2020. Team Coaching: Three Questions and a Look Ahead: A Systematic Literature Review. *International Coaching Psychology Review* , 15(2), pp. 54-68.
- Andrew Kinder, R. H. a. C. C., 2008. In: *Employee Well-being Support: A Workplace Resource*. West Sussex: John Wiley and Sons Ltd., pp. 285-300.
- Bachkirova, T. L. A. a. E. R., 2015. Evaluating a Coaching and Mentoring Programme: Challenges and Solutions. *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 10(2), pp. 175-189.
- Bell, C. A. S. A. C. E. L. H. a. S. J. S., 2021. Research in counselling and psychotherapy Post-COVID-19. *Counselling & Psychotherapy Research*, 21(1), pp. 3-7.
- Boysen-Rotelli, S., 2020. *An Introduction to Professional and Executive Coaching*. 2nd Edition ed. Charlotte: Information Age Publishing.
- Boysen-Rotelli, S., 2020. Executive coaching history: Growing out of organisational development. *Coaching Psychologist*, 16(2), pp. 26-34.
- Boysen-Rotelli, S., 2021. *An Introduction to Professional and Executive Coaching*. 2nd ed. Charlotte: Information Age Publishing, Inc.
- Braun, D. J., 2022. The Experience of Deep Connection in Coaching Relationships. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching & Mentoring*, pp. 173-184.
- Byrne, U., 2005. Wheel of Life - Effective Steps for Stress Management. *Business Information Review*, 22(2), pp. 123-130.
- Carey, W. D. J. P. a. G. G. C., 2011. Coaching Models for Leadership Development: An Integrative Review. *Journal of Leadership Studies*, 5(1), pp. 51-69.
- Choppin, C. C. a. J., 2021. Coaching from a distance: Exploring Video-based Online coaching. *Online Learning*, 25(4), pp. 104-124.
- Ciporen, R., 2015. The Emerging Field of Executive and Organizational Coaching: An Overview. *New Directions for Adult and Continuing Education*, Volume 148, pp. 5-15.
- Collis, J. a. H. R., 2014. *Business research*. 4th Edition ed. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Corrie, M. W. a. S., 2013. Growing the 'I' and the 'We' in Transformational Leadership: The LEAD, LEARN & GROW Model. *Coaching Psychologist*, 9(2), pp. 86-99.
- Crawford, A. C. V. H.-Y. H. T. Z. S. L. M. A. P. M.-B. a. V. B., 2021. A Comparative Analysis of Instructional Coaching Approaches: Face-to-Face versus Remote Coaching in Preschool Classrooms. *Journal of Educational Psychology*, 113(8), pp. 1609-27.

