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## SUPPORTING CHANGE LEADERS WITH EXECUTIVE COACHING

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#### Abstract

Executive coaching is a leadership development tool that facilitates leading organizational change. As a goal-oriented process, with evidenced based research, executive coaching helps develop leaders quicker by engaging them in a conversational model. An effective executive coach designs the coaching sessions to model interactive skills, to transition through personal and organizational change, and to strengthen relationships within an organization. Although costly for organizations the clients acquire valuable competencies to guide others through change.

#### Introduction

As the third decade of the new millennium approaches, countries around the globe face significant political, technological, social and economic change. In these countries, the demand for innovative, creative leaders is relentless and remedies are essential to enable organizational leaders and their followers in the accomplishment of successful transitions. The practice of executive coaching gained prominence in the 1990s and by the second decade of this century achieved, evidence-based research on process, structure, and outcomes continue to support its efficacy. By way of introducing the topic, one needs to address the perennial question:

"what is leadership?" In a meta-analysis by Dunst et al (2018), the authors suggested that the common definition of leadership changed little in the last two decades. Leadership is a process; and suggest we look to the expanded definition that addresses the nature of the relationship between leaders and followers: "Leadership is an influence relationship among leaders and followers who intend real changes and outcomes that reflect the shared purposes" (Daft, 2015, p. 5). The nursing profession was the first to embrace leadership development (Mac-Intyre, 2014); and the profession continues to advance leadership through teaching and learning (AbuAlRub & Nasrallah, 2017).

#### Literature Review

Sources for this paper included books, dissertations and research papers, and peer-reviewed journal articles. Ten books published between 2005 and 2016, provided source material on global talent management, leadership coaching, and executive coaching. The research included four dissertations and research papers on executive coaching for leadership development, with one dissertation on the leadership development of a sample of professional women engineers, Thirty-three peer-reviewed journal articles revealed the abundance of research on leadership development beginning with Stogdill (1950), and the evolution of executive coaching from 2001 to 2017.

## **Executive Coaching**

Executive coaching is a process for leaders to engage followers in developing their potential in a desired field of practice within an organizational context. Often the purpose is to help leaders design and implement change management projects (Cox, Bachkirova & Clutterbuck, 2017; Grant, 2014). Although executive coaching initially included clients who presented behavioral problems for the organization, it is recognized as valuable developmental tool at all levels of management (Joo, Susko & McLean, 2012). Applications vary from succession planning for top leaders to individualized learning at all levels of an organization; and unique to executive coaching is a one-to-one exchange between a trained executive coach and a client in a

conversational tone. Through executive coaching a manager learns how to give and receive feedback, thus enabling the manager engage followers in the performance management and the competency based systems of an organization. Coaching looks easy; however, it requires a unique blend of emotional intelligence, career transitions, and organizational change.

The practice of executive coaching (EC) is a principal form of leadership development by organizations in business, government, and health (Taylor & Crabb, 2017). According to Cox, Bachkirova & Clutterbuck (2017), the purpose of executive coaching is one of helping individuals to achieve organizational change. EC draws upon a multidisciplinary background, including adult learning, coaching psychology (O'Brien, 2016), and psychotherapy approaches (De Vries, 2017; Hunt & Weintraub ( 2017) claimed executive coaching was a developmental intervention, focused on high potential managers with the intent of improving leadership and communication skills. A vital aspect of executive coaching is to provide a learning mechanism that supports alignment of individual development with the strategic vision and objectives of the organization. As a result, it develops the leader's ability to effectively encourage, inspire, and motivate his or her stakeholders. A study by Salicru (2017) revealed that executive coaching utilizes feedback from associates, stakeholders, colleagues, and partners to accurately identify the obstacles to individual and organizational success.

While focusing on executive coaching as a form of leadership development, this paper supports the argument that executive coaching helps to strengthen interpersonal skills and relationship building. Current definitions of leadership support the importance of relationship building and the leader's ability to influence the follower without reliance on legitimate or formal power (Daft, 2014). Avolio's (2012) description of the full-range leadership model provides a spectrum of leadership styles portraying the communication spectrum between the leader and follower. The relationship strengthens as the leader move from the telling nature of a passive leader to the transformational leadership modes of interaction. The spectrum of leadership styles provided a useful starting point for evaluating the coaching client's to self-assess her leadership style.

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executive coaching became alignment of outcomes with the strategic vision and objectives of the organization (Hunt & Weintraub, 2017). The intent was improvement of the leader's ability to effectively encourage, inspire, and motivate his or her stakeholders. A study by Salicru (2017) revealed that executive coaching utilized feedback from associates, stakeholders, colleagues, and partners to accurately identify the obstacles to individual and organizational success. With this understanding, a product of executive coaching was a roadmap for excellence in leadership.

