

Executive Coaching: Inspiring Performance at Work

A Carter



**EXECUTIVE COACHING:
INSPIRING PERFORMANCE AT WORK**

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Inspiring Performance at Work

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Executive Summary

This report is aimed chiefly at HR professionals and management development specialists, *ie* actual and potential commissioners of executive coaching. However, senior managers, aspiring executive coaches, and students of HRM are likely to find much of the contents relevant to their perspectives also.

The IES study

The ultimate aim of this work was to help organisations improve their practice in the commissioning of executive coaching interventions on behalf of their organisations. In order to help them understand better how to do that, this exploratory research study sought to explore four questions:

- what is executive coaching?
- why do organisations commission it: what is it that they hope to gain?
- what are the issues commissioners should be aware of?
- where does executive coaching fit in terms of the management learning theory?

There were four main aspects to this exploratory study, starting with a literature review. In-depth interviews were conducted with management development specialists and other commissioners in employing organisations using executive coaching. In-depth interviews were also conducted with executive coaches. The interviews were supplemented by documentary analysis and less formal discussions. Finally, a Forum of IES Research Club members was held, which debated the issues arising. In all, 22 people from 14 different organisations were involved in the exploratory study.

Why is executive coaching so popular?

Executive coaching is largely an import from the US that appears to have grown enormously in popularity in Europe over the last few years. The study offers some reasons underlying why executives and organisations in the UK have been so keen to embrace it. These reasons include:

- the knock-on effects of the downsizing and delayering of the 1990s resulting in 'lonely' and isolated senior managers
- the increasing demand by organisations for senior managers with key 'soft skills'
- the failure of many business schools and in-company standard development programmes to embed suitable feedback based approaches for managers when they were more junior.

A definition

What is executive coaching? Well, it isn't the same as role-modelling mentoring relationships. The definition proposed is that it is:

'A form of tailored work-related development for senior and professional managers which spans business, functional and personal skills.'

The key features of executive coaching presented are that it is a short-term and time limited, paid for, goal specific, action and performance orientated, personally tailored approach to learning which is objective and utilises feedback.

What are companies using it for?

What motivates organisations to use and commission executive coaching? What is it that they hope to gain? This was a key question for the research. The study was able to identify five main reasons. These were categorised as follows.

Accelerated development

Supporting the induction or appointment of a senior person to a more senior or different role and/or supporting individuals

defined as 'high potentials' or identified from groups targeted for affirmative action.

Implementation of change

Underpinning the effective implementation of organisational change through supporting professional teams.

Critical friend

To act as a critical friend or sounding board to a senior manager.

Underpin wider programmes

Supporting managers engaged in wider personal effectiveness programmes, such as 360-degree feedback.

A further category was suggested as possible, although it was not encountered in this study:

Keeping the best

A means of rewarding and retaining key staff critical to the business.

The executive coaching process

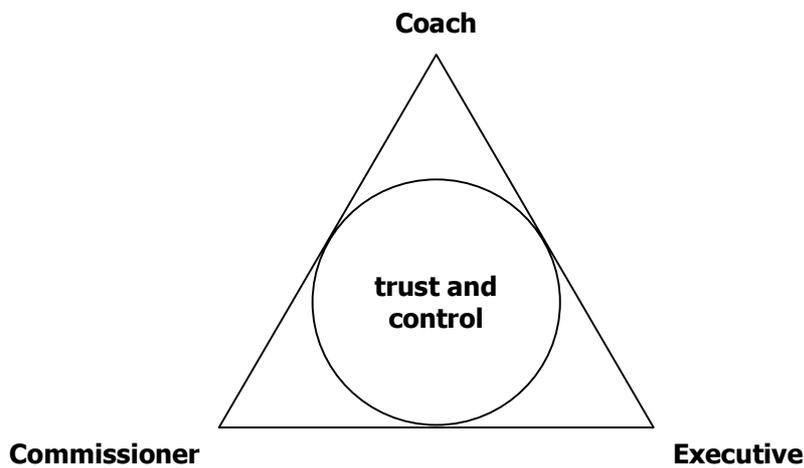
The study enabled the process from the executive coach's perspective to be identified. Six main phases within the overall process were evident. These were: entry and contracting; identifying the issues to be addressed; reaching a shared diagnosis; planning to address development needs; action taking and reflection; and closure.

Implementation issues

The study identified a range of implementation issues that organisations should bear in mind when introducing and managing the provision of executive coaching services.