- Crosse, E., 2019. A Q Methodology Study: How do Coaches Foster the Coaching Relationship?. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching & Mentoring*, Volume 17, pp. 76-93.
- David, O. A. a. O. C., 2016. Evidence-Based Training in Cognitive-Behavioural Coaching: Can Personal Development Bring Less Distress and Better Performance?. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 44(1), pp. 12-25.
- Denicolo, P. L. T. & B.-C. K., 2016. *Introduction and orientation to constructivist research. In Constructivist approaches and research methods*. s.l.:SAGE Publications Ltd.
- Dimas, R. a. L., 2016. Team coaching: One more clue for fostering team effectiveness. *European Review of Applied Psychology*, 66(5), pp. 233-242.
- Dodi Wirawan Irawanto, K. R. N. a. K. R., 2021. Work from Home: Measuring Satisfaction between Work–Life Balance and Work Stress during the COVID-19 Pandemic in Indonesia. *Economies*, 9(3), p. 96.
- Eamon McInerney, G. S. a. A. M., 2021. Does It Last? A Systematic Review of the Enduring Effects on Managers from Executive Coaching. *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 16(2), pp. 22-50.
- Ebner, K. E.-M. S. R. S. a. S. K., 2018. Coaching as Stress-Management Intervention: The Mediating Role of Self-Efficacy in a Framework of Self-Management and Coping. *International Journal of Stress Management*, 25(3), pp. 209-33.
- Elsbach, K., 2009. *Qualitative Organizational Research - Volume 2: Best Papers From the Davis Conference on Qualitative Research*. 2nd edition ed. Charlotte: Information Age Publishing.
- Farmer, S., 2015. Making Sense of Team Coaching.. *Coaching Psychologist*, 11(2), pp. 72-80.
- Gavin, M. A. a. J., 2017. Exploring the Evolution of oaching through the Lens of Innovation. *International Journal of Evidence based Coaching & Mentoring*, 15(1), pp. 24-41.
- Gill, A., 2017. What is the perceived contribution of coaching to leaders transitioning to more senior roles in the NHS?. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*, Issue 11, pp. 70-83.
- Graf, E.-M. a. F. D., 2021. Coaching Research in 2020 -About Destinations, Journeys and Travelers (Part II). *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 16(2), pp. 6-21.
- Grant, A., 2011. Is It Time to REGROW the GROW Model? Issues Related to Teaching Coaching Session Structures. *Coaching Psychologist*, 7(2), pp. 118-26.
- Grant, A., 2012. ROI is a poor measure of coaching success: towards a more holistic approach using a well-being and engagement framework. *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*, 5(2), pp. 74-85.
- Guetterman, T., 2015. Descriptions of Sampling Practices Within Five Approaches to Qualitative Research in Education and the Health Sciences. *Forum: Qualitative Social Research.*, 16(2).
- Gupton, S. U., 2012. *Executive Coaching: A Practitioner's Guide to Creating Excellence*. California: Sage Publications.
- Gyllensten, K. S. P. E.-K. N. A. M. R. a. A. F., 2010. Experiences of Cognitive Coaching: A Qualitative Study. *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 5(2), pp. 98-108.

- Hammack, D. W. a. M., 2011. Leadership Coaching: Coaching Competencies and Best Practices. *Journal of School Leadership*, 21(3), p. 449.
- Hamurcu, Ç., 2018. Core Professional Coaching Competencies Scale. *Performance Improvement*, 57(9), pp. 36-47.
- Haneberg, L., 2016. *Coaching Basics*. 2nd Edition ed. Virginia: The Association for Talent Development.
- Hayden, D., 2021. *CIPD*. [Online] Available at: <https://www.cipd.co.uk/knowledge/fundamentals/people/development/coaching-mentoring-factsheet#6995> [Accessed 18 January 2022].
- Honsova, P., 2021. How Coachees Perceive the Coaching Process: Evidence Using Narration and Graphical Illustration. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 73(2), pp. 145-62.
- ICF Ireland, 2022. *International Coaching Federation*. [Online] Available at: <https://icfireland.com/about/> [Accessed 15 January 2022].
- ICF, 2019. *Coaching Federation*. [Online] Available at: https://coachingfederation.org/app/uploads/2021/07/Updated-ICF-Core-Competencies_English_Brand-Updated.pdf [Accessed 19 July 2022].
- Jacobus Cilliers, B. F. J. K. N. M. S. T. a. T. T., 2022. Can virtual replace in-person coaching? experimental evidence on teacher professional development and student learning. *Journal of Development Economics*, Volume 155, pp. 2-8.
- Jarosz, J., 2021. The Impact of Coaching on Well-Being and Performance of Managers and Their Teams during Pandemic. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching & Mentoring*, 19(1), pp. 4-27.
- John Adams, H. T. A. K. R. R., 2014. *Research Methods for Business and Social Science Students*. 2nd Edition ed. New Delhi: Sage Publications Pvt. Ltd.
- Jonathan Passmore, M. S. & Y.-L. L., 2018. Defining coaching psychology: debating coaching and coaching psychology definitions. *The Coaching Psychologist*, 14(2), pp. 120-123.
- Katharina Ebner, R. S. a. S. K., 2020. Incongruities between Values, Motives, and Skills: Exploring Negative Effects of Self-Exploration in Career Coaching. *British Journal of Guidance & Counselling*, 48(4), pp. 454-476.
- Kiel, F., 2015. *Return on Character : The Real Reason Leaders and Their Companies Win*. Boston: Harvard Business Review Press.
- Kirkpatrick, D., 2006. *Improving Employee Performance Through Appraisal and Coaching*. second edition ed. New York: Amacom.
- Köhler, T. A. S. a. V. B., 2022. Templates in Qualitative Research Methods: Origins, Limitations, and New Directions. *Organizational Research Methods*, 25(2), pp. 183-210.

