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# Voices of the Coached: Conversations with Those Who Have Participated in Executive Coaching

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**VOICES OF THE COACHED:**  
CONVERSATIONS WITH THOSE WHO HAVE PARTICIPATED IN  
EXECUTIVE COACHING

**A Dissertation**

**Submitted to the Faculty of the University of St. Thomas**

By Scott Trevor Morrell

**In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements  
For the Degree of Doctor of Education**

October, 2011

Voices of the Coached:  
Conversations With Those Who Have Participated in Executive Coaching

We certify that we have read this dissertation and approved it as adequate in scope and quality. We have found that it is complete and satisfactory in all respects, and that any and all revisions required by the final examining committee have been made.

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## Acknowledgements

I initiated this scholarly journey with the intent to better understand the experience of leaders who engage in executive coaching. No effort of this magnitude is done alone. Several significant individuals shaped the various stages of my academic pursuit within this publication. Therefore, I wish to provide my written gratitude and indebtedness to those individuals who contributed to my study.

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experience of leaders who engaged in executive coaching as a leadership development initiative. Through Interpretive Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), six participants, three women and three men, shared their experience of the client side of executive coaching. Data collected through one-on-one interviews provided rich descriptions of the client's perceptions during their coaching engagement. Thematic findings include three Super-Ordinate themes: A Hope & Faith in the Coaching Process, The Journey and Memory Book. Sub-themes under Hope & Faith in the Coaching Process: investment in me, know oneself, expect the unexpected, and ascension. Sub-themes under The Journey: attending, facing warts, freckles and scars, Johari Window, and leader as humanitarian. Sub-themes under Memory Book: nostalgia, self-reflection, client-coach fit and still learning. The three Super-Ordinate themes and sub-themes provide significant insight to the lived experience of leaders in coaching. The research provides recommendations to organizations who may hire a coach, to the executive who is new to coaching or a veteran of coaching, and to the executive coach. Future research is suggested for both positivistic and interpretive studies.

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## Chapter 1

The International Coaching Federation (ICF), considered the largest representative body of coaches with 18,000 coaches in 100 countries, is a growing body of leadership development professionals (International Coaching Federation, 2011). Since its inception in 1995, ICF has experienced significant growth in membership, with a commensurate increase in coaching revenues, due largely to the popularity of the practice of coaching across the globe. Some have suggested that executive coaching annual revenues are near a billion dollars (Liljenstrand & Nebeker, 2008; Stober & Grant, 2006; Valerio & Lee, 2004). Other sources suggest higher figures with 29,000 coaches generating up to \$2 billion dollars annually (Pennington, 2009). These numbers suggest positive trends for the executive coaching industry, yet there is much to understand about the organizations and the individuals who use executive coaches. Specifically, the voice of the client is a missing piece of the burgeoning executive coaching puzzle.

Organization and individual use of executive coaching has matured over the last two decades. Prior to the 1990s, executive coaching was used primarily for the problem employee or to correct valued employee who displayed derailing behaviors (Joo, 2005; Liljenstrand & Nebeker, 2008). If maladaptive behaviors were not corrected through executive coaching, termination generally followed (Peterson, 2009). This punitive paradigm of executive coaching is not as prevalent today (Valerio & Lee, 2005). Where once coaching was a negative stereotype, today coaching is considered “a badge of honor” (Charan, 2009, p. 28). Some suggest having an executive coach is a “status symbol” within Corporate America (McKenna & Davis, 2009, p. 244).

## **Statement of the Problem**

On the client side, there is a growing body of quantitative knowledge about who engages in executive coaching, how long they use the coaching service, frequency of the engagement, prerequisites desired in a coach's background, the motivation for hiring a coach, and the impact of the coaching leadership development experience on the organization (Kaufmann & Couto, 2009; Levenson, 2009). Kaufmann and Couto (2009) and Levenson (2009) provided informative quantitative data for coach practitioners, human resource professionals, organization development consultants, and consumers of executive coaching. Although quantitative research is an important element in the decision making process, less is known qualitatively about the "lived experience" of those who have been coached. Additionally, much of the executive coaching literature suggests a gap in understanding of the coachees' perspective (Joo, 2005). Leading researchers such as Kilburg (2004) noted that "what happens in coaching remains quite mysterious" (p.204). Kilburg's assertion attempted to gain understanding about what takes place in coaching, unmasking the mystery of the engagement and describing what interpretations are shared by the coached. Due to a lack of depth in the scholarly literature additional research is needed to better understand the coachees' interpretations of their coaching experience.

## **Researcher Interest**

I became interested in executive coaching in the late 1990s, about the time when the mass media associated coaching with personal growth, leadership development, and psychological counseling. Executive coaching, as I understood it at the time, paralleled some interests and skills I had to offer leaders who were looking for leadership development intervention. Executive coaching is a helping process and I am a helper; I remember countless times when colleagues asked my opinion on professional matters I received both solicited and unsolicited

feedback indicating I had a talent for asking provocative questions. Questions that invited the other person to think, reframe, and generally confirm what they often already knew about themselves. Although I may not have known what to call it at the time, it seemed I had the makings of an executive coach in terms of both natural abilities and in techniques I learned in my education and life experiences. In 2005, still at the beginnings of my doctoral studies in organization development, I began to chart a course in the direction of becoming an executive coach. I also decided that my dissertation research would center on executive coaching.

I have been an executive coach for three years. During that time I have observed that my organization and individual coaching clients vary significantly in their motivations for seeking coaching. Some had transitioned or were transitioning into new roles within their company and wanted an external sounding board. Others expressed a need for a coach to keep them on track during a career change. Organizations I've worked with were often looking for a coach to help, keep their leaders sharp and on a path to continual growth. Whatever the client motivations – or even the motivations of the client's organization – the client (also known as the coachee) typically enters into a partnership where problems and even solutions are not always clear. Regardless of the client or organization motivations, the coaching partnership is a relationship built on immense mutual trust in each other and in the coaching process itself. Clients trust that they will receive honest feedback, will be held accountable to their objectives, and will be working with a partner who is focused on their professional and/or personal goals. In my observation, an instillation of hope sometimes seems to be the only thing coaches can offer their clients. In a nutshell, the relationship between a coach and a client is a sacred relationship.

## **Purpose of the Study**

The purpose of this study was to better understand the experience of organizational leaders who engage in executive coaching. In each of the cases presented, coaching was suggested by the subjects' immediate supervisor, an external leadership development consultant, or a third party who believed that coaching as a leadership development activity would be useful to the coaching client. Using face-to-face interviews, I interviewed six coachees about their coaching experience. The study was designed to capture the meaning a participant gives to the experience of being coached. As McKenna and Davis (2009) suggested, "The client's view is pivotal" (p. 251). It is the clients' own voice that provides insights into the practice of executive coaching.

## **Research Questions**

The study was guided by a primary research question and reinforced by two sub-questions. The main question was, "What is the lived experience and psychological meaning-making process of the participant in coaching?" A guiding assumption to this main interpretative research question was the supposition that each participant makes meaning of his/her own reality in coaching. In other words, just as each of us has our own "lens" to view the world, so does each of us have a unique interpretation on any given phenomenon (Moustakas, 1994). To take this concept further, no two participants will have the exact same meaning or interpretation of their coaching experience (Moustakas, 1994). Two sub-questions followed the main research question. First, "How does the lived experience influence the participant's reality inside coaching?" Second, "How does the lived experience influence the participant's reality outside coaching?" The purpose for these two questions was to understand how coachees comprehend coaching inside and outside of the sessions.

## Definitions

I wish to be clear to the reader about the terminology used in this research. In some instances specific external sources were applied to terms and in other cases I assigned my own definitions to particular terms. Primary terms include: *lived experience*, *psychological*, *meaning-making*, *participant*, and *executive coaching*.

When I use the term *lived experience* I am supporting what others have advanced, namely that *lived experience* is one's subjective interaction with a particular phenomenon under scrutiny (Creswell, 2007; Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). In this study I intended to understand the subject's lived experience of participating in executive coaching. I desired to capture their interpretations as they lived them actively and consciously.

*Psychological* is a term used in many ways in contemporary conversations. For clarity it is useful to understand *psychological* as a person's cognitive processing of stimulus received from the environment. It is a person's directed cognitive functioning and processing of the world around them. It is one's perspective as they understand the world (Myers, 2010).

*Meaning-making* has been framed as one's understanding of a given phenomenon. That said, two or more individuals could have conflicting *meaning-making* of the same event. Allowances were made in conflicting interpretations since what was key was the individual's understanding and not a collective or shared understanding of an event.

The specific meaning of *participant* in this study referred to the client who received the executive coaching from either an internal coach or external executive coach. Of note is the duality in the relationship where the coach is the entity charged to facilitate the process while the *participant* actively engages in the process.

The term *coach* dates back to the 16<sup>th</sup> century when a coach was a horse drawn carriage used in transportation of persons of value (Witherspoon & White, 1996). There is no universal agreement on the definition of executive coaching. No one definition has been advanced outlining executive coaching in organizational practice (Bartlett, 2007; Gregory, Levy, & Jeffers, 2008; Joo, 2005; Pennington, 2009). Definitions of executive coaching differ in emphasis from Peterson (1996) who advances a process-oriented experience where tools, information, and opportunities bring together client and coach, to Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson (2001) who suggest personal performance is enhanced when systematic feedback is implemented in the relationship, and Kaufmann and Couto (2009) who proclaim coaching is a confidential association where the relationship is leveraged between the client and the sponsoring organization. Common to the various definitions are one-to-one relationships, goal-oriented outcomes, change in behaviors, and learning (ICF, 2009, Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001; Orenstein, 2002; and Peterson, 1996).

The following is a brief record that reflects the diversity of executive coaching definitions. Kilburg (1996) noted that executive coaching is:

...a helping relationship formed between a client who has managerial authority and responsibility in an organization and a consultant who uses a wide variety of behavioral techniques and methods to help the client achieve a mutually identified set of goals to improve his or her professional performance and personal satisfaction and, consequently, to improve the effectiveness of the client's organization within a formally defined coaching agreement. (p. 142)



Ennis, Stern, Goodman, and Otto (2008) advanced:

...executive coaching and the partnership required for maximum success. We believe executive coaching is most successful as a three-way partnership among coach, executive, and the executive's organization. Each partner has an obligation and responsibility to contribute to the success of the coaching process. Although the primary work is between executive and coach, coaching is always an organizational intervention and, as such, should be conducted within the context of the organization's goals and objectives. (p. 16).

Bluckert (2005) suggested "coaching is the facilitation of learning and development with the purpose of improving performance, and enhancing effective action, goal achievement and personal satisfaction." (p. 171).

Kaufmann and Couto (2009) refer to coaching as "a confidential, individually-tailored, engagement designed to meet the needs both of the executive being coached and the organization paying for the service" (p. 3). Here again the organization is mentioned, suggesting evolution in the definition with concern beyond the clients themselves.

In Sperry's (2008) definition of executive coaching one observes the emergence of organizational impact:

A form of executive consultation in which a trained professional, mindful of organizational dynamics, functions as a facilitator who forms a collaborative relationship with an executive to improve his or her skills and effectiveness in communicating the corporate vision and goals, and to foster better team performance, organizational productivity, and professional-personal development. There are three types of such

coaching: skill-based, performance-based, and developmental executive coaching. (p. 36).

### **Significance of the Study**

Capturing participants' interpretations of coaching was insightful for me professionally. This study aligned well with my professional work as an Organization Development consultant and executive coach. While executive coaching is not the sole focus of my consultation practice, I have an active pool of clients who engage me as their executive coach. Clients typically use my coaching services for their professional and personal development. I have marveled at clients who spend their own time and resources seeking out coaching services and executive coaching relationships. In my experience, while client motivations differ, the reasons most people have for seeking coaching services center around several general themes: a desire for professional or personal growth, a goal of personal mastery over a defined goal, a need for genuine and authentic feedback, a trusting relationship, or a non-judgmental colleague, and a need or desire to gather insights from someone outside of their immediate organization. Although the motivations differed significantly by client, I found I had deeper questions that surfaced in my past coaching relationships that needed to be addressed.

This study on the interpretations of coaching from the voices of participants may be helpful to a wide audience that includes leadership development practitioners, organization development consultants, and human resource development practitioners, coaching preparatory program facilitators and developers, and others who practice and use executive coaching.

Those who practice executive coaching are likely to be more informed about their clients' experience. A holistic understanding of the client upon entry into the coaching relationship might mean collection of employment history, relevant personal information, values held,

strengths exercised, aspirations identified, and meaningful content shared by the client (Feldman & Lankau, 2005; Kiel, Rimmer, Williams & Doyle, 1996). Also important should be a firm understanding on the participants' perceptions and interpretation of the coaching process (Diedrich, 2004; Stevens, 2005). As coaches prepare for their clients, they may ask themselves about how the client is interpreting the coaching engagement. The client-coach relationship can be enhanced when coaches have an understanding and appreciation of how the clients view their own world (Sheth, 2000; Stevens, 2005). In a sense, I believe coaches will be able to “get into the skin” of their clients.

Theory development and coaching models may also be impacted as a result of this study. Although it is not the purpose of this study to test a theory or set of coaching theories, qualitative approaches can be inspirational for development of theories (Creswell, 2007). I expect that my efforts will inspire both quantitative and qualitative studies in the future.

Finally, as Chapter 2 – A Review of the Literature will demonstrate, there is a need for qualitative research on the participants' perspective in coaching. An imbalance of positivistic quantitative research has already been provided on coaching methods, models, and approaches (Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001; Kauffman & Couto, 2009). We know a considerable amount about who coaches are, where they are trained, their credentials, the terms of engagement used, and marketing methods for securing coaching engagements. A natural progression for a knowledge base of coaching has first concentrated on the providers themselves. It is a good time to capture the participants' interpretations of coaching.

### **Assumptions**

It is necessary to present some guiding assumptions inherent in my study. First, an underlying assumption I brought to this study was that participants would be honest in sharing

interpretations of coaching. Because coaching is generally a psychologically insightful and meaningful experience, I believed subjects would be eager to talk about their experience. I presumed subjects interviewed would be interested in talking to a third party who is studying the dynamics of executive coaching. In reality, I think my selection process screened out those who were not interested in participating in the study, so I believe willing participants in the study were those who I ultimately interviewed.

Another assumption in the study was the tendency for the participants to share *natural attitudes* (Husserl, 1927) on their executive coaching experience. A *natural attitude* is concerned with the day-to-day realities of one's life rather than attending to the internal world of one's perceptions. Accompanying this *natural attitude*, I assumed clients would possibly share the name of the coach, the dates of the service, where they met, items worked on in the coaching relationship, and basic superficial facts. However, this *natural attitude* is not the phenomenological perspective I sought to understand and ultimately capture in the study. Rather, using Husserl's (1927) work and the concept of *natural attitudes* as a foundation, a *phenomenological attitude* was what I aimed to hear when listening to the experience of and meaning-making of the coachee. A *phenomenological attitude* is that which lays deeper into one's awareness, it is where perceptions and interpretations are stored (Husserl, 1927).

### **Organization of the Study**

The introduction discussed the purpose of my study as an exploration of the client's lived experience in executive coaching. My rationale and motivations for capturing the nature of an individual's interpretations of coaching are cited along with the underlying research questions. The significance of the study was discussed by presenting: how my findings could influence coaching theory development, how I had hoped to be impacted by the study, and how themes

from my study may instruct coaching as a practice. Executive Coaching definitions were presented to aid readers in understanding the range of interpretations.

In Chapter Two, A Review of the Literature, I present a brief overview of executive coaching literature to provide research context. Others have provided more extensive literature reviews on executive coaching which are beyond the scope of this qualitative study (Grant, 2008; Liljenstrand & Nebeker, 2008). Specifically presented will be (a) a deeper explanation of executive coaching, (b) effectiveness of coaching, (c) models of executive coaching, (d) coaching practices, and (e) known coach and client perspectives.

In Chapter Three, Research Methods, I detail the interpretative study including (a) sampling procedures, (b) how I recruited subjects for the study, (c) a snapshot of the six participants eventually interviewed, (d) a broad profile of each interview case including recommendations to executive coaches, (e) my role as the sole researcher, (f) data collection procedures, (g) data analysis procedures, (h) validity checks conducted, and (i) ethical issues.

Chapter Four, Findings, reviews qualitative data gathered from interviews on the lived experience of those who participated in executive coaching. Three Super-Ordinate themes and 12 supporting themes are discussed in depth. Short narratives from the interview are included as reinforcement of the identified themes. Finally, a graphic representation of the client's lived experience as a client in executive coaching is provided.

Chapter Five, Discussion, includes (a) discussion of the themes, (b) implications of the findings, (c) future research recommendations, and (d) personal insights gained from the study.

## Chapter 2: A Review of the Literature

In Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009), a concise literature review helps to identify the topic to the reader, provide possible gaps in the literature, and is essentially evaluative of what exists. The literature review that follows is not an exhaustive effort as is traditionally expected in other research methodologies (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Rather, I will discuss the understanding of what executive coaching is as a professional practice, provide an overview on the impact of executive coaching in terms of the current literature, discuss coaching models as a way to gain understanding of the various coaching approaches, present coaching practices that exemplify the state of executive coaching today and finally, present research on what is known from the perspective of the coach and coachee.

### What is Executive Coaching?

At this time there does not appear to be consensus on coaching as a recognized profession; rather coaching is seen as an intervention used by helping professions such as organization development consultants, human resource development leaders, former executives, psychologists, and other helping professionals (Bennet, 2006). Consequently, it is constructive for the reader in this literature review to differentiate the *practice of coaching* (i.e., a manager who coaches a subordinate) from *coaching as a practice* (i.e., an organized profession). It is not the scope of this literature review and dissertation study to provide scholarly material specific to managers who coach subordinates (i.e., *practice of coaching*). Instead, a brief discussion will be presented on *coaching as practice* (i.e., the executive coaching profession) and what is evident in the literature.

Bennett (2006) cites that coaching lacks several elements to justify consideration as a professional practice. Among the items Bennett identifies for recognition of a profession are: (a) Identifiable and distinct skills, (b) Education and training required for proficiency, (c) Recognition outside the community as a profession, (d) Developed, monitored, and enforced code of ethics by a governing body making the profession a self-disciplined group, (e) Public service, (f) Formalized organization, (g) Evaluation of merit and self-regulating, encouraging diversity of thought, evaluation, and practice, (h) Established community of practitioners, (i) Status or state recognition, (j) Public recognition from outside the practicing community that the profession is distinct and actually in existence, and (k) Practice founded in theoretical and factual research and knowledge (p. 241-242).

Bennett (2006) suggests each item needs to be addressed for coaching to develop as a legitimate practice. Yet, most lacking in Bennett's (2006) estimation as well as in the estimation of other authors, is the scholarly literature reinforcing coaching's legitimacy as a standalone profession (Feldman & Lankau, 2005; Joo, 2005; Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001).

Conversely, recent authors suggest a building momentum for theoretical and empirical research to address this knowledgebase shortage. Grant (2008) provides the most recent and comprehensive literature review on executive coaching. Grant (2008) states that, of the 428 articles published on executive coaching since 1937, 335 of the 428 were published after the year 2000. The years between 1937 and 1999 saw only 93 articles published which suggests that a momentum has been building for theoretical and empirical research in the last decade.

Despite growing demands for executive coaching, no clear consensus differentiates executive coaching and other forms of helping such as therapy, counseling, or mentoring (Feldman & Lankau, 2005; Sperry, 2008; Stevens, 2005). Executive coaching tends to focus on

the work environment but non-work issues do creep into the coaching conversation (Feldman & Lankau, 2005). Therapy and counseling should be thought of as a process where a licensed psychologist clinically treats individuals for emotional and behavioral problems (Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001). Mentoring should be understood as an internal process where a senior member of an organization is paired with a junior member for the purpose of transmission of knowledge, skills, and attitudes of that organization (Feldman & Lankau, 2005). Some suggest that what makes coaching different is a future focus, one that is concerned with personal performance in the business environment and one that teaches participants to decide their own futures (Kaufmann & Coutu, 2009; Grant, 2009).

### **Is Executive Coaching Effective?**

A significant theme arising in the literature worthy of mention, even in an interpretative phenomenological study, is a strident plea for evidence that executive coaching works (Joo, 2005; Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001; Levenson, 2009; Mackie, 2007; Wasylyshyn; 2003). It seems execution of coaching as practice has preceded sound theory yet some suggest executive coaching is indeed having an impact on the organization and can be measured empirically (Evers, Brouwers, & Tomic, 2006; MacKie, 2007; Orenstein, 2006; and Wasylyshyn, Gronsky & Haas, 2006). Strain on organizations to maintain competitiveness has influenced coaching as an intervention and questions certainly will arise about its impact (Joo, 2005).

### **Models of Executive Coaching**

Various coaching models are being constructed from practitioners of executive coaching. A Cognitive-Behavioral model (Ducharme, 2004) advances the notion that one's cognitions (perceptions about an object or event) influence behaviors (actions taken on perceptions).



Coaching agreements that require quantifiable results, skill refinement, reduction in maladaptive behavior, and stress management are optimal for a Cognitive-Behavioral approach.

Somewhat related to the Cognitive-Behavioral model is the Rational-Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) model (Sherin & Caiger, 2004). This approach differs from the Cognitive-Behavioral Model in the concentration on irrational beliefs in order to alter maladaptive behaviors. The REBT model is suggested for use as a short-term intervention when concentration on one objective is needed.

An Action Frame Theory (Cocivera & Cronshaw, 2004) has been inspired by social action whereby recognition of the environmental factors comprises the starting and ending points. The model is mindful of *the current state* and *the future state* as desired by the client's organization. Surface level problems are acknowledged but deeper unconscious motives are more thoroughly examined.

Another unconsciously focused model is the Psychodynamic Approach or Psychoanalytical Coaching approach (Arnaud, 2003; Kilburg, 2004). Inspired by Freudian psychodynamic theory, in this approach the client's unconscious motives and beliefs are examined. Executive coaches must know when to explore more deeply into subconscious issues and when this is best left for licensed psychologists or psychotherapists. A prerequisite for this psychodynamic model is that clients willingly choose to explore these unconscious factors.

A Humanistic Coaching model (Bartlett, 2006) would suggest the client does not need the coach as an expert with specific knowledge or process experience such as a clinical perspective would require. Rather, as suggested by Flaherty (2005), clients have the knowledge of self-generation and self-development. The coach becomes a partner in the client's growth rather than one who provides guided solutions. Similarly, Neurolinguistic Programming (NLP), a branch of

Humanistic Psychotherapy, suggests clients make their own meaning and have personal experiences to inform their reality (McDermott & Jago, 2001). The coach essentially plays a reflective role.