# Why Executive Coaching?

Ariss (2014) suggested use of EC as part of a talent management approach, where the efficacy of a succession pipeline of leaders was a significant differentiator of the company's future growth. In this organizational context, the Human Resource professionals collaborated with executives to design developmental initiatives for managers at all levels. Stephenson (2000) further supported executive coaching as an essential way to address the power and political actions that emerge in designing programs for leadership and talent development. Nauert (2014) identified three core stages of leadership development: readiness, willingness, and the ability to lead. Executive coaching evolved as a component of talent and leadership development, preparing future leaders with the motivation, the resources, and the tools they required to succeed. In contrast to the traditional classroom training, the outcome of executive coaching is a sharper

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insight to workplace situations and the need for behavioral change. During executive coaching leaders reflect upon their actions, practice new behaviors and to think contextually by exploring a wider range of options and the implications for organizational development; the outcome of executive coaching is more resilient leaders who learned the ability to change their behavior (Visser, 2010). Correia, Santos, and Passmore (2016) proposed a conceptual framework of three mechanisms to describe what happens during the coaching process; these included projection of future self, perspective taking, and confirmation of past behavior patterns. The research included data collection from 10 participants, four coaches, and five clients through a total of thirty interviews. Projection of future self involved the leader in articulating a vision of success; that is, describing what the organization will look like after accomplishing the goals and objectives of a specific set of strategies. Through executive coaching, the client selected actions and strategies useful in leading the organizational change. In the second mechanism of perspective taking, the client examined the beliefs through reconstructing and reframing, and changing them to achieve an effective perspective. For example, a client gained understanding that self-awareness made it possible to review one's assumptions, those leading to present actions. By rethinking one's assumptions, the client reflected on herself, and shifted to assessing assumptions with respect to the present organizational context. Therefore, the coaching client proceeded with actions that had a more relevant and sustainable impact on the organization. The third mechanism is confirmation of Past/Present Self: The client acquired recognition of his past patterns of behavior, even as far back as childhood. De Vries (2014, 2016) applied a psychodynamic approach, with the possibility of the client surfacing the historical actions and beliefs that hindered his leadership development.

Before focusing on the three dimensions, Correia et al (2016) mentioned other considerations like understanding the aim of coaching interventions, the timing of specific sessions, and the overall coaching process. Phillips & Ball (2008) suggested questions for leaders to pose before establishing an organization-wide executive coaching program:

- What do you want executive coaching and why is it important to the organization?
- What leadership or managerial alternatives do you need to explore?
- What structures serve you best in moving your organization and leadership forward?
- Who or what are your support system?
- How will you know that the executive coaching has been successful?

Correia et al (2016) and Santos & Passmore (2016) thought the structure of the executive coaching session was a fundamental and positive attribute to consider. The design of the structure

promoted a conversational mode between the coach and client; and the design enabled the coach to model interactive skills to the client (Bush, 2005; Grant, 2001; Gyllensten & Palmer, 2005). Olson (2014) argued for an integration of executive coaching and mentoring to provide a systematic tool for leadership development in an organizational context. According to Passmore (2010), executive coaching for leadership development involved transferring adult learning, building a leader's selfawareness, enhancing skills and motivation to grow, and strengthening of one's self-concept. Olsen (2014) identified seven domains to achieve an integration of executive coaching and mentoring, these included the following:

- 1.Insight from reflection and Meta-Learning: Olson argued that both executive coaching and mentoring nurture learning from experiences as well as reflection on the learning. As a result, the leader gains the skills and the capability to plan for personal and professional growth. Executive coaching was vital as a learning ground for leaders to replicate the ideas for both personal and organizational success.
- 2. Working with the Whole Person:
  Leaders addressed personal issues in executive coaching; such as, self-concept, emotions, relationships, and wellness. Executive coaches strived for a holistic approach, balancing the client's work and life, while aim-

- ing for performance improvement in the organization. Clawson (2010) pinpointed the dilemma for an executive coach, whose humanistic approach resonated more in favor of the client's needs than those of the organization. To sustain executive coaching as part of a leadership development program, this required champions form the board of governance and the senior leaders in the organization.
- 3. Culture: Leaders focused on building an organizational culture that champions change; in the executive coaching, leaders learned to reflect on his or her approaches to situations. Thus, executive coaching helped clients to more effectively lead change in the organization.
- 4. Deep Listening, Beyond Words:
  Executive coaches taught leaders
  and managers the value of listening to their followers. As a result,
  it was possible for the clients to
  create maps of the strategies that
  brought positive transformation
  to the organization.
- 5. Emotional Intelligence: Leadership draws heavily upon the soft skills; such as interpersonal actions, teamwork, and envisioning a future. Without emotional intelligence, the leader will not be able to inspire followers to share their goals; and to follow the leader into an ambiguous, uncertain future.

- 6. Goal Orientation: Executive coaching had a goal orientation; and this motivated leaders to explore issues instead of the natural, immediate approach to do problem solving (Visser, 2010). With a goal orientation, the leader and the follower were better able to move collaboratively towards more sustainable actions for the organization.
- 7. Systemic thinking and Team Development: Olsen (2008) and Griffin, Neal, & Parker (2007) stressed the growth of open systems increased the complexity of organizations. Executive coaching interventions enabled leaders to apply systemic thinking to the range of issues facing the organization. Integration of executive coaching and mentorship programs encouraged managers to lead change and improve performance improvement.