- Kumar, R., 2015. *Research Methodology for Agricultural Economics*. New Delhi: Daya Publishing House.
- Lee, A. M. V. a. R. J., 2005. *Executive Coaching : A Guide for the HR Professional*. San Francisco: Pfeiffer.
- Levenson, A., 2009. Measuring and Maximizing the Business Impact of Executive Coaching. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 61(2), pp. 103-21.
- Lightfoot, I., 2019. Insight events in coaching sessions. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*, pp. 94-101.
- Mark Saunders, P. L. a. A. T., 2019. *Research Methods for Business Students*. 8th Edition ed. Harlow: Pearson Education.
- Merrigan, J. W. a. M., 2021. Employee Coachability: New Insights to Increase Employee Adaptability, Performance, and Promotability in Organizations. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching & Mentoring* , 19(1), pp. 121-136.
- MOHAJAN, H. K., 2020. Quantitative Research: A Successful Investigation in Natural and Social Sciences. *Journal of Economic Development, Environment & People*, 9(4), pp. 50-79.
- Mosteo, L. P. T. E. M. a. V. J. M., 2021. Coaching for Cultural Sensitivity: Content Analysis Applying Hofstede's Framework to a Select Set of the International Coach Federation's (ICF) Core Competencies. *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 16(2), pp. 51-74.
- Mukherjee, S., 2014. *Corporate Coaching: The Essential Guide*. New Delhi: Sage Publications Pvt. Ltd.
- Nabors, V. B.-M. a. L. K., 2016. *Building a Coaching Organization*. Virginia: Association for Talent Development.
- Newman PA, G. A. B. T., 2021. Ethical Considerations for Qualitative Research Methods During the COVID-19 Pandemic and Other Emergency Situations: Navigating the Virtual Field.. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods.*, 20(12), pp. 2-9.
- Niza, G. K. S. a. I., 2020. Coaching and Employee Performance: The Mediating Effect of Rewards & Recognition in Malaysian Corporate Context. *International Journal of Management, Accounting & Economics*, 7(1), pp. 41-72.
- Ove Granstrand, P. P. a. K. P., 1997. Multi-Technology Corporations: WHY THEY HAVE 'DISTRIBUTED' RATHER THAN 'DISTINCTIVE CORE' COMPETENCIES. *California Management Review*, 39(4), pp. 8-25.
- Panchal, S. a. P. R., 2020. the GROWS Model: Extending the GROW Coaching Model to Support Behavioural Change. *Coaching Pyschologist*, 16(2), pp. 12-24.
- Passmore, B. V. D. A. a. J., 2022. How experienced coaches use mindfulness in practice and how they know it is useful or beneficial. *Consulting Psychology Journal*, 74(1), pp. 116-141.
- Patil, A. D. a. S. H. S., 2021. A Study on Preventive Way of Stress Management in Work Place. *Ilkogretim Online*, 20(6), pp. 391-95.