A model that blends several traditions such as a psychodynamic, behaviorist, or humanistic approaches is an Eclectic Model of executive coaching (Turner & Goodrich, 2010). Here the executive coach draws from multiple disciplines within psychology and other social science fields. The executive coach has no reliance on or dependence toward one tradition. Information presented from the client, the client's organization, or other sources informs which model might be best used in a coaching relationship.

Joo (2005) provides a conceptual model of coaching effectiveness (see Figure 1). The model has four stages; each stage contains a particular set of dynamics unique to that stage. The four stages are: Antecedents, Process, Proximal Outcomes, and Distal Outcomes. Three factors are presented in the Antecedent stage: Coaching Characteristics, Coachee Characteristics, and Organizational Support. The Coaching Approach, Coaching Relationship, and Feedback Receptivity are evident in the Process stage. It should be noted that Joos' model is dependent on the coaching process and it "is central to the conceptual framework" (Joo, 2005, p. 279). The Proximal Outcomes stage is where Self-Awareness and Learning occur. Joo (2005) suggests this stage is where one observes Behavioral Changes in the client. Finally, the Distal Outcomes of the coaching engagement are presented in the client's Individual Success and Organizational Success.

<u>Antecedents</u>	<u>Process</u>	<u>Proximal Outcomes</u>	<u>Distal Outcomes</u>
Coach Characteristics	Coaching Approach	Self-Awareness	Individual Success
Coachee Characteristics	Coaching Relationship	(Behavioral Change)	
Organizational Support	Feedback Receptivity	Learning	Organizational Success

*Figure 1. A Conceptual Framework for Successful Executive Coaching*

### **Coaching Practices**

Liljenstrand and Nebeker (2008) examined 2,231 coaching practices. This recent landmark study provides a robust industry analysis mentioned frequently in the scholarly literature. Several items on both the coaching and client side were examined in order to gain a better quantitative understanding of what is happening across the globe. Coach characteristics gathered include the following: attributes (e.g., gender, academic background, age, and experience), attitudes toward certification/licensure, and ethics. Client information gathered, albeit from the coaches, included: how clients found their coaches, industries served, client goals, client assessment, session format (face-to-face versus telephone), time spent coaching (per week), engagement length (length of the relationship), session frequency and length, session fees paid by client or sponsoring organization, concurrent clients, client referrals, and evaluation methods and follow-up. The findings provide insights regarding the coaches themselves and provide evidence on who is using executive coaching and why.

While not as comprehensive as Liljenstrand and Nebeker (2008), another noteworthy meta-review of 26 documents by Bennett (2006) suggests much more data, both quantitative and qualitative, is needed on executive coaching. Themes suggested by Liljenstrand and Nebeker (2008) to be comprehensively explored include: the client/coach relationship, theories and

practices of teaching coaching, coaching outcomes, process of coaching, characteristics of effective coaches, characteristics of effective clients, and a clearer definition of coaching.

### **Client Perspectives**

A call for participants' perspectives has been raised suggesting qualitative contributions are sorely needed (Diedrich, 2004; Freedman & Stinson, 2004). Diedrich (2004) reminds executive coaches, consultants, psychologists, and any and all helpers to "start where the client is" (p. 129) and get back to basics in the helping process. Such invitations suggest that sharpening one's coaching skills leads to a better understanding of the client's perspective, client motivations, and interpretations of the coaching engagement. The invitation [to get back to basics in the helping process] has stemmed from an imbalance of coach perspectives while somewhat ignoring or at least minimizing the client's voice (Dierich, 2004). The literature does not suggest this imbalance has been intentional but rather symptomatic of an emerging profession (Joo, 2005).

The client's perspective has not been totally silent in the literature. Accounts have been shared that shed light on the content of conversations, the processes taken, and outcomes achieved within the coaching relationship (Diedrich, 2004; Kiel, Rimmer, Williams, & Doyle, 1996; Peterson & Millier, 2005; Peterson, 1996; Stevens, 2005). Case study content describing the client-coach relationship varied. Peterson (1996) provided multiple coach-specific perspectives and only one paragraph of client perspectives on the coaching relationship. Kiel, Rimmer, Williams, and Doyle (1996) provide even less descriptive data in their client case study. Blattner (2005), in his coaching relationship with his client, provides four paragraphs of perspective on the long-term relationship. Peterson and Millier (2005) provide a greater balance between the client and coach perspective on the coaching engagement. Rich narratives are

provided that allows the reader to gain a sense of what took place in that one case study. Stevens (2005) offers the perspectives of seven executives in his cases study stemming from the executive's perspective alone. Narratives are provided in the Stevens (2005) account and themes emerge around the coaching engagement.

Case studies fall short in fully describing what the client perceives is taking place in coaching. Superficial content seems to populate case studies that explains the who, the what, the why, the where, and when about the coaching engagement. A deeper analysis is needed to understand clients' perceptions of what is taking place in coaching. As Joo (2005) suggests in his invitation for future research "...interpretive research using a phenomenological approach that examines the perspective of executive being coached could add significantly to knowledge about executive coaching" (p. 483).

Doctoral dissertations published within the last decade have laid an impressive foundation for understanding both the executive and executive coach's perspective in the coaching engagement. A qualitative study by Sztucinski (2001) presents themes related to the client's interpretations and experience while engaged in the coaching relationship. Themes presented by Sztucinski (2001) include: Path to Achievement, Unique to Self, Ownership, Confrontation with Self, Array of Emotion, Bond with Coach, and Achievement. Turner's (2004) mixed-methods study examined the interpretations clients had on specific coaching behaviors such as: asking questions, listening, giving feedback, and trust building. McClelland (2005) focused a phenomenological study on the coach's experience. Themes published by McClelland (2005) include: Authentic Hope and Understanding, A Big Exploration, Intense Client Focus, A Valuable Affinity, Coaching as Art, Candid Assessment, and Parting with a Growing Friend. Finally, Bush's (2004) phenomenological dissertation focused on the client's perceptions of

effectiveness in coaching. Bush's (2004) findings suggest the client perceives coaching to be effective when: the client has the motivation and high commitment for the coaching activity, the work with a veteran coach leads to positive rapport, a systematic structure is present, and there is a concentration on personal and professional development. Finally, Hopf (2005) published case study on the interpretations of client, the coach and the client's followers. The study provided unique insights to one case where focus is on a single leader and their executive coach with follow up on the leader's followers.

McKenna and Davis (2009) suggest that the need for coaches to better understand their client's perspective and understanding of the relationship is essential. McKenna and Davis (2009) assert:

The client's view is pivotal. There is ample evidence that the quality of the alliance predicts outcomes. But it is important to note—as we have already hinted—that it is client ratings of the alliance (rather than therapist or observer ratings) that have the most predictive power. Great therapists appear to be cognizant of this fact. They make it a regular practice to check in with the client about his evaluation of the state of the alliance. We think this practice makes good sense for executive coaches as well and have begun to incorporate brief, regular alliance assessments in our own work with clients. If we are shy about talking with our clients about the process of coaching (i.e., the alliance and relationship), we risk not hearing about concerns that may be weakening or even dissolving the alliance. By being on the alert for alliance problems, the coach can identify breakdowns earlier, work to repair them, and maintain or even strengthen the alliance. (p. 251).

In summary, the review presented provided insight into relevant content found in the executive coaching literature. A discussion was presented on what executive coaching is as a professional practice. Coaching impacts were provided so the reader could understand the emphasis in the contemporary literature. Coaching models covered helped shed light on the

multiple approaches implemented by executive coaches. Research on coaching practices was presented to better understand the state of executive coaching. Finally, the client's perspective in executive coaching research was presented along with insights gathered from a coach's interpretation.

### Chapter 3: Research Methods

In the following chapter I will discuss the specific phenomenological research methods used in the study. I will share the foundation of my phenomenological approach, details on who was targeted for the study, how I set out to find the specific subjects, a participant snapshot (Table 1) of the participants in the study, profiles of each subject interviewed, my role as researcher, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures, and validity and ethical issues.

#### Phenomenological Study

It is appropriate to mention a few words about the characteristics of an phenomenological research study. The ontological framework assumes reality is socially constructed—as opposed to objectively posited—by the members experiencing any particular phenomenon (Creswell, 2007). In the case of this specific study, the focus was on the participants' understanding, interpretation(s), and meaning-making of their experience of being coached. A phenomenological approach was suitable in the pursuit to understand the meaning of coaching (Smith & Osborn, 2003). No other interpretative methodologies such as case study, narrative approach, critical theory, or grounded theory (Creswell, 2007; Smith & Osborn, 2003) attempt to probe into the *life-world* as suggested by Husserl's philosophy (Husserl, 1927).

*Life-world* should be understood (Husserl, 1927; Smith & Osborn, 2003) as that which individuals take for granted in everyday experiences. To illustrate, one may be aware that a person walks by on the sidewalk. However not until our attention is reflected on the person (attending to) will we be able to meaningfully describe what occurred. So, too, coaching clients may quickly move from their coaching experience without pausing to examine what was taken-for-granted in the context of coaching.



As is the nature of phenomenological studies, data collected should not be generalized (Creswell, 2003) to any other population beyond the study. In this study, the findings are limited to the six cases. While the thematic data might be informative for those who are organization development consultants, human resource practitioners, and coaches, especially executive coaches, this study should only be understood within the rich descriptions gathered from the interviews themselves. No attempt was made to build a theory or model beyond the boundaries of the study. I recognized the limits within the study to accurately capture the subjects' responses and interpretations during the interview and not project meaning toward other populations. More is stated about my role as researcher (see *Role of the Researcher*) however it is necessary to mention that my involvement was total immersion in the conversation and in the natural setting of the coaching participant.

### **Recruitment of Subjects**

Recruitment of subjects for the study (see Appendix A) was through several agencies (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). I targeted consulting firms, universities, leadership development consultants, former students, professional colleagues, and distant associates. I sent 148 separate messages via e-mail between the months of April-May, 2010. A MicroSoft Office Excel spreadsheet was used to record to whom I sent invitations and included the date, any reminders that were sent, and results of inquiries received from the source. Ten potential subjects were identified and screened for participation in the study. As mentioned, screening criteria included: confirmation they had participated in executive coaching, were able to provide a face to face interview, were between 35-60 years old, and were employed either full or part-time at the time of the interview. Screening was conducted over the phone with some brief e-mail exchange as follow-up. Six of the ten potential subjects agreed to participate in the study.

Each of the six subjects was provided via e-mail the semi-structured interview questions (see Appendix C) and Confidentiality Agreement Form (see Appendix B) one to two weeks prior to the interview. Participants were invited over the phone or in e-mail communication to reflect on the questions to be used during the interview. My hope and intention was that each person would spend time reflecting on the executive coaching experience to increase the likelihood for rich data sharing in the interview.

### **Criteria**

Purposeful sampling was employed for the study (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). Six subjects were recruited to participate in face-to-face interviews. Subjects were targeted who were between the ages of 35-60 years old, who were employed either full or part-time at the time of the interview. No limitation was made on the industry or size of organization where the subject worked. My interest was in the experience of the participants, regardless of the type of organization, profession, or industry to which the subject belonged. The study was conducted in a natural environment; in each case the interviews were held in was the subject's private office where the actual coaching occurred. A natural environment such as an office suite would increase the subjects' opportunity to reflect upon their executive coaching experience. In a somewhat similar manner, I as the researcher would be able to engage with the subject in the very place where the coaching took place.

Subjects for the study shared that they either sought out executive coaching or were asked to participate in coaching as an organizational initiative to "improve his or her skills and effectiveness in communicating the corporate vision and goals, and to foster better team performance, organizational productivity, and professional–personal development" (Sperry, 2008, p. 36). Each of the six subjects interviewed confirmed he or she was invited to participate

in coaching by either an organization-wide initiative or as a component of their own developmental growth. Coaching was offered by the sponsoring organization from a growth orientation not as a disciplinary action. Subjects interviewed were clear that coaching was not prescribed to them due to poor performance in their leadership capacity.

### **Role of the Researcher**

This study, as has been shared, followed an interpretive research tradition. A defining characteristic of interpretive research involves the active role of the researcher (Creswell, 2007; Smith & Osborn, 2003). In positivistic studies the researcher is distant from the field so as not to influence data collected or variables manipulated (Creswell, 2007). Researcher bias is seen as a negative influence driving the researcher as far from the variables under study as possible (Creswell, 2007). On the other hand, in interpretive research, immersion of the researcher in the field of study is required (Creswell, 2007; Smith and Osborn, 2003). Distance from the field of study was minimized so that the data collected could be understood and interpreted.

As researcher, I was invited to each of the six interviews in the field of each subject, that is, their offices. Five of the interviews were at a conference table in the subjects' office space. Each of the subjects mentioned specifically that the coaching conversations took place in the same office where we held the interview. I was pleased with the settings since it likely allowed each person to recall information pertinent to the coaching activity. This location in the subjects' office allowed me to not only collect data but also to lay the foundation for data analysis. Because my goal was rich and robust descriptions this approach as researcher in the field was used (Creswell, 2007; Smith & Osborn, 2003).

### **Data Collection Procedures**

Face to face interviews, lasting approximately 60 minutes or more, were digitally audio-recorded, and transcribed into a MS Office WORD document by me after each interview.

Candidates were made aware during the screening call that the interview would be recorded and transcribed by me. No one objected to or mentioned being concerned about the audio recording procedures. Each willingly signed their permission to be recorded for the interview. I also took observational notes during the interviews. A semi-structured interview guide was used for each interview and, as has been mentioned, was sent to each subject for preparation prior to the interview. (See Appendix C). As is allowed in qualitative studies, I did from time to time vary from my semi-structured interview guide. In some cases I did not ask every question word for word because the situation or timing did not allow for a particular question to surface.

### **Data Analysis Procedures**

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) (Smith & Osborn, 2003) was used as the data analysis tool. IPA is rooted in psychology and has been used primarily when a major event in a persons' life is under analysis. For this study, the ultimate goal was to understand the lived experience of the participant in executive coaching. IPA has phenomenological roots as it "is concerned with trying to understand what it is like, from the point of the view of the participants, to take their side" (Smith & Osborn, 2003, p.51). IPA is also appropriate in qualitative research where little is known regarding a phenomenon.

Smith, Flowers, and Larkin (2009) provide some general IPA guidelines for researchers to follow however wide latitude exists in research application. Central to IPA however is the analytic focus of the participants; in the case of this study the subjects' attempt of meaning making of executive coaching. General guidelines for IPA include: navigation from the specific

to the collective, descriptive comments to the interpretative understanding, focus of the subjects' experience, and psychological orientation on the subjects' meaning-making (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). Data analysis with IPA actually began immediately after each interview during the transcription process. A step-by-step overview for IPA will be shared (See IPA Process) so one is able to understand how I came to the interpretations presented. Six data analysis steps are suggested for researchers:

1. Step 1: Read and re-read transcript
2. Step 2: Initial notation of content
3. Step 3: Development of emergent themes
4. Step 4: Search for connections across emergent themes
5. Step 5: Repeat Steps 1-4 for each case
6. Step 6: Identify pattern across cases

**Bracketing.** IPA suggests that a researcher, in order to understand the interpretation a subject has on a phenomenon, should examine their own preconceptions first. Once knowing these preconceptions the researcher should set them aside, “on the shelf,” prior to entering into an interview account shared by the subjects of a study. The purpose of this bracketing is for the researcher to be fully attentive to the subject making sense of the phenomenon under review.

Prior to each interview, I reviewed – with the intention of not having my coaching background influence the interview - a previously documented preconceptions about the executive coaching process. These preconceptions had been developed in such a way that I placed a boundary around my experience, ideas, philosophy and models of coaching. My preconceptions: A) I am not able to identify with the experience of being coached. I have never

had a coach myself therefore I cannot begin to form my own interpretations of the coaching experience. B) Individuals seek executive coaching for their own reasons, motivations and aspirations. I did not project why a person would seek executive coaching or have agreed to coaching if requested by their sponsoring organization. C) People select executive coaches that are an optimal fit for their own objectives. I trusted their judgments and did not judge motivations for their coach selection. D) If I learned about methods executive coaches used with their subjects that ran counter to my own coaching approach, I withheld my opinion(s). E) Participants may have brought work and life issues into coaching that went beyond the work related objectives that initiated the coaching engagement. F) Some level of learning was likely to be disclosed in the course of the interview, I would let that disclosure arise naturally.

As I entered the data analysis (IPA Stages 1-6) of the six interviews; I continued to bracket my preconceptions with the sole intention to focus on the subjects' account of their coaching experience. This is the double hermeneutic cycle process; where I make sense of the verbal data while the subject made sense of their coaching experience. Having previously documented my preconceptions of coaching I used that documentation to not influence my interpretations of the subjects interpretations of their coaching experience.

**Process taken.** It has been shared that each of the interviews was conducted in the subjects' familiar work environment; all were recorded in the comfort of their personal offices. A digital audio device was used to record our conversations. After each interview I immediately down-loaded the file to my personal computer. I played each interview in order to feel assured the quality of the audio came through as well as to gain a general sense of the entire interview.

I elected to transcribe each audio recording myself. There were two reasons for this approach. One, a colleague had said this was a good way to become real familiar with my data. I

wanted to become intimate with the data collected. Two, I had not budgeted resources for paying someone to transcribe my electronic files. This process gave me a solid familiarity of the content of each interview. An hour long interview took me around three to four hours to transcribe.

Transcripts ranged from 21-54 pages in length and 5,000 to 7,500 spoken words.

Prior to the IPA data analysis process, I participated in member checking (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). “Member checking” is the process of going back to the subjects themselves for confirmation of data collected during the interview. Once audio recordings were transcribed into a MicroSoft Word file, I invited each subject to: (a) affirm what was transcribed, (b) edit anything covered in the transcript, and/or (c) add content after further reflection. Four of the six subjects interviewed participated at various levels of member checking. Some simply affirmed what was transcribed and wished me well with the rest of the study and others supplied additional insights on the MS Word transcript. Calls made to those who had not responded to my request went unanswered. I respected their silence and left their lack of response as endorsement of the original transcript I had sent to them.

**IPA steps.** Six data analysis steps are suggested by IPA (Smith, Flowers, & Larkin, 2009). A detailed account I elected to follow during the data analysis portion of my study is presented here.

**Step 1.** Read and re-read transcript. I transcribed each hour-long audio recording myself therefore I had a solid familiarity with the content of each interview. I have shared previously that the hour long interview took around 3-4 hours to transcribe. Starting and stopping the audio file during transcription helped cement content shared by subjects into my memory. Not wanting to completely rely on this transcription experience I did read and reread transcripts in the order of interviews conducted.

**Step 2.** Initial notation of content. A three-column table was developed for data analysis of each interview (see Appendix D). At this stage I wrote observations on the content of the transcript with an open mind. Notations were made in the right hand columns labeled *Exploratory Comments*. Three levels of *Exploratory Comments* were employed in order for me to fully parse out an interview. First, *Descriptive Comments* focused on the describing content of what the participant had offered. This was the subject of the content within the transcript, noted by “normal text.” Second, *Linguistic Comments* focused upon exploring the specific use of language by the participant, noted in italic. Metaphors such as a “safety-net,” “sounding board,” “coaching as sailing,” were identified of particular interest. Finally, *Conceptual Comments* focused on engaging at a more interrogative and conceptual level and these comments were underlined. Each of the six interviews contained right-hand columns of three levels of analysis in Step 2.

**Step 3.** Development of emergent themes. The volume of data in words began to greatly increase with the word-for-word transcripts and three levels of notations just cited. The stage for data reduction started in the thematic development stage. I used the left-hand column of the three-column table template used in Step 2 cited above (see Appendix D). Narratives and passages were cut into smaller units based on patterns of thought or meaning. During the process of ascribing thematic meaning, I was reminded that “...the analyst may at first feel uncomfortable about seeming to fragment the participants’ experience through this re-organization of the data. This process represents one manifestation of the hermeneutic circle” (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009, p. 91).

**Step 4.** Search for connections across emergent themes. Here I labeled together how I thought the themes might be related with one another. I used the same left-hand column of the



three-column table template used in the steps cited above (see Appendix D). IPA suggests no specific prescription on how best to go about making thematic connections but offers some known approaches: abstraction, subsumption, polarization, contextualization, numeration, and function. In my analysis I used abstraction, contextualization, and numeration. Abstraction is considered a basic form of thematic pattern identification where super-ordinate themes were categorized. Contextualization allowed me to consider the background of a given passage, a narrative, or set of elements reviewed. Finally, numeration is a process where I could consider frequency of a thematic passage or numbers of ideas supported within a transcript (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009).

*Step 5.* Repeat Steps 1-4 for each case. By this time I had quite a working knowledge-base of each interview experience, audio recording, transcription background, notation of right-hand column observations, and the development of emergent themes. It was at this stage that I bracketed my knowledge of the other transcripts in compliance with the IPA process. I treated each interview on its own merits with no attempt to cross reference or compare information gathered in transcripts. I used the same procedures with interviews two through six.

*Step 6.* Identify pattern across cases. By now each of the six interviews had several themes cited in the left-hand column of each transcript. I copied all of these themes in each of the six interviews into separate MS Word documents labeled by the name of each subject. For example, Subject A had their own thematic document separate from Subject B. After each document containing several themes was developed, I printed out each of the six interviews in order to capture a visual of similar themes to condense ideas or meanings into manageable units. For example, my first interview transcript “Rose” uncovered 51 different themes and I condensed the 51 into four themes. This same process was repeated for each of the subjects

where a final list of 24 themes - across cases - was identified. To further reduce the volume I developed a six column table where each theme was listed by interview subject. The condensed version appears in Chapter 4 – Findings in Table 2 – *Themes by Subject*.

At this point in my thematic development, I developed another table (See Table 3 – Frequency) also found in Chapter 4 – Findings, where frequency was considered across all cases. Identification marks were made on the specific case where that theme was “very clear” indicated by an X and other cases where I felt comfortable agreeing the theme was also present, indicated by a P or “present” in its relationship. “Very clear” designation was applied to specific interview (narrative) content considered. The “present” designation meant content from an interview could also apply to a specific theme. This was done in an attempt to condense themes into few super-ordinate themes with more supporting themes underneath each super-ordinate theme. Some of my original theme labels did not seem to fit so better names were ascribed. I will go into depth on these super-ordinate themes and all supporting themes in Chapter 4 – Findings.