Rekalde, Landeta, Fernandez-Ferrain & Albizu (2017) explored executive coaching as a communicational, behavioral, patterned, and systemic approach to leadership development. The authors matched managerial abilities to the competencies defined by the organization and found executive coaching was a way for the leaders to explore the actions and behavior in relation to the competencies. They claimed executive coaching provided the leaders with a practice field for administrative and leadership behaviors; and thus a way of strengthening their capacity to lead.

# Costs and Benefits of Executive Coaching

Grant (2010) explored the correlation between workplace coaching skills and the perceived costs and benefits of adopting executive coaching skills. The research included ninety-nine executives from diverse occupations. While examining the executive coaching process, the researcher discovered that individuals had lower self-efficacy and lowered coaching skills in the early stages of the executive coaching process. Even though the cost of conducting executing coaching programs was higher for organizations, the benefits emerged within the first six months. This suggested the importance of support from governance and leaders at all levels to promote acquisition of coaching skills throughout the organization.

## **Shaping Leader Identity**

After teaching leadership for many years, it's evident that literature on the definition of leadership is plentiful to theory will continue to grow. By the end of the twentieth century, the realities of globalization imposed new paradigms in management and leadership education. The stability of the mid-century gave way to changing political, social, and economic conditions, with technology the key driver to the speed of change. By the end of the first decade of the new millennium, the language of strategic planning embraced terms like 'globality' (2008), applied in an effort to capture a new appreciation for entrepreneurs, in contrast to the out-dated business focus

on the corporation. Entrepreneurs take risks and bring innovation into an economy; and their willingness to take a chance on the future benefits numerous stakeholders. Within corporations, lively activity is underway to stimulate entrepreneurial approaches. In many countries, migrants are entrepreneurs as they leverage the business possibilities between countries, increasing cultural diversity and leadership capacity (Guenther & Didion, 2014). The purpose of this paper is to to conceptualize the leader identity with a model that furthers leadership development.

## Leader and Follower Identity

Lord and Brown (2003) introduced leadership identity and a follower centered leadership, which shifted the historical mindset away from only considering the leader to one consistent with open systems thinking. Their intention was to clarify the contrast between the historical definitions of trait-based leadership to the recognition of an organizational leader as part of an open system. This open systems' mindset frames leadership roles in the context of interactions between leaders and followers; addresses the goal orientation of executive coaching. In Canadian government the opposite took place as Prime Ministers created a leader-centered style beginning in the 1990s (Bernier, Brownsey & Howlett, 2005).

#### Work/Life Balance

Grant, Studholme, Verma, Kirkwood, Paton, and O'Connor (2017) con-

ducted mixed methods research involving thirty-one professional leader. Their aim was to evaluate the impact of leadership coaching within an Australian healthcare setting. Participations identified improvements in their solutionfocused thinking, perspective-taking capacity, leader self-efficacy, tolerance for ambiguity, self-insight, and resilience. Participants and their followers reported a significant reduction in their stress and anxiety levels and a better work/life balance. More importantly, the research revealed that the benefits of executive coaching transferred from the individual's workplace to their home. For example, most of the participants used the insights gained through executive coaching to positively impact their personal lives. According to O'Neil, Hopkins, and Bilimoria (2015), challenging organizational contexts, career/life stages concerns, and work-life integration are some of the significant issues that affect women's leadership development. Executive coaching facilitated the women's leadership development; they acquired self-confidence, a sense of authenticity, and increased self-efficacy. This helped the women leaders to take on all the odds against their success as leaders. Bariiers to women's success includes a lack of female role models, the implicit attitudes that boys are better than girls in the sciences and engineering, the agerelated concerns women face, and the prevent gender biases (Jackson, Hillard & Schneider, 2014; Shapiro & Williams, 2012; and Valenti, Masmick, Cox & Osman, 2016).

#### Conclusions

Executive coaching is a tool to accelerate the leadership development within an organizational content As the third decade of the new millennium approaches, the demand for leaders is unabated, particularly in Canada where birth rates failed to supply adequate talent; yet the economy requires creative, innovative leaders in all domains of business, health, post-secondary education, and for research and development. Canada tends to follow the lead of the United Kingdom, where the government committees studied ways of replenishing England's need for nuclear engineers. In report by the House of Commons' committee, they stated that England needed to embraced the diversity of American society and endeavored to follow the lead of the United Kingdom, when it needed to "grow its own" supply of nuclear engineers (House of Commons, 2009, p. 451). Canada's overreliance on immigration of talent is dubious, given that political and social factors change quickly, as they have in the US and in European countries. This recommendation of this paper is utilization of a leadership development tool known as Executive Coaching.

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