- Rabionet, S., 2011. How I Learned to Design and Conduct Semi-structured Interviews: *The Qualitative Report*, 16(3), pp. 563-566.
- Rapley, E., 2018. Seeing the Light.' Personal Epiphanies and Moving towards Interpretivism; a Researcher's Tale of Exploring Teacher Pedagogic Practice. *Ethnography & Education*, 13(2), pp. 185-203.
- Rhonda Berry, J. A. P. G. a. K. M., 2011. A Comparison of Face-to-Face and Distance Coaching Practices: Coaches' Perceptions of the Role of the Working Alliance in Problem Resolution. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 63(4), pp. 243-253.
- Rob D. Mitchell, G. M. O. G. A. P. T. S. N. R., 2020. Developing a research question: A research primer for low- and middle-income countries. *African Journal of Emergency Medicine*, 10(2), pp. 109-114.
- Robert Hamlin, A. E. a. R. B., 2008. The Emergent 'Coaching Industry': A Wake-up Call for HRD Professionals. *Human Resource Development International*, 11(3), pp. 287-305.
- Roberts, R., 2020. Qualitative Interview Questions: Guidance for Novice Researchers. *The Qualitative Report*, 25(9), pp. 3185-3203.
- Roulston, K., 2014. *The SAGE handbook of Qualitative Data Analysis*. s.l.:SAGE Publications LTD.
- Russo, A. F. a. S. D., 2021. An Experimental Field Study on the Effects of Coaching: The Mediating Role of Psychological Capital. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 70(2), pp. 459-488.
- Sheedy, C., 2022. The Great Resignation. *Journal of the Australian & New Zealand Institute of Insurance & Finance*, 45(1), pp. 6-10.
- Sheila Boysen, M. C. W. A. M. T., 2018. Organisational Coaching Outcomes: A comparison of a practitioner survey and key findings from the literature. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*, 16(1), pp. 159-166.
- Smith, T. B. a. C. L., 2015. From Competencies to Capabilities in the Assessment and Accreditation of Coaches. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching & Mentoring*, 13(2), pp. 123-140.
- Snehashis, S. K. a. N., 2021. Employee Engagement: Factors and Recommendations for Enhancing Employee Engagement during Covid-19 Pandemic. *Journal of Strategic Human Resource Management*, 10(3), pp. 25-32.
- Suter, N., 2012. *Introduction to Educational Research: A Critical Thinking Approach*. s.l.:SAGE Publications Inc..
- Tim Chapman, L. P. T. S., 2020. *Coaching Winning Sales Teams : Insights From the World of Sport and Business*. 1st Edition ed. Bingley: Emerald Publishing Limited.
- Vartanian, T., 2011. *Secondary Data Analysis*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Walle, A., 2015. *Qualitative Research in Business: A Practical Overview*. Newcastle Upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars Publishing.
- Wilkins, S. S. R. a. N., 2014. *Leadership Coaching for Results : Cutting-Edge Practices for Coach and Client*. Second Edition ed. Randburg: KR Publishing.

Williams, M. a. T. M., 2019. The Art of Coding and Thematic Exploration in Qualitative Research. *International Management Review*, 15(1), pp. 45-55.

Zielinski, D., 2022. VIRTUAL COACHING TAKES OFF: Scalable Technology Platforms Can Help Expand Access to Coaching. *HRMagazine*, 67(2), p. 20.

Appendices

Appendix 1. Research Information Sheet

Required Interviewee Profile:

The interviewee must meet the below criteria;

1. Holds a recognised Coaching accreditation
2. Currently practicing in Ireland
3. Has been conducting one to one coaching for a substantial period of time prior to the pandemic
4. Has been conducting one to one coaching throughout the pandemic
5. The interviewee is either an Executive Coach, Career Coach, Life Coach, Personal Coach or similar

Subject of research:

“Coaching during Challenging Times: An Exploratory study into the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Coaching in Ireland”

Research Aims:

While the effectiveness of coaching has been extensively explored, it is obvious that there is a large study gap in terms of how coaches feel about coaching during unprecedented and challenging times. It is important to gather data to understand if the practice of coaching experienced any impact due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These are times where pressures, stress and anxiety of the clients are at an all time high. Not only are the coaches coaching during an abnormally challenging time for clients but also a challenging time for themselves. Therefore, the central aim of this research is to explore the practice of coaching during times of crisis and uncertainty. The research will discuss from the coaches perspective their insights and experiences of coaching during the pandemic in comparison to coaching pre pandemic.

Research Objectives:

The research aims to explore and gather a deeper understanding from coaching professionals in Ireland their experience of coaching during a crisis, in this study the crisis being the COVID-19 pandemic.

By exploring the coaches experiences and identifying any notable impact, the researcher aims to provide insights not readily available in the current coaching literature. This study can be utilised by coaches and particularly coaches who will become accredited in the future for professional development purposes to gain an understanding of what coaching during a crisis can entail.