The final step in my data analysis procedures was a cross-checking activity added beyond the suggested IPA process (Smith, Flowers & Larkin, 2009). This additional step was to ensure I had made a solid connection between interview data from the transcripts and specific thematic labels I had developed. Specific interview passages were taken from each subjects’ transcripts. I have labeled in Chapter 4- Findings, 95 Essential Passages (Table 4 –Essential Passages) as those which inspired themes, either super-ordinate or supporting themes, as I compared all six cases as a whole.

### **Validity**

It is important to note that the data collected accurately reflects what the subjects interviewed intended to share. In this study, it was necessary to provide evidence that the

responses from the participants' reflect their understanding of the topic discussed in the interview. To ensure that my data collection was interpreted accurately I employed "member checking" (McMillan & Schumacher, 2006). Member checking is the process of going back to the subjects for confirmation. I informed each subject after the conclusion of our interview that I would send them an electronic copy of the transcript within two weeks. Subjects were invited to: (a) affirm what was transcribed, (b) edit anything covered in the transcript and/or, (c) add content after further reflection since the interview.

### **Ethical Issues**

To the best of my knowledge the study posed minimal ethical concerns to the participants. No coercion or manipulation was used to gather the six subjects for the interviews. I followed the University of Saint Thomas Institutional Review Board (IRB) process disclosing risks and benefits for being a participant in the study. I was clear to the subjects that their identity and organization would not be named in my study. I changed the names of the participants and broadly referenced their industry and job title or function. Anonymity of the subjects of the study was protected.

If an interview subject was still actively being coached (at the time of the interview) I thought it appropriate that their coach be informed of our conversation. I invited the subject where possible to properly notify his or her coach about the nature of this study. If the subject had ceased coaching, no attempt was made to notify the coach of the interview unless desired by the subject. I did not seek to learn the names or any identifiable information on the subjects' executive coach. If this information was shared during the interview, I assigned a pseudonym or generic label (the coach) in the transcript.

## **Chapter 4: Findings**

In Chapter 4 – Findings, I will present to the reader additional background information gathered on each subject interviewed for this study. A participant snapshot will be presented giving the reader a picture of who exactly participated in the study. Next, the reader will see a deeper profile of each subject with enough details shared on each to gain a broader understanding of each subject. Following these subject profiles I will provide the thematic findings identified through the IPA process outlined in Chapter 3 – Research Methods.

### **Participants Snapshot**

I think it useful in my presentation here to present a quick snapshot (see Table 1) of the subjects who engaged in the study. The names presented are pseudonyms; their names have been changed, per our agreement prior to the interview. Gender specific pseudonyms do reflect the subjects' true gender. Each individual is presented in the order that I interviewed them. Age ranges are presented only to gain a general sense of the age of the subject in the study. The six subjects were an educated group with most having advanced graduate degrees. It was not the intent of the study to examine a highly educated group. One subject (Karl) did not elect to share his educational achievement. All of the subjects shared that the executive coaching relationship was their first official executive coaching experience. Some reported distant observations and knowledge of colleagues who had worked with an executive coach. Industries are presented in broad categories for the reader to gain a sense of where the subjects were employed. Leadership roles are also presented from department heads to the CEO of their respective organizations. Finally, I share the status of the subject's relationship with his or her coach.

Table 1

*Participant Snapshot*

	<b>Age range</b>	<b>Education</b>	<b>Executive coaching experience</b>	<b>Industry</b>	<b>Leadership role</b>	<b>Coaching status</b>
Rose	50-55 yrs	EdD	1 <sup>st</sup> experience	Higher Education (Private)	Dept Head	Coaching ended in 2007
Barney	50-55 yrs	MBA	1 <sup>st</sup> experience	Health Insurance	CEO	Coaching ended at time of interview
Karen	46-49 yrs	PhD	1 <sup>st</sup> experience	Medical Services Provider	Executive Director	Coaching ended 2009
Kim	30-35 yrs	BA	1 <sup>st</sup> experience	Health Insurance	Regional President	Coaching ended 2009
Peter	40-45 yrs	JD	1 <sup>st</sup> experience	Financial Services	VP General Council	Coaching was on-going
Karl	36-39 yrs	Undisclosed	1 <sup>st</sup> experience	Health Insurance	Dept Head	Coaching ended at time of interview

**Profiles of Interview Cases**

It may be helpful for the reader to gain additional insight beyond Table 1 – *Participant Snapshot* to understand what made each subject interviewed unique. Each of the six interviews is briefly summarized for the reader to gain a healthy sense of context and gather the flavor of each interview. In the summary of each interview, I will share initial reasons for why each subject came to enter the coaching relationship, specific recommendations that each subject offered to those who practice coaching, and any particular observations I gathered from my time with the participant. I wish to note to the reader that I did not intend to solicit client-to-coach recommendations in the course of the interviews. This data emerged from the conversations organically. I have sought to represent it here as evidence for further analysis.

**Interview Case - Rose**

**Name:** Rose

**Gender:** Female

**Age:** 51 years old

**Educational Level:** EdD

**Leadership Role:** Executive Director – Administrative

**Industry:** Higher Education – Private

**Reason for entering coaching:** Group coaching was prescribed by Rose's immediate supervisor. Three department heads, including Rose, were encouraged to use an executive coach to assess strengths of their leadership team and to develop a cooperative working environment.

**Length of coaching:** Six months

**Coaching experience:** First executive coaching engagement

**Stage of coaching at time of interview:** Ended 3 years ago (2007)

**Advice to executive coaches:**

If I were a coach I would want to know, want to set the stage. What's going on in your life? What kind of commitment are you going to make today? Are you energized, engaged, receptive? I like coaches that ask, that are not shy about asking provocative questions (Rose).

**Comments:** It was a special delight to engage with Rose about her experience with executive coaching. Rose and I had a prior relationship having attending graduate school together, although at the time I was completely unaware of Rose's involvement in

executive coaching. I only became aware of Rose's experience during outreach to my peers in the recruitment stage of my dissertation study. Once I learned that Rose had participated in group executive coaching, I thought that experience would be really interesting to understand. While not one of my objectives, the group coaching approach became a golden nugget in my mining expedition. Rose was my first interview and it really helped that we had a prior relationship because I found myself unusually nervous for the experience. My nerves calmed down significantly once Rose and I engaged in the conversation about her coaching recollections.

### **Interview Case - Barney**

**Name:** Barney

**Gender:** Male

**Age:** 52 years old

**Educational Level:** MBA

**Leadership Role:** CEO, new to organization within past two years

**Industry:** Health Insurance

**Reason for enter coaching:** Barney entered executive coaching as a piece of a much larger strategic planning initiative within his organization. Barney shared his desire to engage the organization with new energy and vitality as the new leader. The leadership development consultants contracted to facilitate strategic planning suggested the top leadership team might want to consider executive coaching. Barney agreed and selected himself to be the first on the leadership team to engage in executive coaching.

**Length of coaching:** 12 months

**Coaching experience:** First experience

**Length of coaching:** One year

**Stage of coaching at time of interview:** Ended within past year

**Advice to executive coaches:**

I think they [executive coaches] should know as much as they can know about what makes them [the client/leader] tick. And one of the suggestions that I am going to have for anybody that....doesn't know the person [client] or isn't comfortable with the person – they need to spend some personal time, like a lunch – sometime to get to know the person as an individual because that is going to be critically important to their success in coaching (Barney).

...[I]t's, there are always underlying motivations for how we behave. And people particularly under stress will behave the way that they behave. If you understand that as a coach, that's going to be helpful. Because as you go through this coaching, you're going to have to – if that particular behavior isn't helpful – you're going to have to recognize that it is going to occur. ...[P]eople go through this coaching process....take two steps back, one step forward, there's always this entrenchment that happens and you have to recognize that that is going to occur.

To the extent that you know the person it is helpful (Barney).

**Comments:** Barney came to his organization two years prior to the interview in the capacity of CEO. While he works in the Minneapolis area, Barney lives in Pennsylvania and commutes to work in the Twin Cities, MN. I learned of Barney's executive coaching experience from a local executive coach in the Twin Cities area. The coach presented



Barney as having intense self-reflective capabilities and unique insights to human behavior within organizations. When we met I was struck by how casual his appearance was and how a calm demeanor was presented to me. Perhaps my stereotype of a hurried CEO was misguided? Barney did not comply with my expectation of a buttoned-up executive who spoke in quick bursts of words in a hurry to get to the next meeting. I was honored to receive valuable time from Barney and capture his interpretations of executive coaching.

### **Interview Case - Karen**

**Name:** Karen

**Gender:** Female

**Age:** 49 years old

**Educational Level:** PhD

**Leadership Role:** Executive Director

**Industry:** Non-profit Health Services Provider

**Reason for enter coaching:** New to executive director role. Entered a local university leadership development program where executive coaching was a component. Karen did not intentionally seek coaching but was open to it as it was positioned by the university faculty.

**Length of coaching:** Nine month relationship

**Coaching experience:** None prior

**Stage of coaching at time of interview:** Ended within past year

**Advice to executive coaches:**

I've only had the one coaching experience...It went really well. It really looks like a safety net. You're on the trapeze all day long.... The nice thing about a coach is I can come and talk about goals, staff, [etc]. I can talk about revenue generating ideas, I can talk about board issues and I know there is a [safety] net. I know it won't go anywhere, I know I won't be interrupted, I know I won't be contradicted, I know I won't be given advice [on how to do my job] (Karen).

**Comments:** My third interview was with Karen and she was referred to me by an executive coach. Karen and I met in her no nonsense manufacturing and health services organization office suite. This roll-up-the-sleeves leader was truly inspiring as I participated in the conversation. Karen's account of her coaching experience was candid, honest and forthright. Similar to Barney, Karen spoke in quiet tones and selected her words with great care. Karen's use of metaphors to describe coaching certainly influenced the creation of several themes in the study. I left the interview under the impression that Karen felt great responsibility to her organization's employees and the non-profit sector they serve.

### **Interview Case - Kim**

**Name:** Kim

**Gender:** Female

**Age:** 34 years old

**Educational Level:** Bachelor of Arts - Accounting

**Leadership Role:** Regional President

**Industry:** Health Insurer (Fortune 100)

**Reason for enter coaching:** Prescribed by CEO when she was promoted to CFO role

**Length of coaching:** 12 months

**Coaching experience:** None prior

**Stage of coaching at time of interview:** Ended within the year

**Advice to executive coaches:**

[Executive coaches] should understand....that....what people are trying to get out of coaching is different for everybody. I am sure there are plenty of people who go through coaching who are using it as a tool to achieve a certain job, role or title change in their organization...I would also say that coaches need [that]...holding people accountable is the only way to get people to change their behaviors and a good coach knows that. [A person's behavior is so] engrained, I mean after so meaning years of doing something it is very hard to change your ways – the well-worn path that you referred to...it's hard [to get] oneself to go a different direction [alone] (Kim).

**Comments:** During the screening call with Kim I could sense she was eager to talk about the coaching experience. Kim was eager to tell her coaching story and openly share what she learned along the way. At the time of the interview, Kim was 34 years old meaning she was a year short of the 35 years I sought to find in the study's original design. I had hoped to find persons ages 35-60 years old. Due to the flexible nature of interpretative qualitative studies, I felt it acceptable to include Kim in the study. I made this decision based on her energy and excitement to share of her coaching story. Once in the interview, I was captivated on the depth of preparation Kim had demonstrated to me. While Kim had switched roles since the executive coaching experience she was adept at providing

her interpretations of the experience. Kim left me with the keen impression on knowing oneself in the selection process for identifying an executive coach.

### **Interview Case - Peter**

**Name:** Peter

**Gender:** Male

**Age:** 44 years old

**Educational Level:** JD

**Leadership Role:** Vice President and Managing Counsel

**Industry:** Financial Services (Fortune 500)

**Reason for enter coaching:** Prescribed by supervisor as part of corporate leadership offering

**Length of coaching:** 12 months

**Coaching experience:** None prior

**Stage of coaching at time of interview:** Near end of the coaching relationship

**Advice to executive coaches:**

I came from [Fortune 100 Investment Firm] where it was really competitive – the next office to you, you're trying to get the edge on....I do not know how coaching would work in that environment effectively. For me I felt safe, I felt open to the criticism, open to the self-reflection (Peter).

**Comments:** Peter shared that he elected to use coaching for personal growth rather than for his professional growth. Peter was quite transparent in his experience admitting areas of personal/professional growth as central to his coaching focus. His demeanor seemed to radiate that the coaching experience had a transformative impact on his entire life.

**Interview Case - Karl**

**Name:** Karl

**Gender:** Male

**Age:** 39 years old

**Educational Level:** Not disclosed

**Leadership Role:** Department Head

**Industry:** Health Insurance Provider (Fortune 100)

**Reason for enter coaching:** Invitation of supervisor

**Length of coaching:** 12 months

**Coaching experience:** None prior

**Stage of coaching at time of interview:** Near the end of coaching relationship

**Advice to executive coaches:**

I think to the extent possible, if the coach can understand the culture, at some level the business and the business challenges, and then the positions with which I am interacting and how I am expected to navigate the organization, I think those are critical for [the coach] to understand (Karl).

**Comments:** My sixth and final interview was with Karl; he was also referred to me by a colleague aware of the study. I would describe Karl as very busy and somewhat reserved in his remarks at times. Although busy, Karl was wonderful to provide me time and to share his understanding of the coaching experience. Karl has observed previous mentors use coaching and had a favorable impression of the leadership development tool.

Attention to detail and a “can do” attitude contributed to Karl’s recently expanded responsibilities which led to the coaching engagement. I did sense that Karl was under

pressure during the interview based on his routine glances at the computer screen. If Karl elected to enter a coaching relationship in the future he admits to spending more time upfront seeking an optimal fit. I was left with the impression the client-coach fit was vital piece of satisfaction for Karl.

Now that the reader has a solid foundation of who participated in the study it is proper to begin to share the thematic findings. Exactly how I identified the thematic findings can be reviewed in Chapter 3 – Research Methods.

In Table 2 – *Themes by Subject*, the reader should note various thematic descriptors (i.e. Hope and Faith in the Process) provided by each subject interviewed. Some themes only applied to one specific subject and other themes could be found in more than one subject.

Table 2

*Themes by Subject*

<b>Rose</b>	<b>Barney</b>	<b>Karen</b>	<b>Kim</b>	<b>Peter</b>	<b>Karl</b>
Hope & Faith in the Process	Hope & Faith in the Process	Reassurance – “Steer Small”	Facing My Warts	Self-Reflection – The Me	Sounding Board
Know Thyself Accountability	Leader As Humanitarian	Leader As Humanitarian	I’m Still Learning and Working On A Few Things	What Got Me Here Will Not Get Me There	Hardware Store – New Tools Needed
Gave Me Permission	Johari Window	Safety Net	Know Thyself – Accountability	I Was Cornered	Do I Have to Change?
	Client-Coach Fit			Investment In Me	Client-Coach Fit
				Push Back	Express My Fears

In Table 3 – *Frequency*, the frequency of each theme was considered across each of the six subjects in the study. An X identified a theme that was “very clear” in subjects interviewed such as “Hope and Faith in the Process” that was quite apparent in Rose and Barney’s interviews. A “P” was ascribed to a theme where data collected could be interpreted as also “present” in a particular interview. For example, Karen, Kim, Peter and Karl’s interviews all

suggested “Hope and Faith in the Process” was also “Present” in their interview content. The purpose of this activity was to condense several themes into fewer themes called Super-Ordinate Themes ascribed in the IPA process.

Table 3

*Frequency*

	<b>Rose</b>	<b>Barney</b>	<b>Karen</b>	<b>Kim</b>	<b>Peter</b>	<b>Karl</b>
Hope & Faith in the Process	X	X	P	P	P	P
Know Thyself Accountability	X			X	P	
Gave Me Permission	X					
Leader As Humanitarian		X	X	P		
Johari Window		X	P	P	P	
Client-Coach Fit	P	X	P	P	P	X
Reassurance – “Steer Small”	P		X	P		P
Safety Net		P	X	P	P	
Facing My Warts		P		X	P	P
I’m Still Learning		P		X	P	P
Self-Reflection – The Me		P	P	P	X	P

What Got Me Here Will Not Get Me There				P	X	P
I Was Cornered				P	X	P
Investment In Me	P	P	P	P	X	P
Push Back		P	P		X	
Sounding Board		P	P	P	P	X
Hardware Store – New Tools Needed	P	P	P	P	P	X
Do I Have to Change?		P	P	P	P	X
Express My Fears			P	P		X

Table 4 – *Essential Passages*, will allow the reader to see specific narrative content taken from transcripts that inspired a particular theme by participant. This raw data allows for one to see exactly which content shaped a theme. I provide the reader a comprehensive account of each passage that inspired all themes. Some passages have more than one theme represented.

Table 4

*Essential Passages*

<b>Essential Passages - Rose</b>	<b>Thematic Labels</b>
Well first of all....I've always thought it would be really cool to have a coach.	Hope & Faith in the Process
[T]he coach [was handpicked by supervisor] It was ok with me. I thought why not? I mean, I was very open to the experience....I had never worked with a coach in a leadership way....	Investment in me/us
It's a good thing [coaching]. ... I didn't know this individual [the coach] but I thought... he [my supervisor] only liked consultants who he thought really added value, something that he couldn't do	Hope & Faith in the Process



<p>or if they (consultants) could bring out some information that he couldn't. But he really didn't like to use consultants very much. So I thought, he's behind this guy [the executive coach] he's going to listen to [this counsel].</p>	
<p>[My boss] came back and said "you know here it is, you've got three strong leaders and you've got a lot of stuff going on. One of the things was, how are we going to be able to....work together and lead the organization?" So we came, we agreed to those commitments and one of the things was... I don't even remember who, felt that there should be another layer between [our boss] and us....Or we could figure it out....we're short on resources, did we really want to give up resources to somebody you know?</p>	Johari Window
<p>I would say that it [the coaching] was much more practical [than I expected it to be] and he kind of came in and ...he'd just say, "here's a series of questions" and then he'd say, "here's what I'm seeing...you have timeliness and communication and...." three of four areas [for me to work on with my colleagues]....."would you agree that these are issues?" It [the coaching] was very practical in my, in my head anyway.</p>	Hardware Store – New Tools Needed
<p>.....As a supervisor you can say things till you're blue in the face and maybe there is a different way that a coach, in a confidential conversation, ...they can get at more of the underlying issues and still give me [the supervisor] the results...</p>	Hope & Faith in the Process
<p>I didn't feel like it was going to come back to bite me at that point.</p>	Safety Net
<p>I felt like, ok, somebody's taking enough time to say, "I want you to engage in this process...I care about the fact that you're here and that you're trying to get a job done and what are some of the obstacles..."</p>	Investment in Me
<p>I've always had a very positive with coaching activities that I have been engaged in so, not that everybody I've worked with has been fabulous but by and large it's been a useful... successful relationship for what I need to have come out of [the coaching]. So I have a positive predisposition toward the coaching experience.....Accountability, that I've spoke of and the other thing is the probing nature of a good coach that allows for greater self-awareness and, in this particular coaching, better group awareness?</p>	Investment in Me Know Oneself - Accountability
<p>....[I]it reinforced that a coaching relationship can be a very successful catalyst of organizational change.</p>	Hope & Faith in the Process
<p>It wasn't that strong of a bond that I'd say, "Oh my gosh, I really want to get together with [that coach] again. [He] was a coach but [more of] a facilitator from point A to point B. I think he did a fine job, I think he was professional the way that he did it [coaching]. It didn't raise any big red flags with me. But he isn't necessarily who would come top-of-mind in terms of working</p>	Client-Coach Fit

with myself and my team.	
If I were a coach I would want to know, want to set the stage. “What’s going on in your life? What kind of commitment are you going to make today? Are you energized, engaged, receptive?”	Client-Coach Fit
And I like coaches that ask, that are not shy about asking, provocative questions.	Johari Window

<b>Essential Passages - Barney</b>	<b>Thematic Labels</b>
The Consulting Group was identified for us for this initial consulting [and coaching effort] ... and during my discussions with [my coach] she had mentioned some other resources they have, and one of them was executive coaching. I had been through a process before and it was a disaster.....I think it would be a really good thing and I’d like to go through the process first so see how it goes. There are certainly some things I think I can benefit from.	Hope & Faith in the Process
So I let everybody know why I was going through the [coaching] process, what we’re going to get out of it, and talked to them about some of the goals, and some of the things that were identified. I shared with them the 360 review which wasn’t always flattering [to me]. I think that helped a lot to sort of bring people together.	Facing Warts, Freckles and Scars
[The transparency] built some trust; it humanizes the process a little more. One of the things that had built up over time was that the previous CEO was very autocratic and decisions came from “on high” and they just tried to understand that, you know, I was pretty clear about saying, “I do not always have the answers, it’s infrequent that I have the answers, and, you know we have to work through them” and so that was kind of a revelation of sorts.	Facing Warts, Freckles and Scars  Attending
I didn’t have any significant expectations about what would come out [of the coaching]. I was more curious about what I could do to help facilitate this team or what I wasn’t doing that I could be doing to become a more effective leader and how we can move the organization along. So I had some hopes but I didn’t have those expectations. I intentionally did not do a lot of reading about it [coaching].	Expect the Unexpected
[The coach] being a psychologist....took it in directions that it might not have gone.....and in fact had not gone in with other consultants that we had been using...except one of our other leaders who is going through the process and her background [the coach] is business ... so the conversations are more around technical things. With [my coach] being a psychologist I think what we ended up doing was going a lot deeper into emotions and dealing with people. ...it became clear, based on our conversations and based on the challenges we were facing that one [coaching] model wasn’t going to work. And so....depending	Expect the Unexpected  Johari Window

<p>on the individual you are working with, you will need to use a combination of [coaching] styles or one style in particular.</p>	
<p>There were times when as a result of this process, we [I]needed a more directive approach. And one of the things that we discovered in this process was, I thought I was being very clear, others, less so. Even with the Board. Part of that was they wanted to be directed and I wanted to lead. And so they wanted me to tell them what to do and I had no desire to tell them what to do.</p>	Johari Window
<p>And so there was some confusion around [my lack of being directive] and so one of the things that came out was that I needed to be much more clear with the goals and much more clear that people were going to choose the path, they were going to make recommendations, but ultimately if you going to empower somebody you can't say, "check-in with me and I'll tell you if you're [it right]."</p>	Facing Warts, Freckles and Scars
<p>But one of the things that [my coach] is particularly adept at is getting you....to reveal things in just a conversation..... It was "Let's talk about these [work] instances and give me some examples of what you've been doing or what the conversations and the responses were."</p>	Johari Window
<p>I think one of the things....was that in each of the sessions that we had were specific take-a-ways so "Before we meet again these are the five things we're going to work on" and so it was pretty clear that when we got together what we were going to talk about.</p>	Attending
<p>There wasn't a formal agenda per se but as we were wrapping up our conversation, "What is it that you want to do? What are the kinds of things you want to deal with? What can I help you with?" So there were always a handful of things. And then in intervening weeks, or once a month we would meet and...those items would be addressed. And it wouldn't be like a formal report or anything like that. We'd talk about those issues and there were always things that would pop up in the meantime. So [the coach would] say, "What do you want to talk about today? Or what are the issues you want to address?"</p>	Johari Window
<p>[Y]ou know it's funny I don't know which one of us was driving the sessions...I'd say [the coach] doesn't probably know either. Because it would vary, you know...There was a mutual respect that was built up and so I think [the coach] might say the same thing. It wasn't one driving the sessions ...there might be times when I had the agenda and was going through it and there might be others times when [the coach] was pushing the agenda so it was very comfortable. And I think that was one of the most important things for.... Anyone who is going to have a successful coaching relationship is that relationship is important. You have to have the trust, I think particularly at a senior level you have to feel that someone has the confidence to deal with these issues, the</p>	Johari Window Expect the Unexpected

experience to understand the issues. Sometimes there are complex things you're dealing with and so while [my coach] didn't always understand the....technical vagaries of this business, she understands people.	
This job is not about technical knowledge....It's about trying to inspire others to lead. Even more than that, if you don't recognize that these people do not work for you but in reverse, you can never be effective.	Leader as Humanitarian
I think they should know as much as they can know about what makes them [the client/leader] tick. And one of the suggestions that I am going to have for anybody that....doesn't know the person [client] or isn't comfortable with the person – they need to spend some personal time, like a lunch – sometime to get to know the person as an individual because that is going to be critically important to their success in coaching.	Client-Coach Fit
...[I]t's, there are always underlying motivations for how we behave. And people particularly under stress will behave the way that they behave. If you understand that as a coach, that's going to be helpful. Because as you go through this coaching, you're going to have to – if that particular behavior isn't helpful – you're going to have to recognize that it is going to occur. ... people through this coaching process take two steps back, one step forward, there's always this entrenchment that happens and you have to recognize that that is going to occur. To the extent that you know the person it is helpful.	Client-Coach Fit

<b>Essential Passages – Karen</b>	<b>Thematic Labels</b>
I've done theories and done models. I can pick up anything. I have my own doctorate you know, and so I can pick up information.... [W]hat I needed was practical [ideas]. I had a real life roller coaster event happening here and so....the coaching was valuable....	Investment in Me
Kind of the definition [of executive coaching] that they [a university leadership development program] gave us....to help us to explore where we needed to grow. Or what strengths we needed to develop. Where we might need to have someone reflect back to us something possibly holding us back. [T]he coach was not there to take care of us, was not there to give us advice... really more a tool that we were to use to develop what we needed and perceived to be effective in our work.	Investment in Me
I'm looking for any tools to help me develop my skills [and become a] better communicator. As a leader. As a better person. You know, happier, more fulfilled...	One Oneself
[S]he [the coach] wasn't the solution and she wasn't an answer, she certainly wasn't a partner, she was a place to bounce things off. I could say things to her I can't really say to my staff.	Johari Window

[M]y only expectation [prior to coaching] and the thing that I will always, in this kind of thing be watchful for is, “do no harm.”	Johari Window
[S]he [the coach] would point me in a direction that I had forgotten, “of course I know how to do that.” But kind of being in this situation I had forgotten. When you’re sailing, when you’re a sailor, the thing you do not realize is you don’t need to do this with the tiller. [Models steering a sailboat]. It’s called steering small. And you really rest your hand on the [tiller] and you let the boat tell you what you need to know and you plan your adjustments. [My coach] was or the coaching process was very much like that “Stop steering large. Be still and pay attention. Everything you know is right here in your hands.”	Johari Window
How do you tell 30 people that their livelihood is gone? How do I carry the safety for this senior management [group] who will now have to reconfigure the organization with all these people gone? How do I help them come to the understanding that this is absolutely necessary? Everyone will have survivor guilt, I can’t tell you how long I walked around in what appeared to be the Grim Reaper costume cause as soon as someone saw me, scurry, scurry, scurry... [Laughter].	Johari Window
I think the emotional challenge or the emotional residue for myself, my senior management and staff would have been much greater – the scar tissue would have been much greater – I wouldn’t have done it as well as I did without having the benefit of coaching.	Facing Warts, Freckles and Scars
Sometimes they [coaching sessions] were calm, sometimes they were extremely intense. One of the things I will give [my coach] great credit for is, she took the intensity. She did what I needed her to do which was hold my safety.	Johari Window
When you’re sailing, we’ll back to that analogy, you don’t ever get to take your sails down because that is dangerous. But there are moments where you are on a course and everything is set, there is peace. But in the back of your mind you’re always working, “where is the wind coming from now, where’s the current going?” You know, what’s happening? But that’s all running smoothly in the background. So, yes. She [coach] allowed a place for me to just run the team. Check all the things that needed to be checked, “check, check, check. Have I forgotten anything? Here’s the checklist, have I gone through it? Have I missed anything? Ok...we’re breathing...we’re surviving. We’re above water.”	Johari Window
[T]he reason coaching could be good for me is to have that person with no interest...they don’t care, they want to help me go back here [gesturing to a happy place]. I can’t walk into a room with all conversations stopping and everyone turning to look to me to so say, “What do you need?” I’m deferred to all the time.	Attending

I've only had the one coaching experience...It went really well....Hold the safety.	Nostalgia
It really looks like a safety net. You're on the trapeze all day long.... The nice thing about a coach is I can come and talk about goals, staff, [etc]. I can talk about revenue generating ideas, I can talk about board issues and I know there is a [safety] net. I know it won't go anywhere, I know I won't be interrupted, I know I won't be contradicted, I know I won't be given advice [on how to do my job].	Client-Coach Fit

<b>Essential Passages - Kim</b>	
I knew the expectation was that I would go into the CFO role; I also had made it clear I wasn't interested in taking the role if I didn't think it was the right thing for the organization.	Ascension
I would say six minutes into it that I realized I was way over my head. Prior to that I had about 30 people reporting to me and then I had gone to 200 people all over the country. [S]o vast geographic dispersement and I hadn't had more than five years direct supervisory experience in the first place.	Ascension
It [the 360 feedback] was painful! I mean it was...I cried. It was actually that emotional for me I think because I care so much what other people think, I don't want folks to view me as what I perceive to be, the typical executive.	Facing Warts, Freckles and Scars
But if you're making decisions on how it's going to promote you in the organization, that isn't right. Even if it is the right business decision to me it's not right. ... [H]aving a sound moral [foundation] having integrity is what I wanted to convey to people. [I]t's actually been surprising to me how well, just being myself and trying, trying to do the right thing, not always accomplishing it, but trying. ...I keep thinking the organization is going to say, "Oh, she doesn't have what it takes to be an executive." And it's been quite the opposite. They appreciate the honesty and integrity and, you know, I definitely have business skills that I bring to the table that are appreciated as well, but from a leadership perspective it is appreciated that I am authentic and trying to do the right thing for the organization, our constituents...	Investment in Me Ascension
[Coaching] was giving me a picture when I was trying to do the right thing; I sometimes make it harder ... particularly those who work for me.... To protect my team from having to do last minute, I'm going to call it corporate last-minute-fire-drill-stuff – I often times would do things myself...so they could go home and be with their families. Well that did two things... it had an impact on me and my family. The thing I didn't understand before going through coaching was it had an impact on those individuals in a negative way. "My intent was to... help you" what I didn't expect	Facing Warts, Freckles and Scars

was they didn't feel like I trust them at all.	
I remember just falling apart [in the feedback sessions]. It's just tough to hear.... I mean he's [the coach] very adept at being brutally honest and sensitive at the same time. I shut out all the positive things, I mean I just... [focused on the few negative comments].	Facing Warts, Freckles and Scars
Here's the mirror, stare at it, cry a little bit, have some Kleenex. ... [T]he next day [referring to two-day feedback session] is really around practicing scenarios to change your behavior – about the things you weren't so great at. So an example would be, you literally role play with [the coach] and a video camera. Which was extremely uncomfortable for me, I would role play the conversation I would have with one of my direct reports about this corporate thing that came up, last minute fire drill – all of that business. So that I could change how I responded in that...	Facing Warts, Freckles and Scars
[T]he odd thing about it [the agenda to prioritize behavioral changes] was it aligns completely with the objectives I set out to achieve... [prior to coaching]. Things I wanted to delegate more... I wanted to have more executive presence... all of the feedback reinforced – essentially I knew what needed to be fixed....[W]hat was hard for me was that it [the coaching feedback] personalized it. It's one thing if others want me to change one thing about myself than if I want to change one thing. It's a lot hard[er] for me personally. That was harder to hear and to know that I had a negative impact on people that I cared about even though I was trying to go out of my way to avoid a negative impact on those people. That was the hard part.	Know Oneself  Facing Warts, Freckles and Scars
[D]elegation is very difficult for me because I had a hard time setting expectations. So that was one of the things I thought would need to happen and how I would do it. So it was harder for me to say “this is the outcome and what I am looking for. You figure out how you are going to achieve that outcome.” .... I would prioritize task over relationship every time.	Know Oneself
A little bit [of the coaching experience] was uncomfortable because I don't like to have people looking over [my] shoulder. [A]gain I knew I wouldn't do it otherwise. My behavior for however many 30 plus years had been all about doing all those other things. I knew I had to have someone [keep me accountable].	Client-Coach Fit
[Being] unprepared [for coaching sessions] is very, very bad. And this wasn't a subject matter that I could punt on; I really had to give it thought to be able to articulate what it was that the homework assignment was for that week. And so that was helpful. We would have, I would say monthly or sporadic check-ins on the phone to chat about how things were going.	Ascension
One of the things I haven't talked about yet that was a huge	Facing Warts, Freckles

<p>problem for me was saying “I’m sorry” too much. I mean I would apologize if someone on my team would get a report – somebody else that was a peer of mine – I would apologize [for them]. Unnecessary apologies were a huge handicap for me. I don’t feel like I do, in fact I notice it in other people now. And it is not that I am any less sorry that they didn’t get what they wanted but I don’t take personal responsibility for everything that happens on a daily basis.</p>	and Scars
<p>I think the perception is that I am more confident [now].... I don’t know that I feel any more confident but I stopped doing some of the things that made me look completely not in control of myself as a leader.</p>	Still Learning
<p>Would I do it again? Absolutely! I’ve recommended a number of different folks to this particular [coaching] program because I’ve thought so highly of it. I think it probably helped me personally as much as it did professionally because it became clear to me I was doing more than what my job was on paper. ....I was doing the wrong things which were taking time away from being at home. And that realization that, “why is my family less important than the person that works for me?”</p>	Nostalgia
<p>[Executive coaches] should understand.....that....what people are trying to get out of coaching is different for everybody. I am sure there are plenty of people who go through coaching who are using it as a tool to achieve a certain job, role or title change in their organization...I would also say that coaches need [to know that]....holding people accountable is the only way to get people to change their behaviors and a good coach knows that. [A person’s behavior is so] engrained, I mean after so meaning years of doing something it is very hard to change your ways...it’s hard [to get] oneself to go a different direction [alone].</p>	Self-Reflection

<b>Essential Passages – Peter</b>	<b>Thematic Labels</b>
<p>[M]y boss said it was a significant investment, which it was, in terms of money and my time. Asked me if I was ready to dedicate myself to it [executive coaching]. I indicated I was although I had some hesitation because I never had that kind of individualized [attention].</p>	Investment in Me
<p>I did help shape it [coaching agenda] in terms of, most notably from the onset – from what my boss told me was “this is for you and in terms of what you want to make of it and what you want to identify as something to work on.”</p>	Investment in Me
<p>As [my coach] called it “The Me, The We and The Us” – The Us is the organization and The We is working with others. The Me is kind of what I want and what I identified for my goal was where I am at in my career and life journey. I have always kind of been “head down” get through law school, get through college, now I</p>	Attending



<p>am married, now my wife is going to med-school, we have young kids, she needs to finish her residency...get the new job [here] .....become a leader [here] and all of a sudden, "I'm here and I'm managing people, now what?" I described it [Coaching} as it was an opportunity to pull my head out, take a breath, look around and for me...purpose...now what? "What do I want to do?" And so this has been underway for about 9 months.</p>	
<p>He [executive coach] suggested it [a model] and then we talked about it. He suggested using some of the tools they have "in the box"....for analysis and feedback but adjusting them considerably to do a deeper dive based on what was the goal to help me identify purpose...</p>	Attending
<p>Next steps for me individually, professionally, personally and he [coach] also was responsive to, I articulated "The Me" to just be focusing on the professional side on feedback, and development opportunities is ignoring a huge driver in my life from a personal perspective. So [my coach] said, "Oh, I've actually done this very rarely, let's reach into your family, let's talk to your spouse, let's talk about some other things on a personal basis that drive you."</p>	Expect the Unexpected
<p>So we collectively pulled out the themes, you know, the questions were "What's the sweet-spot? What drives him?" The strengths...passions sort of thing, for me there were probably three really valuable "ah-ha's" going through the in depth – drill down reviews that he had provided. He brought it [data collection] on a gross basis. Ah...without letting me read it first. To share with me some observations, I would guess he was steering me toward themes he had in mind. [T]hen I took the data...chewed on it for a week or two, [and] I developed my own themes, he developed his themes – he came back and we kind of jointly agreed.</p>	Johari Window
<p>There were similarities [in theme development of data collected] and there were some things he observed and they were some things I observed that I could get, based on history that he didn't quite have. You know large themes from a personal basis are, [an] over-reliance on one skill throughout my life. ... [T]hat skill, some articulate it as "charm, interpersonal skills, relationship skills," and so we explored that quite in-depth.</p>	Johari Window
<p>You know, we [I/O psychologist who conducted psychological analysis] kinda broke through that right away...In terms of, "Ok, ...are you going to try to control the room? Are you going to try to control the situation? You're trying to charm me. So let's kind of breakthrough that a little bit." She called me out. Yeah, and that was with my permission. It's like, "we can engage in a couple levels here but what do you think?" And I said, "Let's go for it and open it up."</p>	Facing Warts, Freckles and Scars
<p>It came down in terms of an 'ah-ha' to an observation with [my]</p>	Investment in Me

<p>CEO...his observation was, “I want you to bring your authentic self-more to the meeting, to larger meetings with the board and the executive management meetings....when I am one-on-one with you, your sleeves are rolled up, you have humor that can pierce through the situation, you step up and help me find a solution quickly...When it’s the full board, when you’re sitting at the board meeting you’re a buttoned-up-lawyer, you let us go quite a long time before stepping in to help us find a solution that I know you have had maybe 15 minutes.” He’s witnessed it. And kind of the connection that was made, you know, the charm and the desire to be liked is a pretty good driver for me.</p>	
<p>It’s [desire to be liked] a limiting factor in terms of the next step of...the desire to be liked and particularly the desire to succeed and have everyone on board with me limits my effectiveness if my next step is to be general council. Because I need to step up to drive the solution quicker, take an unpopular position which I can do but I am holding back. And that can be a limiting component for me.</p>	Facing Warts, Freckles, and Scars
<p>[L]et me hit one other observation, I’m also transitioning from what I coined.... In the integration session last week – less Hans Solo and more Yoda. That’s a transition for me that is new. I’ve been the doer; I’ve been the guy on the front fighting the fights, bringing home the save for the galaxy.</p>	I’m Still Learning
<p>And the other thing is being vigilant. I know that sounds strange...I’ve been very vigilant at picking the perfect entry point, the right step forward and lead...That vigilance has been a screen that may have held me back in some instances. I’ve been practicing being less vigilant... [and] spontaneous. More hop-in. More, “I’ll give it a shot” ...more risk-taking. That’s coincided on the flip-side with the feedback that was not a surprise – where my credibility suffers based on my desire to please people, is taking on commitments.</p>	I’m Still Learning
<p>If I had an assignment I would have been working on it because part of his deal with me on the onset was “I know you’re a last minute guy. You’ll probably still do this, but if I give you assignments to observe yourself over two weeks – to keep track over two weeks. Don’t write it down over the last minute. Can I have your commitment on that?” And I did it.</p>	Know Oneself
<p>Ah, he [executive coach] has a favorite quote. “What is clearer now than the last time we met?” Sometimes I thought about it, sometimes I made it up as I was sitting here. And then as I was stumbling through I’d usually have something and he’d usually ask clarifying questions. That’s usually how we started each session. He’d have an agenda for what we wanted to accomplish for that session usually. But I remember one or two he didn’t and I was kind wondering “Where are we going? What are we going</p>	Johari Window

to do?”	
[T]his whole process was “I know it’s about me but they are doing this so I will want to take the next step, be general council, and be ready.” [T]hey spend a lot of money on this but the recognition that “You’ve got to be comfortable where you are at as a person and where you want to be professionally. To do a good job here.”	Attending Ascension Investment in Me
[S]he’s [his wife] curious to how it’s going because she was interviewed [for the 360 process by the executive coach]. I’ll come home and I’ll say I had a three hour session today and she’ll say, “How did it go?” I think she’s surprised at how positive I am about it [the coaching]. Her observations over the last year, it may be this or other factors, “You are a lot more calm.” And I ha[d] a conversation with [my kids] this past weekend and they observed that I am much more calm. [There’s] harmony at home.... Dad’s not grumpy.	Attending
One of his [the coach’s] questions was, “What do you need from [your wife]?” And I shared that with [her] and she was like, “Wow. That is pretty cool that they are asking this.” And so we had a discussion then and what I need from [her].	Attending
“The We” is my team. More frequent communication – that was one consistent piece of feedback that I communicate up very well. Communicating down on a frequent basis....they do not want to be surprised either. Cause I’m out running at a fast pace and I’ll make decisions and commitments that can come and surprise them...that they have to fulfill. [F]ormal communications are not my style so quick voice mails-they’ve noticed that and said “thank you.” And one of them feels comfortable enough to approach me on this basis and said they noticed the calm piece [in me].	I’m Still Learning
I was safe. I just had to self-identify some things. So no conflict just discomfort which was leading toward... self-discovery.	Self-Reflection
I talked to him [the coach] about that [a prior coaching-client confrontation incident] .... And said, “that was really helpful to call me out.” And he [the coach] said, “Good, cause I’d like to do that [same intervention] along the way [of the coaching relationship]. [I]f I see behaviors that impact our ability to communicate I am going to call them out.” And the behaviors were just to make sure I wasn’t going to manipulate the situation.’ So I was in a comfort zone [that is, when using the process to advance or not stretching the boundaries for growth]. And so they would ask once in a while, “Are you outside the comfort zone? I am observing you being outside the comfort zone.” And their response was, “Good. That’s where....we want you to be...”	Facing Warts, Freckles and Scars
I think they [executive coaches] need to know what other pressures are going on around the coaching experience whether it	Client-Coach Fit

is professionally or personally... The fact that they [the coaching firm] had a good sense what was going on me with me professionally – the good was I was in a safe spot and the good was they wanted to invest in me... Now not every coach is going to have the ability to have the couple years' experience with me. I think that's what made it really worthwhile because [he] knew from an experience basis what approach would work best for me. So to the extent that the coach can really get to know the person [and] what motivates them.	
I don't know what the next stage is I know the next stage is for me to reflect. Because this is still very fresh... we just finished the integration session. So I am at a reflection stage...	Self-Reflection
I came from [Fortune 100 Company] where it was really competitive – the next office to you, you're trying to get the edge on... I do not know how coaching would work in that environment effectively. For me I felt safe, I felt open to the criticism, open to the self-reflection.	

<b>Essential Passages - Karl</b>	<b>Thematic Labels</b>
It was really good [chemistry].	Client-Coach Fit
When asked about perceptions of coaching... You know not so much, my, previous manager, he was a seasoned executive but he continued to have an executive coach throughout his career.	Hope and Faith in the Process
He [the boss] was like, "Alright. In order to improve your executive presence you need to sit at the power position at the table."	Ascension
I didn't view it [the invitation to engage in coaching] so much as purchasing it, but kind of an investment in me. ....that was certainly the way that I took it, you know, I didn't really know exactly what it was going to be like. I was really opened minded.	Investment in Me Expect the Unexpected
And he [the coach] more or less helped me....think through the executive presence and create some habits around that would resonate here in the [organizational] culture. [H]e really challenged me to think about how I am promoting myself and what I am doing internally and then thinking about where is it that I want to be.	Johari Window Ascension Attending
What he told me was I'm an unbelievable middle manager. I can go around and influence. I can get it done. But that's not viewed as being executive leadership within [the organization].	Facing Warts, Freckles and Scars
Clarity around that [corporate expectations of leadership] and that I didn't need to become someone different to get there. I'm not going to be one that is loud, I'm not going to drive it, and cause conflict to cause conflict. But there are other tools to use and get what I am going and get my thoughts promoted within the organization without having to do that [negative stereotype].	Johari Window Ascension
I always thought because I was managing a... business and was	Facing Warts, Freckles

<p>so successful, I thought I was kind of there [professionally]. And so the internal conflict for understanding for me was, “Ok, I’m not there. I’m not where they want me to be.” And so it was more about.... once I got my head around that it kind of went from understanding the expectations from a vantage point where I felt like some of the things they want me to push on, would have gotten me fired. Right? It’s kind of getting past that hurdle of “I’m not going to get fired, this is what they expect me to do--challenging or pushing certain items” or “this is how they want me to navigate the organization.”</p>	<p>and Scars Johari Window Ascension</p>
<p>[I]t is hard for me to be vocal. I am more like, I like to digest and figure things out and then lead the charge. You know one of the things I have been practicing is to be the first one to speak up and share my opinion first.</p>	<p>I’m Still Learning</p>
<p>But it helps if you have that opportunity to kind of float things by, so from a business perspective internally, but from a personal development perspective I really did miss that and this [coaching] gave me the opportunity. And quite honestly it gave me an independent view. It wasn’t, “Karl how can we make you succeed at [internally]? Rather it was, “I will help you to succeed no matter where you go.”</p>	<p>Investment in Me</p>
<p>...A part of my challenge is I don’t know who I want to be when I grow up. I’ve always been one of those guys who’ve jumped into many different roles, if you look at my history; there is no direct path to health care. But no matter what I have been in I have been successful.</p>	<p>Johari Window</p>
<p>... [I]t is, but it is a struggle to ask “How much of the details do you want?” And at some level you need to trust the people who are working for you.... If I get into some 10<sup>th</sup> floor meeting and I’m asked a question, in the past, I would have known the answers because I had the details right there.... You don’t want to be the guy who says, “I’ll get back to do on that [question].” [I]t’s getting to the point now where I can start pushing a lot of this out to [my team]. But there are some points where I’ve gotten comfortable saying, “I’m going to have to get back to you on that. Here’s is my understanding, but I’ll have to verify that.”</p>	<p>I’m Still Learning</p>
<p>I think to the extent possible, if the coach can understand the culture, at some level the business and the business challenges, and then the positions with which I am interacting and how I am expected to navigate the organization, I think those are critical for [the coach] to understand.</p>	<p>Client-Coach Fit</p>
<p>I mean there’s got to be a perspective of what is realistic. To your point, “I have a day job. I want to be successful here. To the extent that it is [coaching engagement] something I can build into my routine.” Patience is a good thing obviously.</p>	<p>Client-Coach Fit</p>
<p>You know, I found [my coach] had a business background ... was</p>	<p>Client-Coach Fit</p>

more relevant for me because he was able to be very clear in what his experiences were or understanding business – being able to pull other references from other businesses – that was pretty effective for him.	
I think I did find a good fit in the [coach] that I worked with but I don't know that because I didn't talk to anyone else. And so out of the gates maybe forcing the person [client] to speak with three or four coaches and say, "This is the person that I think is going to help me be more effective."	Client-Coach Fit

### Super-Ordinate Themes

By employing the IPA processes Steps 1-6 three Super-Ordinate Themes have been identified as describing the essence of the executive's experience during coaching. Supporting each of the three Super-Ordinate Themes; *Hope & Faith in the Process*, *The Journey*, and *The Memory Book*, are 12 sub-themes. In the pages that follow I will share passages from interviews which inspired the Super-Ordinate Themes and supporting themes. A summary of each theme is presented for the reader (see Table 5).