Structure of the Interview:

1. Semi-structured, open-ended questioning (you will receive questions in advance)
2. Approximately 30-45 minutes in duration
3. Interviews will be recorded via MS teams and conducted virtually
4. Interviewees will remain anonymous and will not be identifiable in the published dissertation

Pre-Interview:

You will be expected sign and return the consent form and to review the questions in advance of the virtual interview.

Post-Interview:

1. The recordings and interview materials will be retained until the dissertation final grade has been received.
2. Once the dissertation final grade has been received all materials and recordings will be destroyed
3. Anonymity and confidentiality will be maintained throughout the process
4. Should you be interested in receiving a copy of the final dissertation please let the researcher know and this will be sent via email

Appendix 2. Interview Consent Form

I volunteer to participate in a research project conducted by Nicola Kingston as part of her Masters of Art in Human Resource Management.

I have agreed to take part in a study related to the following research title:

‘Coaching during Challenging times: An Exploratory study into how the COVID-19 Pandemic impacted Coaching in Ireland’

I will be one of several people being interviewed for this research.

1. My participation in this project is voluntary. I understand that I will not be paid for my participation.
2. I may withdraw and discontinue participation at any time without penalty.
3. If, I feel uncomfortable in any way during the interview session, I have the right to decline to answer any question or to end the interview.
4. Participation involves being interviewed by Nicola Kingston virtually via MS Teams. The interview will last approximately 30-45 minutes.
5. I am aware that the interview will be recorded and transcribed. If I don't want to be recorded, I will not be able to participate in the study.
6. I agree that any information provided by me during the recording may be referenced unless I specify otherwise.
7. I understand that the researcher will not identify me by name in any reports using information obtained from this interview, and that my confidentiality as a participant in this study will remain secure.
8. I understand that the identity of the coaches participating in the research will not be revealed to each other.
9. I have read and understand the explanation provided to me. I have had all my questions answered to my satisfaction, and I voluntarily agree to participate in this study.
10. I am aware that all data gathered will be securely stored and will not be accessible to anyone other than the interviewer and interviewee.
11. I am aware that I will not be named in any part of the research.
12. I agree that the video and audio recording of the interview, short hand notes and transcriptions will be destroyed upon receipt of final grade (date TBC).
13. I agree that my involvement is voluntary and if I so choose, I can withdraw from the process at any stage and accordingly request that my data is destroyed immediately.

Name of Interviewee:

Signature of Interviewee:

Appendix 3. Interview Questions

The Study:

“Coaching during Challenging Times: An Exploratory Study into the impact of the COVID-19 Pandemic on Coaching in Ireland”

Introduction:

Gender:

Age:

Years of Experience Coaching:

Coaching Accreditation:

Areas of Specialisation:

Part 1: Coaching Pre Pandemic

1. Tell me what coaching was like for you pre pandemic?
2. How did you foster the coaching relationship with clients pre pandemic?
3. Describe your typical coaching style pre pandemic? Can you name coaching models/techniques that you would regularly utilise with clients?
4. Describe the common themes/goals why clients came to you for coaching pre pandemic?
5. Any additional thoughts on how practical and effective coaching was for you as a Coach pre pandemic?

Part 2: Coaching during the Pandemic

1. Tell me what coaching was like for you during the pandemic? Did anything change for you?
2. Did the way in which you fostered the coaching relationship with clients remain the same?
3. Did your coaching style remain the same? Describe the models/techniques you utilised?
4. Did the themes/goals for clients coming to you for coaching remain the same? Did you face anything you had not yet come across?
5. As a Coach did your wellbeing/stress levels differ prior to the pandemic?
6. Did your clients wellbeing/stress levels differ prior to the pandemic?
7. Did clients motivation waver in anyway?
8. Did clients reach their goals and achieve their desired outcomes during the pandemic?
9. Any additional thoughts on how practical and effective coaching was for you as a Coach during the pandemic?

Part 3: The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on Coaching

1. Do you believe that external societal factors can have an overall impact on Coaching?
2. Did the pandemic impact you as a Coaching practitioner?
3. Did the pandemic impact your clients?
4. What are the two main learnings/takeaways you will take with you into the future from coaching during this challenging time?