Table 5

#### *Summary of Themes*

<u>SUPER-ORDINATE THEME</u>	
Hope and Faith in the Process	An assurance that coaching is a constructive process where profound hope and faith is place in the engagement with the coach.
<u>Sub-Theme</u> Investment in Me	The acknowledgement the coachee is being invested in as a leader.
<u>Sub-Theme</u> Know Oneself	A prerequisite coachees express as a condition for coaching.
<u>Sub-Theme</u> Expect the Unexpected	The realization each coachee brings an open mind to coaching and is open to unexpected discoveries.
<u>Sub-Theme</u> Ascension	The conditions or events that stimulated the coaching engagement.

<u>SUPER-ORDINATE THEME</u>	
The Journey	The acknowledgement that coaching is more of an excursion where profound learning occurs than a destination.
<u>Sub-Theme</u>	
Attending	The focus of the coaching conversations on the leader, the leader's followers or entire organization.
<u>Sub-Theme</u>	
Facing Warts	Acceptance of one's holistic leadership capacity including the warts, freckles and scars.
<u>Sub-Theme</u>	
Johari Window	A metaphor of disclosure whereby coachees acknowledged "what was known to the coach alone" and sometimes topics that were "unknown to both coach and coachee."
<u>Supporting Theme</u>	
Steering Small	A descriptor for a leader calmly navigating turbulent waters within an organization. Coaching allowed for leaders to steer small.
<u>Supporting Theme</u>	
The Safety Net	A descriptor applied to the coach for keeping a coachee safe when experiencing vulnerability.
<u>Supporting Theme</u>	
The Sounding Board	A metaphor applied to the coach who was sought out for advice, wisdom or feedback for a coachee.
<u>Supporting Theme</u>	
Concern with Changing Too Much	An acknowledgement of a coachees desire to self-determine the amount of their own learning and change.
<u>Sub-Theme</u>	
Leaders As Humanitarian	Coachees provide illustrations in coaching how they care for their organizations human capital.
<u>SUPER-ORDINATE THEME</u>	
Memory Book	A reflection on the coaching experience was a walk down memory lane.

<u>Sub-Theme</u> I'm Still Learning	Learning still occurs after the formal coaching relationship has ended.
<u>Sub-Theme</u> Client-Coach Fit	Any future coaching would find coachees more involved in the client-coach selection process.
<u>Sub-Theme</u> Self-Reflection	Self-reflection continues after coaching engagement has ended.
<u>Sub-Theme</u> Nostalgia	Coachees will reminisce about their experience.

**Hope & faith in the process.** Hope and Faith in the Process describes the understanding leaders had about executive coaching prior to entering the formalized relationship. Each of the subjects' awareness ranged from knowledge about executive coaching to observation of executive coaches in action with their colleagues. Data from the interviews suggested profound recognition on the investment in their leadership development and placed almost a blind faith in the executive coaching process. Additionally, subjects openly shared that they had few expectations to the coaching engagement. This surprised me. Most inferred, however, they expected a safe conversation, confidential sharing, and one-on-one time with a trained expert.

Some subjects mentioned they were concerned about the match between the coach and placed trust in the selection process. Sometimes an internal superior or human resources professional screened potential coaches and other times the coaches were randomly assigned. Nonetheless, it is apparent for most that the client-coach fit was examined.

Hope and Faith in the Process Super-Ordinate Theme can be best understood as that period of time where the leaders were experiencing profound change. They were ascending on to a new leadership role, a new leadership position, or expanded expectation from their sponsoring



organization. This is also the time period generally ascribed prior to and/or in the early stages of the formalized coaching relationship.

Four sub-themes *Investment in Me*, *Know Oneself*, *Expect the Unexpected*, and *Ascension* have been identified and will be discussed in support of Hope and Faith in the Process. Passages from the specific interviews will be shared to support these four sub-themes.

*Investment in me*. There were subjects who specifically mentioned they recognized how special they felt about being singled out for executive coaching. Most had been approached by a supervisor or trusted associate to engage in the process. So while not anticipating the leadership development opportunity, when approached, all considered it an honor. None of the six subjects mentioned coaching was prescribed to punish or to be used as a last resort for employment. No one reported needing to correct bad behavior but rather that the coaching was offered to “provide new tools” or give “more insight on what it means to be an executive leader.” Those who were approached by a superior characterized that they had the option to turn down coaching or to delay the timing of the initiative based on personal and/or professional commitments.

The sponsoring organization where Peter is employed invests annually in its senior executives with a one-to-many approach over the course of a year. Peter mentioned that one senior leader per year is selected to engage in coaching. After having participated in the year-long leadership development activity, Peter was slated to be next in line.

They [supervisor] didn't make a big deal out of it [meaning publicly] my boss said it was a significant investment, which it was, in terms of money and my time. Asked me if I was ready to dedicate myself to it, ...and I indicated I was although I had some hesitation [with humility] because I never had that kind of individualized...coaching. (Peter).

Karl's organization, also as a matter of investment, uses executive coaching when senior leaders request the initiative for their subordinates. In Karl's situation his job role had greatly

expanded requiring more executive meetings and increased visibility and interaction with senior executives in the Fortune 500 Company. When Karl accepted the offer, he immediately saw it as an investment the company was making in his professional development. Gratitude followed.

I didn't view it [executive coaching] so much as purchasing it, but kind of an investment in me.....that was certainly the way that I took it.... I didn't really know exactly what it was going to be like... I was really opened minded (Karl).

Rose discussed the conditions that led up to her coaching experience. She shared that her supervisor had experienced an increase in his supervisory responsibilities on the university campus. The expansion of her boss's role meant less time for Rose and for her team. Some questions surfaced in Rose's boss's mind about how autonomous the team (Rose and her peers) could be or what level of boss/team interaction would be required. A coach was selected and three members of the team were selected to participate in executive coaching as a group.

I was approached by my supervisor. Would I be willing to participate in a coaching activity? So he said would you...and I say "Sure! Why not?" Very open to it! Yeah. I thought why not? I mean, I was very open to the experience. I had never worked with a coach in a leadership way. (Rose).

Kim climbed the corporate ladder to the role of Chief Financial Officer (CFO). She described the offer to engage with a coach as confirmation of her abilities in the new role as CFO. Kim believed the organization felt confident about the coach's abilities as well and projected an ideal fit. Kim's interim supervisor at the time interviewed coaches and screened them thoroughly to ensure an optimal fit for Kim.

I hadn't really done anything like this...I think it worked out [as] it should. I provided input...the company was paying for it – I wanted to make sure they were comfortable with who they were picking. My boss was very thorough...interviewed people...took it very seriously. (Kim).

*Expect the unexpected.* None of the six interviewees provided evidence that executive coaching was sought out by them. Rather, in each case, executive coaching was “suggested” or personal invitations were provided by their supervisor, CEO, or trusted colleague. While two subjects had observed coaching from a distance (Karl and Barney), none of the subjects had direct personal experience with executive coaching. Rose did share, however, that she had previous experience with a personal trainer and spiritual life coach. I felt it was critical to the research to capture interpretations of the subjects’ understanding of executive coaching prior to starting the initiative. As mentioned previously, each subject shared vague front end expectations of the coaching engagement but all six said they expected a safe conversation, confidential sharing, and one-on-one time with a trained expert.

Rose expressed this recollection in the interview with great excitement. She spoke with enthusiasm as a matter of normal speech so this particular passage demonstrated Rose’s intensity of eagerness for the group coaching experience. Although Rose was eager she appeared to purposefully hold onto “wait and see” attitude due to other members involved in the coaching engagement.

Well first of all...I’ve always thought it would be really cool to have a [an executive] coach. I use coaches in different ways in my life. I’m not going to reflect that experience [in this interview] ... I’m a real advocate of coaching cause. I find it helps me keep accountable. I have a spiritual coach and I have a personal trainer. [My supervisor] has decided this is a good thing. He’s comfortable with this guy [coach] and willing to...work with him and listen to his recommendations and you know, what do we have to lose...in my opinion? (Rose).

Because of his expanded job duties, Karl also had a supervisor invite him to consider executive coaching. It should be noted that this same supervisor did not have a positive coaching experience but thought enough of the process [of executive coaching] to believe that Karl might

find positive utility in the leadership development activity. Karl accepted the invitation and disclosed as having an open mind while entering the relationship with his coach. Here are Karl's perceptions of executive coaching.

My previous manager was a seasoned executive but he continued to have an executive coach throughout his career. All I know is that this gentleman would come in and meet with him pretty regularly and it seemed to be something he appreciated and looked forward to and he spent time preparing for these meetings so [it must be that these meetings] were something he felt had value throughout his career. It was role modeled, but I got the spectrum. That manager, the seasoned manager he was doing it, [my manager], had done it, and decided that he didn't necessarily benefit from it. So he was throwing this out, "Try this and see how it helps you." He is very open minded and just because it didn't work for him doesn't mean he doesn't think it won't work for someone else. So I've got managers on both ends of the spectrum... I made myself available to the spectrum of thoughts or ideas that may have come out of it. ...I was kind of looking forward to a sounding board. (Karl).

In his capacity as the new CEO, Barney initiated a strategic planning effort among the board and vice presidents. Executive coaching was an unexpected outgrowth of the strategic planning activity.

So the [Consulting Group Name] was identified for us for this initial consulting [on a strategic planning effort] and we had them come in do so some coaching and during my discussions with [the coach] she had mentioned some other resources they have, and one of them was executive coaching. I had been through a process before and it was a disaster. (Barney).

Barney explained he has observed executive coaching used as a way to weed out people but attributed the "disaster" to those who implemented the activity, not coaching as a tool. So in effect, Barney still was attracted to the idea of executive coaching.

I think it would be a really good thing and I'd like to go through the process first so see how it goes, there are certainly some things I think I can benefit from. One of the

important things for me was a 360 [degree] evaluation and getting others [in the organization] engaged in the process, so I was the first one to do it. I didn't have any significant expectations about what would come out [the executive coaching process]. I was more curious about what I could do to help facilitate this team or what I wasn't doing that I could be doing. ... [T]o become a more effective leader and how we can move the organization along. So I had some hopes but I didn't have those expectations. I intentionally did not do a lot of reading about it (Barney).

It should not be inferred that Barney's lack of preparation meant he did not appreciate the value of coaching or the coaching experience itself. Rather, because of a negative coaching history, he seemed to enter the second experience as a "blank slate." An interpretation might be that Barney was open to the possibilities that existed in the coaching relationship.

Karen was engaged in coaching at a period of intense emotional investment in her organization. She was undergoing layoffs and she had to communicate the news to the employees under her care. Karen clearly was personally attached to her workforce and felt terrible for impacting their lives so negatively. So while she was in some way "doing harm" to her employees, she clearly did not want to be harmed in the coaching. "My only expectation and the thing that I will always, in this kind of thing and be watchful for is, do no harm" (Karen).

Peter shared that his father was a psychologist and that he had some preconceived ideas of what one-to-one conversations might entail. While not specifically stated, Peter inferred that he prepared himself to expected unexpected in the process of his executive coaching relationship.

I thought it would be a fair amount of one-on-one – like counseling but I thought it would be on the traditional strengths, weaknesses, "let's see how we can maximize your strengths and overcome the obstacles for success." I thought it would include some observation, I thought it would... [have a model, meet every so often]. (Peter).

***Knowing oneself.*** All six subjects appeared to have a good handle on their strengths, tendencies, areas for growth, and characteristics needed in a prospective coach. Sometimes the

coach was selected randomly and at other times coaches were matched with their client very carefully. This theme Knowing Oneself describes content shared in interviews about executives who really knew themselves prior to entering coaching.

Kim was transparent in her sharing. She appeared to freely admit that if she was to experience transformational change an outside force would be needed to reach that goal. Furthermore, the characteristics of that outside force, in this case the executive coach, would need to be diligent, focused, and accountable for keeping Kim on track.

I wanted someone who was a little tough and what I mean by that is someone who isn't going to talk about it... are they going to follow up with me and make it [clear] that they are holding me accountable. Because when you are talking about personal change I can see myself well enough ... but it's going to take someone to actually help me. (Kim).

The passage that follows reveals that Peter felt he could at times manipulate any given conversation to suit his agenda. This candor suggested Peter had significant personal insight into his behaviors and as such, when he displayed derailing or resistant behaviors, he would be called on it by his coach. Additionally, Peter knew himself and placed such faith in the coaching process that he reached out to his coach to thank him for "calling him out." That said, Peter participated in manipulative behaviors on the one hand and on the other hand appreciated being held accountable for the manipulation.

I was surprised. And then he [his coach] talked to me later...How I responded was I was surprised. And I said, 'give me an hour' and I went and dealt with it. Put kind of a lid on it and came back. And [then after taking care of my stressor] was engaged. I talked to him about that [incident] at the onset and said, "That was really helpful to call me out." And he said, "Good, cause I'd like to do that [same intervention] along the way [of the coaching relationship]. Are you in this or not? [The background on this statement was in reference to a group leadership retreat prior to this coaching experience where

Peter was not fully engaged in the group process]. And oh, by the way, if I see behaviors that are impacting our ability to communicate I am going to call them out. And the behaviors were just to make sure I wasn't going to manipulate the situation. So I was in a comfort zone [that is, when using the process to his advantage or not stretching the boundaries for growth]. And so they would ask once and awhile, 'Are you outside the comfort zone? I am observing you being outside the comfort zone.' And their response was, 'Good.' And I was ok with that [even though] I sweated a lot. (Peter).

Rose had employed a number of coaches in her personal life but had yet to experience an executive coach in her work life. When approached by her supervisor, Rose was eager for the activity. However it is worthy to note, Rose mentioned a number of times how "holding one accountable" was an important element in coaching for her. Rose appeared to have no problem acknowledging the self-awareness of leaning on an outsider for encouragement.

I use coaches in different ways in my life. I'm not going to reflect that [meaning Rose was not going to necessarily talk about those prior coaching relationships in our interview] experience but I'm a real advocate of coaching 'cause I find it helps me keep accountable. I have.....a spiritual coach and I have .... a personal trainer. (Rose).

**Ascension.** Each of the leaders I interviewed had undergone some significant professional change in association with coaching. In some cases the significant professional change occurred prior to coaching (Karen, Barney, and Kim). In other cases the significant change was simultaneous (Peter, Karl). For three of the subjects it was a role that they ascended to (Karen, Kim, Barney), for two of the subjects it was the same role but with expanded responsibilities (Karl & Rose). With the ascension to change some looked to the coaching to help clarify expectations from - "The 10<sup>th</sup> Floor" where the decisions were made for the organization - as in the case of Karl. Four of the subjects identified new leadership and management tools needed and they looked to the coach to supply the innovation (Karen, Barney, Kim and Rose).

Kim shared some significant life changes in our interview (the death of her first son to the birth of her daughter not long after). Kim received a promotion to become the CFO of her organization and executive coaching was highly suggested by a trusted senior colleague.

I would say six minutes into it I realized I was way over my head. Prior to that I had about 30 people reporting to me over all and then I had gone to 200 people all over the country. [S]o vast geographic dispersement, hadn't had more than five year's direct supervisory experience in the first place. Let alone...running an entire finance organization. So it was a huge... giant leap forward. ...and they also knew I would need help. Coaching was provided for me so I was starting in January of [that year]. More than anything, I would say I had the makings of it [executive clout], but needed some more grounding, executive presence, walk around, delegation, making sure I understood my job. (Kim).

Both Karl and Kim used the specific language "executive presence" when introducing one of the main reasons for engaging in their coaching relationship. In the following passage, Karl reveals that he was quite relived when he learned what was expected of him in the expansion of his role within the organization. Coaching did accompany the job expansion and with that came meaningful clarity of expectations of what constituted "executive" within the senior executive ranks.

My manager recommended it, it's been a fairly positive experience for me...he's given me some tools to think about for me to think about how I am navigating the organization. And it wasn't so much of ah....due to performance...the focus was around executive presence. And, um, how I am perceived in the organization and in order for me to get where they wanted me to be I needed to be a little more vocal....You know, I actually found it fairly therapeutic, you know, just kind of "ok." Understanding exactly what they want on the 10<sup>th</sup> floor [Executive Level]. Clarity around that and that I didn't need to become someone different to get there, you know, I'm not going to be one that is loud, I'm not going to drive it, and cause conflict to cause conflict. But there are other tools to use and get what I am doing and get my thoughts promoted within the



organization without having to do that.... Well it was therapeutic in, just that I never really had a clear understanding as to what they, exactly what executive leadership meant to them.... But it helps if you have that opportunity to kind of float things by, so from a business perspective internally, but from a personal development perspective I really did miss that and this [coaching] gave me the opportunity. And quite honestly it gave me...and independent view. It wasn't, "Karl how can we make you succeed at [my organization]?" Rather it was, "I will help you to succeed no matter where you go." (Karl).

Ascension in Peter's case was much different because he was not necessarily gaining a new job but ascending to another level of self-discovery. He has reached several personal and professional milestones in recent years at a break-neck-speed. The accomplishments, while valued seemed to have brought him to this time of intensive self-analysis.

I have always kind of been "head down" get through law school, get through college, now I am married, now my wife is going to med-school, we have young kids, she needs to finish her residency... Get the new job at [here], become a leader there and all of a sudden, "I'm here and I'm managing people, now what?" I described it as it was an opportunity to pull my head out, take a breath, and look around and for me....purpose...now what? What do I want to do? (Peter).

Karen found herself in charge of an organization that had not had a leadership change in many years. Karen thinks about her words carefully, crafting exactly what she wants to communicate, so I inferred that it had been some time since she was the leader in charge of an organization. The change to the executive director was a big enough change to influence the need for coaching. Yet in this specific situation, Karen found herself in charge of saving the organization from imploding unless dire steps were taken to curb the bleeding. According to Karen, executive coaching came at just the right time as she ascended the ladder of leadership.

So I came to the executive director position at a time of [pause] great change. [W]e had started with the executive director training. My predecessor, after 38 years, was

retiring so I spent most of the year with him. Starting in April ...and got confirmed by the board in the fall. By October I was making the decisions. And then 2008 happened. And I thought, the board thought, it was recommended to me, this [coaching] can only help. So I did several leadership development things. One of the things I did was through the College of Saint Thomas, their Center for Business. Coaching was part of that... one of the added values. What we do is...directly related to the housing industry and the automotive industry. And January came and our largest customer said, "We're reducing our forecast to 10%." So 90% of what we're doing stopped. (Karen).

**The Journey.** The second Super-Ordinate Theme is labeled – The Journey. Leaders engaged in executive coaching are on a journey. Sometimes the executive coaching journey was a clearly known direction and sometimes the destination was not well known by the client and/or the coach. I labeled the second of three Super-Ordinate Themes *The Journey* because it seemed as if subjects were more reflective of the process itself than the actual outcomes achieved from the coaching engagement.

The coaching journey had mile markers of significance to the leaders. First, the attention of the coaching did vary from sole focus on the leader (i.e., they set the agenda) to focus on leader to benefit the organization (e.g. the supervisor set the agenda). Second, in all but one case, data collection on subject's leadership capacity was presented to the executive. This process was a mild discomfort for some and rather intense for others. Yet each mentioned this discomfort was a necessary step in the journey of learning. Third, coaching session trajectories were not always clear, the course charted was sometimes unknown to both client and coach. Finally, subjects provided inspirational data indicating coaching helped them become more sensitive to the human side of their work-places. Supporting themes discussed under The Journey are; *Attending, Facing Warts, Freckles, and Scars, Johari Window, and Leader as Humanitarian.*

*Attending.* I have labeled this theme “Attending” as it indicates an effort to understand where the attention of the coaching was directed. More than the others, Peter’s interview inspired this theme. Peter’s coach contextualized coaching as attending to “The I, The We, and/or The Us.” The focus of “The I” is essentially a focus on the leader’s needs alone. “The We” can be best understood as attending to the immediate co-workers surrounding the executive. “The Us” would be best understood as attending to the organization at large. So, with this backdrop in mind, Peter and Karen both elected to concentrate their coaching experience around “The I.” The others (Barney, Kim, Karl and Rose) focused on “The We and/or The Us.”

Peter was at a stage in life where he focused the coaching engagement on his personal needs for fulfillment and life/career purpose. With an amazing sense of calm, Peter demonstrated gratitude for this opportunity to chart a new course for the next chapter in his life. At the time of the interview and writing this dissertation, Peter was in a reflection period but still actively meeting with his executive coach.

He [coach] suggested it [a model] and then we talked about it. He suggested using some of the tools they have “in the box” for analysis and feedback but adjusting them considerably to do a deeper dive based on what was the goal to help me identify [my] purpose...Next steps for me individually, professionally, personally... [H]e also was responsive to just be focusing on the professional side on feedback, and development opportunities [alone] is ignoring a huge driver in my life from a personal perspective. So [my coach] suggested, let’s reach into your family, let’s talk to your spouse, let’s talk about some other things on a personal basis that drives you. And from the on-set is “this is for you, this is not necessarily going to have a packaged report back [to your boss] ...some of the feedback things in coaching have for your boss or the leadership – it is up to you what you want to do with it.” (Peter).

Karen, while receiving some practical tools for weathering the unsettling atmosphere, clearly used the coaching time to process her emotions. There was ultimately spill over into the

entire organization however the major elements of the engagement appeared to focus on whatever needs Karen expressed in any given session with her coach. “I’ve done theories and done models. I can pick up anything. I have my own doctorate you know, and so I can pick up information... Quickly. And what I needed was practical [tools to navigate this chaos].” (Karen).

Kim was clear that she was able to influence the goals of her executive coaching relationship. While mindful of the harmony between the organizational expectations and her own goals, it is clear she did want to steer the agenda for her own growth.

That initiated in January, the thing that I liked about it was we agreed what my goals were and what my boss’s goals were so we were trying to have as much overlap as possible. But, I got to have my own agenda so to speak, too. So we did that initially and there were a couple conversations, but mostly fact gathering that started in the January or February timeframe. (Kim).

Similarities with Kim’s narrative above and Karl’s that follows blend attending to personal and organizational needs. Kim is clearer with her agenda whereas Karl seeks to understand what is expected of him in order to “navigate the organization” better. In each case there is certainly a top-down understanding that the investment in the leader is to first equip him/her with new executive tools and then to apply those learning elements for the benefit of the sponsoring organization.

We had a session with my manager – they called it a calibration session – make sure what I was wanting to accomplish throughout the sessions, make sure that was in line with what [my manager] was expecting ....the better executive you become...you benefit everyone around you. (Karl).

***Facing warts, freckles, and scars.*** It seemed that each interviewee was willing to share with some transparency the data collected from the executive coach. Four of the six mentioned formal 360 degree feedback (surveys/interviews) or multi-rater instruments were used. Most also

shared that, data were “not always welcomed or embraced” referring to feedback by a coach or when discoveries were made about them. Acknowledgement about facing one’s warts, freckles, and scars was uncomfortable.

Kim referenced her recollections within the passage that follows. The data collection and feedback process had a lasting impact.

[My coach] has a team [of staff] that would [conduct] that information gathering – sort of experts in that aspect of things and so they’re both written and oral interviews with a whole host of different folks in the organization that would tell me what I do well, what I don’t do well. So that [information] was synthesized in an April of 2008, at this time I went to a boot camp – two days over at [the consultant’s office]. And the first day was the ‘holding up the mirror saying this is what people think about you’ and um, as hard as it was to hear, [my coach] tells me it was “the nicer ones” he’s had to do. Lots and lots of positive complementary things. Yeah. And two or three big things that needed to be worked on but no one said it in ah, ‘I can’t stand working with Kim’ kind of way.’ I remember walking away from that feeling like ‘I’m a terrible person.’ You know, how much I try to think about other people, clearly I’m not thinking about other people, I’m thinking about myself. You know, trying to help them...It was painful! I mean it was...I cried. It was actually that emotional for me I think because I care so much what other people think, I don’t want folks to view me as, um, what I perceive to be...the typical executive. I remember just falling apart. It’s just tough to hear. I did [feel safe there] I mean he’s very adept at being brutally honest and sensitive at the same time. Ah, I shut out all the positive things...It [the feedback] was giving me a picture when I was trying to do the right thing, I sometimes, um, make it harder for those, particularly those who work for me. So, I will use a really silly example. To protect my team from having to do last minute, I’m going to call it corporate last-minute-fire-drill-stuff – I often times would do things myself too, so they could go home and be with their families. Well that did two things; [first] it [my behavior] had an impact on me and my family. The thing I didn’t understand before going through coaching was it had an impact on those individuals [she was protecting] in a negative way. “My intent was to help you” what I

didn't expect was they didn't feel like I trust them at all....it isn't until you take a step back and look at it from their point of view. How would I feel if that were happening, I would feel like they don't trust me? This gave more, what was hard for me was that it [the coaching feedback] personalized it. A little bit more, it's one thing if I others want me to change one thing about myself than if I want to change one thing. It's a lot hard for me personally. That was harder to hear and to know that I had a negative impact on people that I cared about even though I was trying to go out of my way to avoid a negative impact on those people. That was the hard part. (Kim).

Kim affirms that facing some negative data about her behaviors was painful. While Kim's intention was to sacrifice her own family time, the impact was interpreted as not trusting her employees. Coaching allowed Kim a safe place to face this reality. Kim admitted it was difficult to hear negative news about her company or about another person's behavior impacting her employees in an unfortunate way.

One of the things I haven't talked about yet that was a huge problem for me was saying 'I'm sorry' too much. I mean I would apologize if someone on my team would get a report – somebody else that was a peer of mine – I would apologize [for them]. It was just like....Unnecessary apologies were a huge handicap for me. I don't feel like I do, in fact I notice it in other people now. And it is not that I am any less sorry that they didn't get what they wanted but I don't take personal responsibility for everything that happens on a daily basis. I am a highly accountable person, I don't...it pains me if I read about something in the newspaper that somewhere in [my organization] something didn't go quite right – allegedly. I feel accountable for that – it's my company, is there anything I could have done? (Kim).

Barney's transparency in sharing non-flattering information about himself with his peers helped cement relationships. The previous CEO's authoritarian leadership style conditioned the organization to hide their deficiencies and so this new style of Barney's came with some apprehension. It wasn't until the leader took the first step of being vulnerable did the guard

come down for his leadership team. “I shared with them the 360 review which wasn’t always flattering...I think that helped a lot to sort of bring people together” (Barney).

***Johari window.*** The Johari Window (Luft & Ingham, 1955) is a cognitive psychological model of understanding interpersonal communication (see Figure 2). The model of a window is divided into four quadrants. Quadrant one represents that information a leader knows about him/herself. An example would be the leader’s personal history since childhood, known only to them. Quadrant Two represents information only a coach may know about the executive. For example, the data observed in the sessions on voice, gate, and eye contact. Quadrant Three represents that shared understanding about the leader that the leader and coach have together. This would be information gathered from multi-rater instruments that both agree exists. Quadrant Four represents that area where no clear answer is presented and an exploration jointly is required. It might be best understood as coach and coachee in a boat without a paddle or motor and both have to figure out how to get to shore. The theme of Johari Window helped me understand that sometimes the coachee had to identify which quadrant they were in during any given coaching session or conversational topic. It seemed that sometimes session agendas were largely driven by “what was known to the coach alone” and sometimes topics were “unknown to both coach and coachee.”

<b>Public Self</b> (Known to me and to others)	<b>Private Self</b> (Known to me only)
<b>Hidden Self</b> (Known to others, but not to me)	<b>Unknown Self</b> (Not known to me or anyone else)

*Figure 2. Johari Window*

Embedded within this Johari Window theme are several sub-themes such as: Steer Small, Safety Net, Sounding Board and Concern for Changing Too Much. Each of these sub-themes will be strengthened with associated passages.

Peter elects to disclose some hidden content of his past career success. The coaching process encouraged Peter to explore his past successes and examine how he got to those ranks. One might consider “charm, interpersonal skills, and relationship skills” as positive behaviors, however Peter discloses these strengths have been overused. Peter openly shares some cognitive dissonance with the apparent examination of his strengths being perceived as weaknesses.

There were similarities and there were some things he observed and they were some things I observed that I could get, based on history that he didn't quite have. You know large themes from a personal basis are, um, over-reliance on one skill throughout my life. Ah, and that skill, some articulate it as ‘charm, interpersonal skills, relationship skills’, and so we kind of explored that quite in-depth. (Peter).

Barney chuckled when sharing his recollection of who drove the agenda. Herein is another example of The Johari Window of interpersonal communication. Because Barney and his coach had a positive chemistry it seemed acceptable that agendas were not always preset or



known prior to a session. This synergy seemed to be the catalyst for discussing pertinent items between Barney and his coach.

It's funny I don't know which one of us was driving the sessions...I'd say she doesn't probably know either. Because it would vary, you know...It was comfortable. And I think it became more comfortable the more time we spent together. There was a mutual respect that was built up and so I think she might say the same thing. You know, it wasn't one driving the sessions. [T]here might be times when I ... had the agenda and was going through it and there might be others times when she was pushing the agenda so it was very comfortable. And I think that was one of the most important things for. Anyone who is going to have a successful coaching relationship is that relationship [chemistry] is important. You have to have the trust and I think particularly at a senior level you have to feel that someone has the confidence to deal with these issues, the experience, to understand the issues. Sometimes there are complex things you're dealing with and so, while [my coach] didn't always understand the technical vagaries of this business, she understands people are the bottom line that is what it is about. (Barney).

*Steering small.* I have already discussed the timing of Karen's coaching coinciding with her promotion to the executive director position. It was also a stressor to downsize the organization from 115 employees to 65 employees. Under such stressors, coaching was a "safe harbor" for Karen, a way to realize she had all the tools, skills, knowledge, and aptitude right in her hands. The coaching sessions tempered Karen's chaotic climate for a period inviting her to recall vital information about herself. It is likely Karen would have wandered about her turbulent waters had the coaching sessions not reminded her to relax, calm down, and realize she was capable.

I would tell her [coach]... the situation, I would tell her my plan and I would ask for thoughts and feedback. And she would have one or two ideas..., she would point me in a direction that I had forgotten, "of course I know how to do that." But kind of being [with emphasis] in this situation, I had forgotten. When you're sailing, when you're a sailor, the thing you do not realize is you don't need to do this [gestures with hand on] with the

tiller. It's called steering small. And you really rest your hand on the [tiller], and you let the boat tell you what you need to know and you plan your adjustments. [My coach] was or the coaching process was very much like that "stop steering large. Be still and pay attention. Everything you know is right here in your hands." So it was extremely [with emphasis] helpful. To help me steer small. Every time you look at a sail boat on the lake you'll now know who can and who cannot sail...because you'll see it. (Karen).

*The safety net.* Karen has powerful images to describe her meaning-making of executive coaching. Karen's view of leadership is one of being vulnerable on a daily basis as her employees look to her for performance, expert advice, and a container for all answers from the trivial to the complicated. One passage noted the isolation she felt, "I can't tell you how long I walked around and in what appeared to be the Grim Reaper costume cause as soon as someone saw me, scurry, scurry, scurry..." (Karen).

The metaphor of the safety net truly speaks to the sacred place where Karen could unpack, unload, and unwind with her trusted coach. It appeared that it was not that Karen wanted to have the net speak to her but to be there for her in case she fell.

It [coaching] really looks like a safety net. "You're on the trapeze all day long." Or I'm on the high-wire. Someone was just talking about how I walk between, between how I have to worry about toilet seat lids and, you know, a half a million dollar chillers for air conditioning. So I am always balancing and never do I know there is a safety net. The nice thing about a coach is I can come and talk about goals, staff, I can talk about revenue generating ideas, I can talk about board issues and I know there is a net. I know it won't go anywhere, I know I won't be interrupted, I know I won't be contradicted, I know I won't be given advice and told, 'maybe you should try....' Do you know how many times a day I am told what I should do? The safety net is simply there, it is like what you would do in counseling or therapy when someone is balling, you know, it's the touch, it's the tissue, and it's the listening. "Your there!" You're the vessel to catch it all. Then when the coachee catches their breath and says, "What do I do?" It's the reflecting, "What is in your heart to do? What's the first thing that comes to your mind?"

Or, simply “what do you have left to, in you to do?” Maybe it’s [with laughter] really to just take a vacation? Let the company implode? “What is it?” Because we all really know how do know it. (Karen).

*The sounding board.* Karl seemed to need the external validation or at least have someone there to receive his ideas or his concerns about navigating his organization. It was not so much validation but perhaps a sanctuary to bounce work-related needs off the coach. Where Karl enjoyed a previous mentorship that provided the sounding board opportunity, his current supervisor did not have the time for Karl. To settle the ambiguity of expectations from “The 10<sup>th</sup> Floor,” where the senior executives lived, was a driver for Karl. A place to understand the expectations from “on high,” is where coaching became a place to volley back and forth with his coach.

I was kind of looking forward to a bit of....ah.....sounding board... help me figure out the next steps to get there [the pursuit to becoming an executive]. Ideas would just pop in my head that I wanted some sort of sounding board on. (Karl).

*Concern with changing too much.* Kim admitted the need to change some elements of her leadership behavior. Her sponsoring organization communicated clearly that she had to work on her “executive presence.” She disclosed there was harmony between her original coaching goals and the organization’s original goals such as delegation, executive presence, being more visible, and engagement with the board. However Kim shared some concern with changing too much or becoming someone she did not want to be. The work in her male dominated environment probably contributed to this concern. In fact, one of the major interpretations Kim made was the confirmation that no change in character was needed. When I prompted Kim she responded with an affirmation of “just wanting” to remain herself.

[I]t’s actually been surprising to me how well, just being myself and trying, trying to do the right thing, not always accomplishing it, but trying. Um, how well that’s been

received by the organization, I kept thinking that probably since [the period of coaching] until now even I would say, I keep thinking the organization is going to say, “Oh, she doesn’t have what it takes to be an executive.” And it’s been quite the opposite. They appreciate the honesty and integrity and you know, I definitely have business skills that I bring to the table that are appreciated as well, but from a leadership perspective it is appreciated that I am authentic and trying to do the right thing for the organization, our constituents, you know whomever is impacted. I, I want to be me.... And I want to prove to people [I] can make good decisions (Kim).

The acknowledgement that Kim could keep her essential personal characteristics warmed her heart and encouraged her mind. The coaching process allowed Kim to gain some resolution on the degree to which change was required by the organization.

I bring it up because I think it becomes taboo that you cannot acknowledge that we are different sexes and that we think differently. ... part of this coaching helped me realize it is more of a strength... I would have called my gender neutral if not a deficit and....after all of this I clearly see that it is, if anything a huge strength. (Kim).

The degree of change required to “navigate the organization” or to become more executive was also a concern for Karl. Here he mentions to his coach that there are limitations on how he gets work accomplish. The coach affirms that slight changes would be required, simple ways to alter the way that Karl is perceived by the broader organizational leaders. It seemed Karl had resolution with this validation from his coach about the slight degree of change to be made. And what it came down to was “I’m already doing that, what I need to do...is socialize a bit differently. I told him [the coach] “I’m not going to be the one who pounds on the table and says, I’m doing this or I’m doing that...” You know it’s just more of here’s some tools. Have some lunches with the people you need to know. Socialize in different ways to make sure that is happening. (Karl).

*Leader as humanitarian.* As had been mentioned, several interviewees talked about an archetype of a brutal executive. The archetype was described as a wicked tyrant. An expression to not become this archetype inspired this theme as Leader as Humanitarian.

Kim emphasized her ideal leadership characteristics that included such things as a sound moral compass, integrity, honesty, and authenticity while contrasting them with her perception of the stereotype of an executive. Kim was relieved to learn the prevailing climate accepted her behaviors and to some extent embraced her style. Furthermore, Kim believed that decision making for one's career advancement should not include the ladder hopping, back-stabbing, and/or self-promotion that are contrary to the ideal leader.

Whatever "right" means. But do it, for me what right means, is doing things and making decisions with the right intent. But if you're making decisions on how it's going to promote you in the organization, that isn't right. Even if it is the right business decision – to me it's not right. Um, and so, having a sound moral – having integrity is what I, um, wanted to convey...honesty and integrity and you know, I definitely have business skills that I bring to the table that are appreciated as well, but from a leadership perspective it is appreciated that I am authentic and trying to do the right thing for the organization (Kim).

Karen struggles with the responsibility of her organization. The decisions to lay off staff and to calm the anxious waters of the staff that remain weigh heavy on her psyche. Coaching came along at an ideal time for Karen to feel safe and to discuss how she could keep the emotional safety of the organization at large.

To a certain extent, I have to process their [with emphasis] stuff too. I have to hold their safety. Even my senior management team, I have to hold their safety. And they need to know that I can do that and they don't, I don't get privilege with them. That's not what leadership is about... You have a bottom line you have to reach, you have to do this [layoffs], you have to do that and you have outside influences but that story is quick. The decisions are obvious.....how do I approach them, I imagine coming from where I do and how I am? And the logic is clear. The feelings are hard. How do you tell

30 people that their livelihood is gone? How do you ... How do I carry the safety for these senior management who will now have to reconfigure the organization with all these people gone? How do I help them come to the understanding that this is absolutely necessary? (Karen).

Barney shares two humanitarian examples that demonstrate where he made a difference in the lives of two of his employees. Relatively new to the organization, Barney was still sensing which employees were going to engage in the future and which employees needed other avenues of employment. In both cases, Barney used measures that some might say put the organization at risk for being sued. Yet when he conveyed the stories the employees expressed appreciation for going out on their own terms and considered Barney's approach suitable and dignified. It was the coaching container that allowed Barney to discuss these decisions.

One of the things we were trying to assess in this individual was... what "was going on?" It was clear this person had the skills but the level of commitment was [n't] there. And what was the issue? Was it that they were disengaged? Was it they weren't buying into the process? Was it that they didn't understand the role? What was the issue? And ultimately as we worked through the issues it was a combination of things. It was... the person had the skills but was unsure or uncertain about their capability and it was a person who was unsecure inwardly but very confident outwardly. So they wouldn't ask for help because that would be an admission of guilt. [She] got mired down in this thing because it was becoming overwhelming to her. She stopped and didn't know where to go. And so it took me going to her and saying, "Look. I understand, it's ok. We can work through it and I am here to help you. And I want to make you successful." It sort of seems, so juvenile at the time, but it's real. It's like let's take this one step at a time... She had health problems, family issues that were going on... there were a lot of personnel issues that were weighing on her, she was moving from one department to another and this department had not had good leadership for years. And so there were a lot of issues that were personnel issues, systems issues a lot of things so, it had become overwhelming. And as a result she was shutting down (Barney).

I'll give you an [another] example. This is one of the things that we [my coach] talked about....there was an employee that was here leading our [XYZ] department who had been employed for almost 30 years. She came into the organization as a secretary and ended up going to college but her whole experience was this company. All she knew. And she was tough! Now she was excellent in terms of my work with her. She wasn't up to speed on all the [departmental] things....so that was sort of a problem....she ruled with an iron fist. And that was not the kind of culture...that we needed. She has a sincere desire to try to adapt to and growth and she was a champion of what we were trying to do but she was not a good ambassador. And ultimately what you come down to is this is just not going to work. And you know, you need to make a change. ... giving where her experience and protected categories and those kind of things – then conversations with attorneys – “These are the kind of things you need to do, you cannot talk about this, develop a severance program, have a very short conversation, that's it done.” I said, “I think I understand why you are giving me that sort of advice, I think it is incredibly bad advice. And I am not going to do that.” So I had the conversation with [my coach] and told her we're just not going down this path, and this is not....and so we had some conversations around that. And she had also been in situations that, ah, you know, ultimately, from a legal standpoint that might be the best thing to protect you from litigation. But it's almost never the best thing for the person. Because you never get to tell them why and they're always struggling with this, “Why?” It's just a terrible thing. And so going against legal advice, I sat down with this person and explained the issues, “where we are, how you're perceived, that's not the kind of environment that we need to have, I appreciate the support you have giving me – this is just not going to work. How do you want to play this out?” You know, so, “I'm happy to work with you to get this however you want to get it. I want to transition you...” she was 60 years old, and ...I'm willing to provide the ability for you to retire early. We had conversations around all this,...“And you can make any announcement you want to make, however you want to do it...” She made the decision she was going to retire in 3-4 months, and 3-4 months we worked through things and she felt good about it...[S]he understood it, even though she said, “I think I can change, but I understand where you are coming from...” And she said, “Whatever you want me to do, I will do.” And so we worked this out. No one here knows

anything other than she retired. And you know, I saw her, this was about a year ago, in the shopping mall just a couple weeks ago...She gave me a hug and she said, “Thank you, so much.” And so that to me is a whole lot more important...than not being sued (Barney).

**The memory book.** Four of the six interviews had officially ended the formalized coaching agreements with their coaches. Viewed now, it is my impression that the interview itself inspired a *walk down memory lane* for the some of the subjects. In the course of our conversations, it seemed to me that several viewed our time together like a memory book, Kim had prepared significant notes in reflection to show me. Karl and Peter both pulled out their 3-ring binders in a show-and-tell approach from their coaching experience. Each also displayed non-verbal behaviors of being proud of their growth experience through coaching. The Memory Book is the last of the three Super-Ordinate themes with supporting themes of *I’m Still Learning*, *Client-Coach Fit*, *Self-Reflection* and *Nostalgia*.

***I’m still learning.*** Interview data analyzed seemed to me to suggest a few of these leaders are still exercising areas for growth. Even as the executive coaching engagements have officially ended, the awareness of and practice of areas for growth are fresh and vibrant. It seems the voice of the coach or at least the coaching experience is very much alive in these cases. This is good news for everyone who participates in coaching for the on-going learning is evident in the wake of the formal coaching contract.

Absolutely! And that was the biggest challenge I would say for, I continue to struggle with because I am kind of a hands on person. A detailed person to a certain degree...I, won’t say I have totally perfected changing it yet, but I have a different discussion with people...I feel like I am getting more candid – you know once they lay it out there and say “This is a problem, you can’t keep doing this” then you can have the conversation. And more than one person had said this (Kim).



Here Kim openly admitted she is still working on letting go and practicing how to delegate more. Now with the permission to engage in the conversation, Kim expresses openness to having a different conversation with her staff. The realization that more than one person offered a micro-management observation, validated the reality that Kim did participate in doing work for those around her.

Yeah. And you just want things to go the way they are supposed to go. A little bit of a control aspect to it sure too. But, at any rate, I did get feedback along the way that I was doing less of that [unnecessary apologizing] (Kim).

When prompted whether others were noticing these new behaviors, Kim noted that others around her noticed less unnecessary apologies. Kim also specifies she changed some internal thinking patterns prior to jumping into the old reflexive behaviors. Kim shared how some behaviors did indeed change and continues to change as she rewrites a cognitive script of apology for mistakes others make within the organization. Kim admitted this was a work-specific behavior; this over-apologetic behavior did not spill over into non-work areas.

Um-huh....Um....I definitely....it was conscious. At first I had to start by taking a breath before I responded...I had to pause to find different words to so start the sentence with because my natural reaction was to say "I'm sorry" instead of "Well, we can do about that is ..." (Kim).

Karl is a "can do" leader who seeks to find a way "to get the impossible" accomplished. A no nonsense leadership style was challenged by the coaching experience. Here Karl admits speaking up first and being less calculating (more risk taking) in meetings. What has worked well for Karl in the past had to shift for a new slightly different change in his behavior.

Somewhat... it is hard for me to be vocal. I am more like, I like to digest and figure things out and then lead the charge. You know one of the things I have been practicing is to be the first one to speak up and share my opinion first..... But there are some points

where I've gotten comfortable saying, "I'm going to have to get back to you on that. Here's my understanding, but I'll have to verify that" (Karl).

Peter admits it's a work-in-progress. While he acknowledges the tendency to over-commit in his work and personal life, he is still learning how to make the necessary changes. It is necessary to recall that Peter was still engaged in the coaching relationship during this interview.

I am still working on that .....the other, let me hit one other observation I'm also transitioning from what I coined in the, I just had the integration session last week – Less Hans Solo and more Yoda? .....That vigilance has been a screen that may have held me back at some instances. I've been practicing being less vigilant...more spontaneous. More hop-in. More, "I'll give it a shot" more risk-taking. That's coincided on the flip-side with the feedback that was not a surprise – where my credibility suffers is based on my, it's again link to my desire to please people, is taking on commitments. "Yeah, I can do that. Sure I'll do that." Cause it will "make you happy, I'll say, yes. It will be an opportunity for me. I want to be accomplished" but there's so much even with delegation I cannot do it all and you know, the plates – they do not drop – they always get delivered before the food gets cold. So transitioning to, not necessarily to saying "no" but "is there another way to accomplish the goal you wanted with me having to take it?" That I've had less success at but it's a journey (Peter).

*Client-Coach fit.* Not all of the leaders found deep personal connection with their coaches. Rose in particular found her coach just “fine” when asked about the client-coach fit. [T]he coach [was handpicked by supervisor] It was ok with me (Rose). Others were much more favorable toward the emotional and interpersonal connection with their coach. Clearly though all expressed an affiliation toward their coach in one way or another that reflected respect and admiration. When prompted most suggested a key element of the experience was the foundational client-coach fit. Each described this connection differently but each agreed the bond was important.

In terms of selecting the coach, all I had done was provide feedback to my boss to the CEO at the time. Indicating that my preference would be to have a male coach I think given that I work with primarily men, ah, at these higher levels, ah, I just...I don't know, I grew up with brothers and I'm more comfortable probably speaking with a man. ... and getting their point of view on things, I'm certainly female and understand that our brains work a little differently and I wanted to understand a little more from the male point of view. I wanted someone who was a little tough and what I mean by that is someone who isn't going to talk about it, are they going to follow up with me and make it that they are holding me accountable. Because when you are talking about personal change I can see myself well enough ah, I could talk a lot about it [change] but it's going to take someone to actually helping me (Kim).

Kim knew her preferences, tendencies, and personal background. This data was informative when she had to communicate desired traits in an executive coach. As has been stated, her interim boss was doing extensive screening for Kim's coach. The coach characteristics were the filter used to gauge whether a potential coach would be a match for Kim.

I think to the extent possible, if the coach can understand the culture, at some level the business and the business challenges, and then the...the positions with which I am [the client] interacting and how I am expected to navigate the organization, I think those are critical for them to understand. In order to help you in your current situation...more

broadly, just thinking a little about it, they need to understand who the individual is, and what their ambitions are as I said, my coach was very straight forward with me. 'If that is not who you want to be then we are wasting our time. Then you're really good at middle management if that is where you want to be then just stay there.' ...I found this [coach] had a business background was more relevant for me because he was able to be very clear in what his experiences were or understanding business – being able to pull other references from other businesses – that was pretty effective for him (Karl).

Karl was gratified that the coach had a similar business background; the affiliation was a bonding agent for the relationship. When asked if the coach had been from another industry such as government, would it have been the same Karl said that a coach from a government agency would have had a similar effect. Apparently in Karl role, there is a constant interpretation of government regulations imposed on his industry. "It was really good [chemistry]" (Karl).

Karl's coach was provided to him with very little input from him upfront; an unnamed human resource professional assigned Karl to the coach. He does say that the chemistry was positive: the coach had a business background, could identify with similar organizational situations, and the simple prescriptions suggested to Karl for developing executive presence. When asked about whether he would engage another coach in the future. Karl replied that he would but recognized more screening should be conducted to find that "great coach" lurking somewhere out there. "I had a [prior] relationship with him [my coach]. Not only from that but also because I support corporate governance and part of the corporate governance is to select new leaders in the organization and notably our CEO" (Peter).

Peter's case was unique in that the coach was a consultant well known to the sponsoring organization. The executive coach had been used for other senior executives and other leadership development projects within the organization where Peter was a team member. Peter and the coach got to know one another in a working capacity before there was the coaching relationship.

They had established a working alliance which Peter grew to appreciate. As a result, entering into the formalized coaching arrangement with this coach was a “no brainer” for Peter.

To your first comment, “was there a connection right away?” I believe there was, [my coach is a] small women, small stature, similar coloring – sharp, quick, intelligent. I think we both took a look at each other and “well I’m, yes, [we are cut from the same cloth].” It’s like “I’m willing to trust you off the bat.” [We] went into it as professionals with the understanding that there is lots of escape hatches if this is not working, if she is inappropriate, or any of those things, either one of us could have quickly and competently concluded it (Karen).

Karen’s match with her coach seemed to have been random. Karen has participated in a local university leadership development workshop where coaching was a learning device in the course. Coaches were paired up with leaders in an unknown manner as communicated by Karen. Although, as Karen cites above, there must have been an instantaneous trust extended when they met one another. Their physical traits and communication styles had a harmony that was readily accepted by Karen. She furthermore provided that had the client-coach fit not been solid that “escape hatches” were made known to each party.

***Self-Reflection.*** Each of the six interviews provided insights that leaders were self-reflective before coaching and continued self-reflection after coaching ended. Many continue to some extent still use this self-reflection in thinking back to the executive coaching experience during the interviews I had with them.

Kim was honest when sharing that our interview prompted her to reflect on the coach’s accountability measures.

I was... in the process of connecting with him weekly, and I would get e-mails from him saying ‘Ok. Haven’t heard from you this week.’ He was very good about following up with me. A little bit of which was uncomfortable because I don’t like to have people looking over my shoulder. Again I knew I wouldn’t do it otherwise. My behavior all up

until, for however many 30 plus years had been all about doing all those other things. I knew I had to have someone [hold me accountable]. I hadn't really reflected on it until just last night actually on that particular point. If [my coach] hadn't kept that steady accountability partner aspect of it through the summer months I do not know that I would have gotten as much out of the sessions...or out of the coaching (Kim).

It should be recalled that Peter was still in coaching at the time of the interview although he was entering a prescribed self-reflection period. "For me I felt safe, I felt open to the criticism, open to the self-reflection" (Peter).

*Nostalgia.* Many of the subjects reviewed their coaching experience with warm nostalgia. The looking back was welcomed by Kim and Barney especially whose voices seemed eager to express such sentiments.

Kim took a posture here in our conversation of old friends seeing one another at a high school reunion. She leaned over to her notes and gestures to a cabinet where other notes from the coaching might be held. I sensed she longed toward that time of growth and learning in the coaching engagement.

Yeah. Yes, there were very few, you know, you don't get to see who wrote it but you can see the actual comments. I'll have to dig that out one of these days and review it a little bit, but.... So it's been fun, the timing was [for this interview] perfect as I told you, to rekindle the learning's that I have, I don't think I was really fully able to implement as I would have liked. And he is the kind of person that you could call anytime (Kim).

Karl had recently ended his coaching relationship but there was the sense that he wasn't ready to formally end the relationship. He already seemed to communicate some nostalgia with his desire to keep in touch and to receive the sounding board advice from the coach. When asked near the end of the interview, "Would you find value in it [executive coaching] again with a particular set of circumstances?" Karl noted:

Absolutely! I am actually hoping to keep in touch every other month here. I mentioned the sounding-board, I recently got a new manager and I may not need that but I've developed a you know it's always, for me it's helpful to have somebody help me to step back from what I have been doing, and put in measurements, if you will, something that helps me evaluate who I am and where I am in my professional development. "Am I headed in the right path? Do I need to do some major correction?" But, ah, I am always open for additional eyes on just about everything I am doing anyway (Karl).

### **The Lived Experience**

To further illustrate the thematic findings discussed, I have developed a graphic representation of the leaders lived experienced in executive coaching (see Figure 3). This graphic portrays the three Super-Ordinates Themes: Hope and Faith in the Process, The Journey and The Memory Book along the top of continuum on the graphic. Hope and Faith in the Process appears first in the sequence starting prior to entering coaching and concluding early in the coaching relationship. Hope and Faith in the Process is not necessarily captive to this period alone but the theme was most apparent early in the coaching relationship. Hope and Faith in the Process also permeates other stages of the coaching engagement.

The Journey is represented by the period of time where initial learning occurred. That is to say the times after pleasantries are exchanged and the leader is invited into the deeper elements of coaching: goal setting, data collection, data feedback, action planning, homework and follow up. The Journey began and ended at difference periods for each subject, no attempts are made to generalize this theme across all cases.

The Memory Book does appear to be contained within the period after the formal coaching relationship had concluded lasting as long as the leader decided. For some, The

Memory Book was a physical 3-ring binder with notes and meaningful content, while The Memory Book for others was only a cognitive mental map from the experience.

The reader is invited to understand the arrows that stem from Hope and Faith in the Process and The Journey represent approximate transition period where one Super-Ordinate Theme would begin and another would end. These arrows are present to suggest periods of where the Super-Ordinate Themes seemed most clear in the data analyzed. The arrow that stems from The Memory Book theme does seem to be bonded to a period of time after the formal coaching relationships has ended.

Each of the supporting sub-themes is presented below each of their corresponding Super-Ordinate Theme in an attempt to represent general time and space when each theme appeared. For example, Investment in Me, Know Oneself, Expect the Unexpected and Ascension, are connected to Hope and Faith in the Process Super-Ordinate Theme. These four sub-themes are loosely surrounded by a loose circle to demonstrate the openness of the Super-Ordinate Theme. Not all sub-themes were represented in each of the subjects interviewed and so are shown to be permeable. So, too, are the four sub-themes under The Journey and Memory Book represented in similar way.



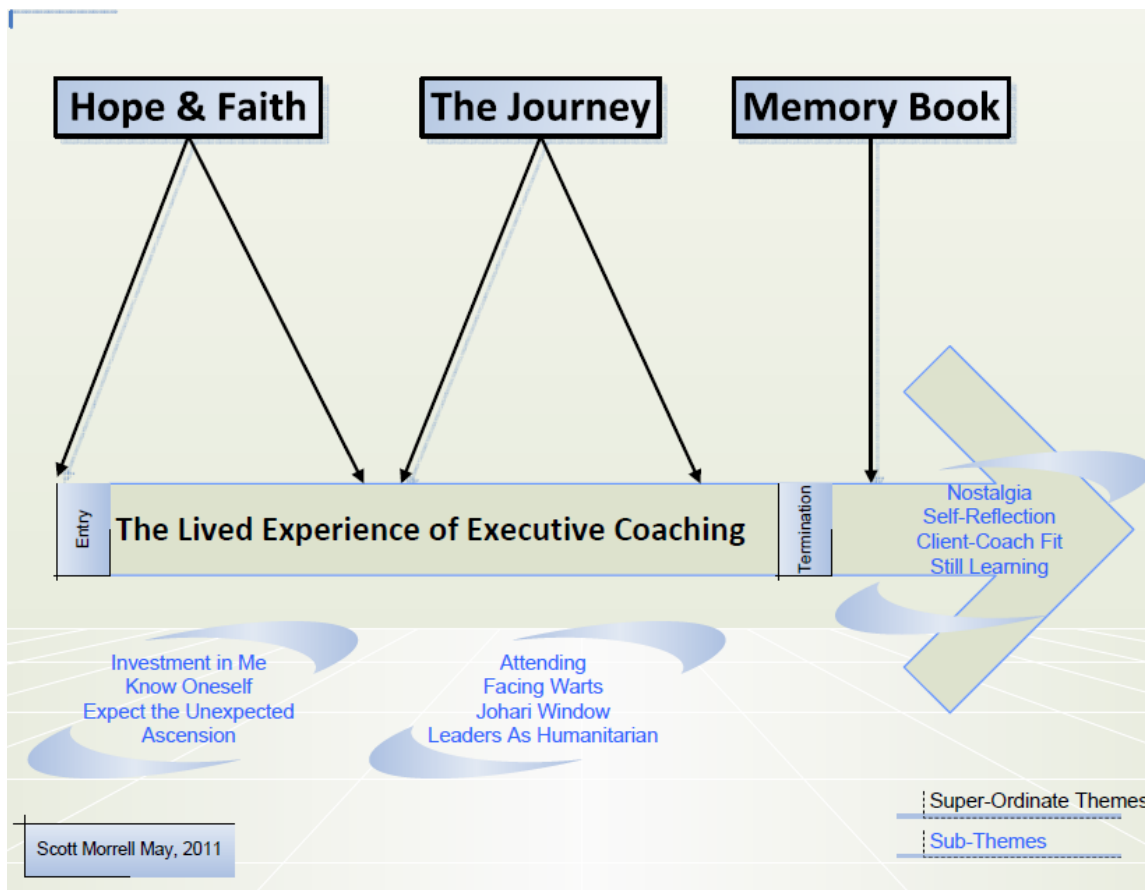


Figure 3. The Lived Experience

## **Chapter 5: Discussion**

I entered this study to better understand what leaders experience during the course of an executive coaching engagement. The genesis of my study came from a desire to better understand my own coaching clients. As an Organization Development professional, much of my own experience with executive coaching was one-sided, my side. I confess, I often times was probably more concerned with “my stuff” and not as focused on the client. “My stuff” would entail my coaching model, my preparation for the client, my ability to think on-my-feet while in a coaching session, and similar ego-centric activities. Perhaps this is normal since I live in my own skin however I believe I can be a better coach by knowing the clients’ internal voice more clearly. I now know more from the client. This study has helped inform me what six subjects interpreted from their executive coaching endeavor. I am better prepared to be a holistic coach in the future.

I have witnessed that executive coaching is a powerful experience as shared by the six subjects of this study. There is a depth of Hope and Faith in the coaching intervention suggesting the tool has a positive branding and acceptance in today’s organizations. It also suggests that coachees appreciate the investment made in their professional development. Furthermore, coaching is not necessarily a one-size-fits-all intervention but is a Journey unique to each participant. There is no one-size-fits-all coaching experience. Finally, the Memory Book helps to understand that participants hold executive coaching as a prize to be cherished and referenced as they continue to grow in their professions.

### **Implication of Findings**

The thematic findings shared within this study can benefit multiple audiences interested in the leadership development tool called executive coaching. It is necessary to remind the reader

that these findings are not presented as a theory or model to be generalized beyond the boundaries of the six subjects interviewed. However the themes do provide a substantial understanding on what interpretations are made by a participant in a coaching engagement. These themes can hopefully inspire other scholar-practitioner to build upon the ground uncovered here. In the meantime, I see implications for organizations who utilize executive coaching, for leaders who have or will enter into coaching relationships, for executive coaches in their own practice, for organization development consultants and for the field of organization development.

**The organization.** Individuals who initiate executive coaching, other than the leader themselves, can benefit from this study. The human resource professional, often times the one who is tasked with finding executive coaches for their organization, can gain insight to this study's findings. Leaders in this study reported a broad appreciation of and acknowledgement of being invested in as a leader within that organization by way of Hope and Faith in the Process Super-Ordinate theme and sub-theme Investment in Me. Human Resource professionals can use the findings here to understand leaders do appreciate the organizational investment and believe the coaching will be beneficial to their professional and personal growth. When economic times threaten leadership development budgets HR professionals can lean on this data for support.

Those who hire coaches should also recognize leaders, whether told directly or indirectly the purpose/focus of the coaching, will aim the trajectory of the coaching on their needs. This is to say, as reinforced by the sub-theme Attending, that leaders will use coaching sessions solely for the leader, the leader's direct reports or the organization as a whole. The leader does share allegiance to the sponsoring organization however there is evidence to suggest leaders use coaching to attend to their needs that given day or hour.

Organizational leaders who hire coaches should also be keenly aware where intense learning occurs (i.e. Facing Warts, Freckles and Scars) that disequilibrium may result. Leaders in this study shared when being held accountable and/or being called on certain behaviors this came with some emotional reactions. Organizations may want to provide assurance that allows the leader in coaching to be vulnerable and yet have complete security during the coaching.

Additional expectations surrounding the scope of change should also be known by those who hire coaches. While some level of transformation may be expected, sometimes a reflection on past leadership successes is the only result. The sub-theme Johari Window (i.e. Steer Small, The Safety Net, and Sounding Board) invites recognition that affirmation of previous learning is what leaders experience in coaching. It is helpful here for organizations to understand that coaching impact may be invisible to the outside observer.

One last note of application for those who hire executive coaches concerns the Client-Coach Fit. For coaches in this study, most organizations selected the coach for the leader based on some established criteria (e.g. industry background, relationship to sponsoring organization or gender). Having gone through the coaching engagement, leaders suggest if they were to enter coaching again, the client-coach fit would need greater upfront attention by the coachee themselves. Now as veteran coachees, these leaders would be more intentional about what they desired in a coach to lead through the process. Organizations might wish to examine interpersonal factors between potential coach and coachee such as cooperation, likeableness, compliance, and temperament.

**The executive.** A coachee new to executive coaching may be interested in understanding the findings of this study as well. They can gain some comfort in knowing peers have advanced a positive “brand” of coaching and found the leadership development tool effective for learning.

The sub-themes Investment in Me would certainly help reinforce the notion that a sponsoring organization has the best interests of the leader in mind with the coaching initiative. The leader may also want to enter into a coaching engagement with an open mind as in the sub-theme Expect the Unexpected suggested.

The coachee new to coaching may benefit from knowing the sub-themes under The Journey (i.e. Attending, Facing Warts, Freckles and Scars, Johari Window, and Leaders as Humanitarian) but I would caution that these sub-themes are not necessarily universal. The leader should understand their experience may or may not have parallels to the subjects of this study. What may be informative is that the coaching process takes on profound meaning for each leader, and this meaning sometimes transforms and sometime the meaning of the coaching is a reminder of latent strengths or skills hidden away for a particular reason.

Leaders new to executive coaching may also want to be introduced that learning from the coaching initiative will continue long after the formal relationship has ended. As found in The Memory, leaders continue to Self-Reflect and are cognizant of their road to continuous learning (Still Learning). This realization may lesson some pressure felt by the leader to have to come out of the coaching cocoon as a transformed butterfly immediately after the last coaching session.

**The executive coach.** Those who practice executive coaching can benefit from the results of this study as well. I mentioned earlier in my presentation that suggested, “The client’s view is pivotal” (McKenna & Davis, 2009, p. 251) because it the clients’ own voice that provides insights into the practice of executive coaching. This sneak-peak into the sacred relationship can allow for interesting applications in coaching practice itself.

Coaches spend a great deal of energy preparing for their craft in formal and informal ways. The design of this self-centered preparation can lead coaches to a one-sided mindset when

there is not a balanced approach for understanding the clients' perceptions. It is my belief that these findings will invite coaches to take a client-centered stance now and then in the course of their coaching no matter the model employed by the coach.

Executive coaches might find the voice of these subjects in the study of value when they each uniquely offered advice to coaches:

If I were a coach I would want to know, want to set the stage. What's going on in your life? What kind of commitment are you going to make today? Are you energized, engaged, receptive? I like coaches that ask, that are not shy about asking provocative questions (Rose).

[I]t's, there are always underlying motivations for how we behave. And people particularly under stress will behave the way that they behave. If you understand that as a coach, that's going to be helpful. Because as you go through this coaching, you're going to have to – if that particular behavior isn't helpful – you're going to have to recognize that it is going to occur. ...[P]eople go through this coaching process....take two steps back, one step forward, there's always this entrenchment that happens and you have to recognize that that is going to occur. To the extent that you know the person it is helpful (Barney).

I've only had the one coaching experience...It went really well. It really looks like a safety net. You're on the trapeze all day long.... The nice thing about a coach is I can come and talk about goals, staff, [etc]. I can talk about revenue generating ideas, I can talk about board issues and I know there is a [safety] net. I know it won't go anywhere, I know I won't be interrupted, I know I won't be contradicted, I know I won't be given advice [on how to do my job] (Karen).

[Executive coaches] should understand.....that....what people are trying to get out of coaching is different for everybody. I am sure there are plenty of people who go through coaching who are using it as a tool to achieve a certain job, role or title change in their organization...I would also say that coaches need [that]....holding people accountable is the only way to get people to change their behaviors and a good coach

knows that. [A person's behavior is so] engrained, I mean after so many years of doing something it is very hard to change your ways – the well-worn path that you referred to...it's hard [to get] oneself to go a different direction [alone] (Kim).

I came from [Fortune 100 Investment Firm] where it was really competitive – the next office to you, you're trying to get the edge on....I do not know how coaching would work in that environment effectively. For me I felt safe, I felt open to the criticism, open to the self-reflection (Peter).

I think to the extent possible, if the coach can understand the culture, at some level the business and the business challenges, and then the positions with which I am interacting and how I am expected to navigate the organization, I think those are critical for [the coach] to understand (Karl).

**Organization development consultants.** Organizational Development (OD) consultants – internal and external practitioners - who may prescribe executive coaching may find themes discussed in this study useful at a variety of levels:

- 1) Hope and Faith in the Process theme should encourage Organization Development consultants that leaders place a great deal of trust in coaching prior to experiencing the engagement. Leaders for this study emphatically said they saw coaching as an investment in their growth, and looked with loyalty to the sponsoring organization.
  - a. OD consultants may use this Hope and Faith in the Process theme to reinforce the momentum where coaching is a constructive initiative rather than a punitive measure exercised long ago. Coaching is being used for growth and not being used as a punishment.
  - b. An acceptable level of tolerance with ambiguity (Expect the Unexpected) is an ingredient OD consultants ought to keep in mind when prescribing coaching. Leaders who engage in the early stages of coaching can be in a

vulnerable state, and as such OD consultants can prepare a coachee for such an emotional state of mind as being normal or expected.

- c. OD consultants will do well to carefully prescribe coaching when leaders are experiencing some level of change or Ascension from one state to a different state. The sub-theme Ascension suggests OD practitioners may feel comfortable prescribing coaching when leaders are in the midst of change. A temptation may exist to put off coaching or to delay when “calmer waters prevail” however Ascension may be the anchor needed to steady the ship.
- 2) OD consultants, when prescribing coaching, should recognize coaching is a Journey and not a destination or an isolated event to undergo. This Journey should be contextualized to the organization receiving the coaching prescription as unique to each individual. No two leaders experience the Journey in the same manner either.
- a. OD consultants would benefit from the realization that a coachee has the likelihood of narrowing the focus (Attending) of their coaching engagement for their own purposes. Because leaders live in their own skills it is likely they will turn the focus of their coaching session on their immediate pain-points.
  - b. The catalyst of learning appeared in Facing Warts, Freckles and Scars sub-theme in the accounts of this study, as has been mentioned. OD consultants would do well to recognize facing one’s blind spots or hidden behaviors can be a painful experience for the coachee. While discomfiting, subjects of this study suggest this is the point where they experienced the deepest learning.
  - c. In the sub-theme Johari Window – Safety Net, coachees may need a safe place to vent, express, bounce ideas and glean insights with their coach. OD



consultants may benefit in knowing coaching is not about transformation in every single session, rather the place of safe harbor is what the coachee experiences in their engagements.

- 3) OD consultants should prepare the recipients' of their recommendations that coaching can be akin to a Memory Book after the formal coaching has ceased. That is to say, coachees look with fondness (Nostalgia) upon their learning, their coach, and the experience altogether. Subjects in this study clearly shared how they recalled the memories of the coaching relationship in the similar vein of a high school year book or scrapbook of professional accomplishments.
- 4) OD practitioners can prepare an organization to look with a long-term view of a coaching initiative or coaching program. As mentioned previously, the coaching initiative will continue long after the formal relationship between coachee and coach has ended. Coachees continue to Self-Reflect and are cognizant of their road to continuous learning (Still Learning). This reframing of immediate returns on coaching may help organizations with patience and cultivate long-term investment in the leader.

**Organization development scholars.** The field of Organization Development (OD) can make a valuable contribution toward assisting the practice of executive coaching toward a legitimate profession. OD can provide some answers to the question, "Is coaching really a profession" (Bennett, 2006, p. 241). Presently, executive coaching is not necessarily recognized as a standalone profession (Bennet, 2006; Sperry, 2008) however this study will add scholarly literature to the research deficit. Bennett (2006) suggests specifically executive coaching lacks: an accepted identifiable skillset, formal training and education, the recognition by other

disciplines and public as a whole, of a community of practitioners, scholarship research, and defined theory on which coaches build their practice (p. 242).

OD scholars and practitioners alike may assist executive coaching in its quest to become a distinct discipline. At this time, calls for scholarly literature include: characteristics of coaches, competencies of coaches, client characteristics, client-coach chemistry, the coaching alliance, language used in coaching, definitions of coaching, models of coaching, coaching differentiated from other helping relationships (e.g. mentoring, advising, counseling, therapy), coaching outcomes, and theoretical base (Bennett, 2006; Sperry, 2008).

As it pertains to this study, it is this researcher's opinion that the thematic results do assist Organization Development scholars with an increased understanding of the client, the relationship between the client and coach, and the interpretations made by those who engage in coaching. We now are more informed to address Kilburg's (2004) question, "What happens in coaching remains quite mysterious (p.204). Yet I would certainly suggest additional scholarly literature is needed to reinforce the young discipline of executive coaching.

### **Future Research**

The design of an academic study is typically quite narrow and so one is not able to study everything of interest. Furthermore, while a study is in motion discoveries are made along the way tempting the researcher to wander off course. The protective confines of a study allow the researcher to maintain focus and in the final analysis suggest future studies. In this case, one is obligated to offer suggestions for future scholars and practitioners who possess a similar interest.

This study researched the lived experience of six executives who had participated in executive coaching as a leadership development tool. These three men and three women offered

their unique insights to the meaning they made from the coaching engagement to shape this study. More could be learned beyond the boundaries of the studied I conducted.

Additional research can be conducted to add to the substantial positivistic studies published on executive coaching. A majority of articles published favor positivistic epistemology leaving a gap in what is known from an interpretive epistemological perspective (Grant, 2008). This gap ought to be filled so the practice of executive coaching is well understood by the practitioner and researcher alike.

It is well established that the design of this study was solely on the client side of the client-coach equation. Opportunity exists to further examine the coaches' lived experience to bookend this present study. Such an approach might yield some fascinating themes as inspired by the interpretations made by executive coaches themselves. Hopf (2005) has offered a similar insight to the coach and the executives' interpretations. One study is helpful yet additional insights are needed as well from the coaches experience during coaching.

There may be some value in further exploring the relationship gender has in the client to coach engagement. Does the gender of the coach matter to the leader in the selection process or during the coaching itself? Some suggest that gender does play a role in the equation yet more is needed for broader understanding (Gray & Goregaokar, 2010).

As it pertains to the results of this study, I believe much can be learned by a further examination of a few of the themes identified. First, the two sub-themes Know Oneself and Facing Warts, Freckles and Scars. A deeper appreciation of the coachee's learning and transformation could lead to theories and models for what works best for the development of optimal learning environments. Facing Warts, Freckles and Scars sub-theme can be further

examined to capture more interpretations from what happens when having to own the constructive feedback from peers, subordinates and colleagues.

Additionally, considering the sub-theme Client-Coach Fit additional data is needed to understand how leaders and/or organization go about making coach selections. We know leaders and/or organization make coaching selections based on credentials and coaching professional background, yet I wonder if there are other intangibles at play in the selection process (Kaufmann & Couto, 2009; Levenson, 2009). Furthermore, is there such a thing as an “optimal fit” between the client and coach?

Lastly, each of the subjects of this present study reported the overwhelming positive experience they had with their coaching experience. Additional studies might explore what happens to leaders who do not have favorable experiences with coaching. What is there to be learned from those coaching engagement that go array that can shed light on the practice of executive coaching?

### **Personal Insights**

I entered this study to understand the meaning leaders make when having participated in executive coaching over a sustained period of time. The experience of entering into the minds of these six subjects has greatly influenced my understanding of what clients think and feel and do about their coaching experiences. I feel thoroughly satisfied having gained substantial insight to what interpretations are made by coaching participates inside of coaching sessions and outside of coaching sessions. In many ways, I feel as though I am just scratching the surface in possible research on the client side of coaching.

I have never participated in executive coaching as a client. Upon reflection there are moments in my professional journey when I could have greatly benefitted from having a coach.

The moments of leadership transition (roles or jobs), change in organizational climate, and/or personal changes are period that come to mind. I am not sure I would have made different decisions, but I would have not have felt as isolated during those historical periods. To borrow from this study, I could have used a Safety Net or a Sounding Board to navigate the challenges encountered at that time. These powerful themes suggest safe harbors where I may have been allowed to grow and thrive in ways not allowed at the time.

I felt I was allowed into a sacred relationship when interviewing each of the six subjects in this study. I have a profound reverence for the coach and client relationship. This respect of the relationship caused me to enter into the interviews with deep respect.

I was surprised by the data where leaders attributed such faith and trust to the executive coaching initiative. To see this first hand was inspirational to me as a coach at this time in my own professional practice. This data should also encourage all who practice coaching as it speaks to a bright future and evidence the practice is working.

I am aware that executive coaching is not used as a punitive measure as it once had been (Valerio & Lee, 2005). Barney inferred in his interview that he had witnessed coaching as a means to weed good people out of another organization. Even though Barney observed a misapplication of coaching he still had faith that the initiative was an investment and would ultimately work. Even so, Barney as the new CEO to his organization hired the coach himself as an investment in his own growth.

Paul, Karl, Kim and Rose all reported that they considered the initiation of coaching as a means the organization was investing in their growth. I was not expecting to receive data attributing coaching as being such a trusted leadership development tool. I don't know if I was expecting suspicion or apprehension. Nonetheless, these accounts seems to suggest leaders

know when they have been labeled “high potential” or emerging leaders and attribute the coaching as getting them to the next level.

I gained some insight to how other coaches contextualize the coaching objective when Peter shared in Attending, “The I, The We, and/or The Us.” This attending focus was also quite clear in Kim’s sole focus on “The I” in her coaching. These lens of focus are simple techniques for both the coach and client to understand where attention should be applied. I am certain to incorporate this technique into my own practice.

There is a temptation when providing feedback to clients to neglect their readiness and receptivity to Facing Warts, Freckles and Scars. Barney provided a genuine insight to how he placed himself in a vulnerable position when he shared his growth areas to his organization’s leaders. Kim, too, shared inspirational account on how she reacted to the coach’s feedback and how she had to own the data. The depth of emotional reactions to subordinate feedback is something I will be certain to keep in mind as I continue with my own practice.

There were inspiring metaphors used by the leaders in their accounts already shared in this study. Specifically, Steering Small and a Safety Net, by Karen and a Sounding Board, by Karl made powerful impacts on my own practice. Each of these metaphors helped to paint a colorful picture of how the coaching experience aided their learning, their leadership capacity and leadership transformation. I would have never gained these valuable client-centered perspectives without entering into the sacred relationship.

A few surprises I encountered from this study deserve mention. Both Kim and Karl expressed a concern about Changing Too Much prior to entering into the coaching relationship. This concern suggests to me that leaders may feel manipulated by their organizations ever-so-much by being asked to enter into coaching. While leaders may be compliant to the

organizational request, there may be some latent and not so latent worry about being shaped into someone they are not. There is herein a slight paradox. Participants of coaching, while they expressed a Hope and Faith in the coaching process, also shared a concern with Changing Too Much in coaching. Perhaps there is some coachee concern about the right to determine their own change and depth of learning about themselves and their organizations.

I did not expect to gather accounts on the humanitarian side of leaders in the coaching engagement. It may be that when coachees struggle with major human resource issues with their coaches that we gain insight to the genuine concern leaders have for their organizations' welfare. This revelation was unexpected. Kim, Karen and Barney allowed me insight to how they struggled with their organizations from a human resources perspective and how coaching helped to resolve the dilemmas.

I am aware that coaching has a positive reputation and is considered a healthy tool for leadership development. This is an encouraging revelation to me professionally as I move forward with my own Organization Development practice. Furthermore, I am mindful to ask my coaching clients questions similar to those used in my interviews with coaching. Allowing leaders to tell their stories, share their concerns, and gain insight to their struggles helps them to Steer Small along the way.

As a result of this research, I prepare for coaching sessions differently. I now have slightly less focus on my approach or model and have an increased focus on what is taking place in the sessions. I ask for more feedback on the process and to balance out my concern for immediate impact. Prior to this study, I was apprehensive to really know what my clients were thinking and feeling from our coaching relationship. On one hand, was worried I would be

judged negatively and on the other hand I had a driving curiosity that inspired this study in the first place.

Lastly, I take less pressure off myself to have immediate results in the here-and-now of the coaching sessions by acknowledgement that some leaders learn from the coaching far after the formal coaching relationship has ended. I suspect that coaches also have to have Faith and Trust in the coaching process that learning continues to happen long after the formal relationship has ended. Coaches would do well to acknowledge their roles continue as teacher, mentor, coach, colleague and peer long after the goodbye handshake.

### **Conclusion**

I have previously shared that my motivations for this study were to better understand my clients' perspectives in my coaching relationships. I feel quite confident that I am personally and professionally in a better position with the knowledge of the themes identified and discussed within this study. It is my hope that the clients' voice is better understood by the reader of this study as well. Leading researchers such as Kilburg (2004) noted that "what happens in coaching remains quite mysterious" (p.204). This study on the client's lived experience within executive coaching allows little known body of knowledge a better understanding of the clients' voice.



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## Appendix A - Sample Invitation

Dear [Name]

I am a doctoral candidate at the University of St. Thomas, Minneapolis, MN conducting a study on the lived experience of leaders who engage in coaching relationships to complete my dissertation in Organization Development. The study is an attempt to learn more about the interpretations individuals make when participating in executive coaching, and add this content to the body of knowledge in this field. Based on a referral I understand, you may qualify as a subject of my research. I invite you to consider participating in this study. As you consider participating, I have outlined additional detail about the nature of the study and what you can expect as a participant.

The study is an interpretive phenomenological approach that desires to seek understanding of any subject under analysis. Rather than seeking a Return on Investment (ROI), coaching impacts or coaching best practices, I seek to discover what meaning is made in the course of the coaching. The meaning I seek specifically is the executive's meaning, not the coach's perspective. Results will be personally and professionally insightful to me while adding to the body of knowledge (i.e. empirical literature) regarding executive coaching.

If you agree to be a participant, I will provide an informed consent form and be available for any additional questions prior to committing to the study. Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary, no compensation or rewards are offered in exchange. Once I would receive your commitment, I will provide you interview questions 1-2 weeks prior to our interview. I would ask that you review the questions around your coaching experience prior to the date of the actual interview. You will be asked to take part in a face-to-face interview to discuss your responses to the questions from my study. This interview will be audio taped and I will be taking notes during our discussion. I expect the conversation to be roughly 60-90 minutes in length.

Immediately following the interview, I will transcribe our notes into an MS WORD document. Within two weeks after the initial interview, I will e-mail you a copy of the transcription for review. I would prefer you to double check what has been transcribed for accuracy and that it



portrays your sentiments. You will be allowed to modify, clarify, and verify the content prior to a final transcript being produced. I anticipate that your total time commitment will be between 2.5 to 3.5 hours (e.g. pre-interview thinking 1-hour, the actual interview 1.5 hours and post-interview review of the transcript 1-hour.)

Risk in the study is estimated to be minimal. While the potential exists to discuss sensitive personal and professional information, no intent is made toward psychologically painful or disturbing information. If at any time, you should feel threatened or experience anxiety the interview can be terminated.

Your privacy will be protected in this study. In my final written dissertation pseudonyms will be created in place of participant names. There are no direct benefits you for participating in this study other than assisting me in contributing to the body of knowledge regarding executive coaching. You will receive no financial compensation for participating in this research project. However, I will provide you with a copy, if you wish, of my findings after completion of this study.

The information gathered during this study will be kept private. I will respect your privacy in publishing the findings of this study. I will address the issues related to confidentiality by disguising any research findings and/or subsequent publications through the use of pseudonyms. In addition, all non-essential details of the act will be disguised as well. Also, all research records will be kept in a locked file; I am the only person who will have access to the records.

If you would like to contact my advisor regarding my background, feel free to contact Dr. Rama Hart (651-962-4454) rkhart@stthomas.edu in the Organizational Learning & Development Department at the University of St. Thomas, Minneapolis, MN.

If you would like to be considered as a participant in this research, please contact me during the day at 952-288-4253. I can also be contacted by e-mail at morrell@csp.edu. If you have any questions about the study, feel free to call me. If I do not hear from you in the next two weeks, I will make a single follow-up attempt to contact you.

Kind Regards,

Scott T. Morrell

Doctoral Candidate

University of St. Thomas

## Appendix B - Informed Consent

CONSENT FORM  
UNIVERSITY OF ST. THOMAS**The Lived Experience of Executive Coaching: A Phenomenological Study**

[# B10- 194- 02]

I am a doctoral student at the University of Saint Thomas, Minneapolis, MN and I am conducting a study about the lived experience of participants who engage in executive coaching. I invite you to review this form and ask me any questions you may have before you agree to be in the study. I invite you to consider participating in this meaningful research. You were selected as a possible candidate for my study by [explain how subject was identified].

This study is being conducted solely by me but my dissertation advisor, Dr. Rama K. Hart is my primary guide in the endeavor. Dr. Hart is an Assistant Professor University of St. Thomas in the Department of Organizational Learning and Development.

**Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to better understand the experience of participants who engage in executive coaching. Through interviews, participants will be able to provide interpretative accounts on the phenomenon of coaching. In short, the study is designed to capture what meaning a participant gives to the experience of being coached. My research question is: “What is the lived experience and psychological meaning-making process of the participant in coaching?”

This study, when completed, will be informative for leadership development practitioners, organization development consultants, human resource development practitioners, coaching preparatory programs, and others who practice and utilize executive coaching.

**Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, I will ask you to do the following:

- Prior to the interview. Once you have agreed to participate in the study, I will ask you to reflect upon your coaching experience. I will send a semi-structured interview guide to encourage reflection 1-2 weeks prior to our interview. I will not collect your reflections.
- During the interview. We will review the Consent Form and if we decide to proceed, you will sign the Consent form. Interviews will be scheduled between 60-90 minutes in a location convenient for you (e.g. office suite or private location upon your choosing).
- Interviews will be audio recorded.
- I will also be taking observational notes during the interview.
- After the interview. Once the interview has concluded, I will personally transcribe each interview in a MicroSoft WORD document. I will send you the interview transcript and request you to affirm or edit the transcript created. I would request you return the transcript with and edits or changes within 1 week.

**Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:**

The study has minimal risks you need to understand prior to agreeing to participate. First, I will not seek any family information from you, but in the course of the interview you may mention some details about your family or other relationships. If this is the case, I will not include their names in the transcript, but will assign generic labels to their identity (e.g. spouse, child). Second, the nature of our interview may surface sensitive personal and professional information. Your desire to share is completely voluntary however it is likely that you may disclose information in the course of our interview together. If at any time, you should feel threatened or experience anxiety the interview can be terminated.

The direct benefit you will receive for participating is as follows. You will have an extraordinary opportunity to process through the meaning and interpretation you are having or have had about executive coaching. This outcome may reinforce learning, insights and discoveries not otherwise known in the course of being coached. You may in essence cement greater understanding from your coaching experience.

**Confidentiality:**

The records of this study will be kept confidential. In any sort of report I publish, I will not include information that will make it possible to identify you in any way.

Each of the data collected (written observational notes, audiotapes, transcripts) will be on my personal password protected computer and backed up copies on CD's will be stored in locked fire proof cabinet in my home office. I plan to keep the data for a period of one year from the conclusion of my study. The audiotapes, written observational notes and transcribed MS WORD transcripts will be destroyed after the one year has elapsed. I will be the only person who will have access to the data stored.

**Voluntary Nature of the Study:**

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. Your decision whether or not to participate will not affect your current or future relations with the University of St. Thomas. If you decide to participate, you are free to withdraw from the study up to the time when you would be asked to review and amend a transcript of our interview. Should you decide to withdraw data collected during the interview will be destroyed. You will be included in the study once you have reviewed the interview transcript.

**Contacts and Questions:**

My name is Scott Morrell. You may ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact me at 952-288-4253. Dr. Rama Hart can be reached at Rama Kaye Hart, Ph.D. Assistant Professor University of St. Thomas Department of Organizational Learning and Development School of Education College of Applied Professional Studies 1000 LaSalle Ave. S. MOH 217 Minneapolis, MN 55403. 651-962-4454 (Office Phone) and at rkhart@stthomas.edu. You may also contact the University of St. Thomas Institutional Review Board at 651-962-5341 with any questions or concerns.

You will be given a copy of this form to keep for your records.

**Statement of Consent:**

I have read the above information. My questions have been answered to my satisfaction. I consent to participate in the study, to have my interview audio recorded and data collected transcribed into a MS WORD file. I am between 35-60 years of age.

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Study Participant

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

\_\_\_\_\_  
Print Name of Study Participant

\_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Signature of Researcher

\_\_\_\_\_  
Date

## Appendix C - Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Say → “I thank you for agreeing to participate in my doctoral research study. Please know that I appreciate your valuable time and energy. As has been discussed, our interview will be audio recorded so that I can transcribe our conversation later this week. The transcription and interpretation will be shared with you at (enter date here). You will be able to alter my findings and/or interpretations so that accuracy is attained. I understand we have 60-90 minutes for this conversation. I wish to review an *Informed Consent* form before we start.”

Action → Review Informed Consent form and obtain signature or cease interview.

Say → “As you know, I provided questions pertaining to our interview a few weeks ago. My hope was for you to reflect upon the lived experience of executive coaching. Have you had the opportunity to reflect on your coaching experience?”

### Starter Questions

Say → “I have a series of questions for our time together today. The first set of questions will focus on surface level (more fact based) coaching related content. The second set of questions will focus on deeper introspective inquiry on your interpretations of and meaning-making of coaching.”

Who initiated the coaching engagement?

Probe → Did you initiate coaching? Did your organization? Anyone else?

How did you select the coach?

Probe → Did you seek out a particular coach? Did the coach come recommended to you?

Was one provided for you?

Describe your understanding of executive coaching prior to entering coaching.

Probe → What associations of executive coaching came to mind? Please describe.

What expectations did/do you have for a coach?

Probe → To hold you accountable?

To listen? To suggest?

Did you have prior experience with coaching? If so, what was your motivation for that previous coaching engagement?

Is there a particular coaching model being used at this time? For example, a psychodynamic or cognitive model.

Do you have a coaching agreement? If not, how do you decide what you are working toward? If so, do you have specific objectives to wish to address in coaching?

How often have you met with your coach? How long are the sessions?

Has there been any (upfront) assessment in the course of the coaching engagement?

Has the coaching relationship influenced your work performance? If so, how? If not, why not?

Say → I will begin the second set of questions that are deeper in nature. Feel free to give each question some thought.

Interpretative Questions

Tell me about your coaching experience.

Probe → What does coaching mean to you?



If we were in the room, what are you thinking during a coaching session? (Take me back to a session, what is happening?)

What meaning would you ascribe to your coaching to date?

Probe →What interpretations do you conclude from this?

How has coaching shaped your thinking? If so, how? If not, why not?

Probe →What interpretations do you conclude from this?

What do you think about during a coaching session?

What interpretations do you conclude from this?

How had coaching changed you?

Probe →Can you provide an example?

Has anyone mentioned they noticed a change? If so, what do you make of these comments?

When do you think about coaching outside of the coaching session?

Probe →What comes to mind?

How has the coaching experience shaped your behaviors?

Probe →What interpretations do you conclude from this?

How has coaching impacted your internal dialogue? By internal dialogue I mean the “self-talk” we speak to ourselves about daily activities.

Probe →What interpretations do you conclude from this?

Can you think of an instances in coaching where you experienced frustration or intense reactions?

Probe →What interpretations do you conclude from this?

How would you describe your coach?

Probe → How would you describe your relationship with your coach?

What interpretations do you conclude from this relationship?

Probe → What does it feel like to be coached by this particular coach?

Probe → What interpretations do you conclude from this?

What should coaches know about what executives experience during coaching?

Probe → What interpretations do you conclude from this?

Is there anything else you wish to share with me regarding your coaching experience?

## Appendix D - Data Analysis Form

## Transcript Analysis - Example: Executive Interview

Left-hand margin	Body of Transcript	Right-hand margin
“What is interesting or significant”	“Content from interview”	“Themes emerge”