In particular, it has:

Figure 1: The executive coaching relationship 'triangle'



Source: IES, 2001

- identified a range of backgrounds and professional training of coaches and the implications that this has for the approach they bring to providing their services
- recommended having a process in place to maximise the chances of a successful 'match' between the individual manager and the coach
- highlighted the existence of 'coaching envy' and the potential need to manage the demand for executive coaching
- shared some of the experiences regarding the cost of commissioning external executive coaches
- explained the 'relationship triangle' between commissioner, executive and coach. Here it also offers insight into the underlying issues of trust and control which need to be present in order to maximise the success of the executive coaching, from each of the three perspectives.
- highlighted the problems inherent in evaluating the impact of this type of intervention.

'Fit' with other development processes

Executive coaching from an organisation perspective can be positioned within the field of development in a number of ways. Depending on the organisational context, it can be seen as:

- a development process identifiable with other development processes involving close 'social' learning collaboration, *eg* learning sets, mentoring, career counselling
- an approach to management 'learning from the job' different from, but nonetheless comparable with, projects or secondments
- a 'meta-process' underpinning and maximising the learning from using a range of management education, experience and development initiatives and processes
- a mediatory process between the career management 'thinking' processes (action planning, personal assessment and job option appraisal) and 'action' processes (skill acquisition and accessing jobs).

1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the research project

The starting point for this research was a concern by a number of IES Research Club members about the practice in organisations of commissioning suppliers of executive coaching. In particular, their interest was raised regarding the apparent increasing use, cost and impact of executive coaching. There is an ever-growing band of individual coaches or groups of coaches eager to offer their services for hire to executives and organisations. Since independent advice on commissioning and implementing executive coaching was not readily available, it was felt that there was a need for research.

Executive coaching is becoming a 'hot topic' for meeting senior management development needs in many organisations. As originally conceived, executive coaching was seen as being a remedial process: a method of personalised, short-term, intensive training to address and cure management performance deficiencies (Thach and Heinselman, 1999). However, a change in this perception has occurred and executive coaching is now just as likely to be seen as a force for positive change, and a method of reinforcing and stimulating success in any organisation's high fliers (Hall *et al.*, 1999).

The process of diagnosing just what organisations were interested in involved a series of follow-up conversations during winter 1999/2000. These discussions resulted in an initial agreement that the ultimate issue was to help them improve their practice in the commissioning of executive coaching interventions in their organisations. In order to help them understand better how to do that, this exploratory research study

should start from the point of seeking answers to the following four questions:

- what is executive coaching?
- why do organisations commission it: what is it that they hope to gain?
- what are the issues that commissioners should be aware of?
- where does it fit in terms of management learning theory?

It became clear in the interviews with executive coaches that senior managers and other individuals can and do find and privately finance an executive coach to help them. However, the research project remained unconcerned with that model of commissioning. Rather, the focus is on those circumstances in which organisations decide to find and finance one or more executive coaches to assist their senior managers. The reason for this specific focus is that it reflected the interests and needs of the study sponsors. These are individuals within organisations who are currently (or may shortly be) responsible for commissioning internal or external providers of executive coaching to assist their managers.

1.2 Method

There were four main aspects to the study. First, an exploratory review of the literature was conducted to develop a definition of executive coaching and to unpick some of the likely issues. As this is an under-explored area in terms of research in the UK, this aspect drew heavily on material from the US.

Secondly, employing organisations' approaches to using executive coaching were explored in detail through a series of face to face interviews with management development specialists and other commissioners, supplemented by documentary analysis. This led to the production of some 'vignettes' of current practice and the identification of key issues.

Thirdly, in-depth interviews with executive coaches, supplemented by documentary analysis, covered the detail of how executive coaching is conducted.

Finally, a Forum for IES Research Club members was held in September 2000 to debate the issues arising and identify what it all might mean in terms of practice.

Less formally, the perceptions and views of others were encountered by the researcher through telephone contact and meetings with interested parties. In total, 22 people from 14 different organisations were active participants in the study.

Direct feedback from executives who have been coached was not sought, although the commissioner interviewees were asked about how they gathered information about the experience and satisfaction of executives, and what this had told them.

1.3 Structure of this report

Chapter 2 explores the reasons behind the growing popularity of executive coaching and asks whether this growth can be sustained. Chapter 3 goes on to explore some existing definitions of executive coaching and offers a new definition.

Chapter 4 identifies what motivates employers to introduce executive coaching and describes some real life examples of how organisations have used executive coaching. This should enable readers to get a clear picture of what precisely those organisations expected to achieve. The process of executive coaching and what coaches actually do is covered in Chapter 5.

Chapter 6 looks at some of the key issues and possible implications for organisations to consider in relation to using executive coaching. Finally, where executive coaching 'sits' within the array of other management development and career management methods, and how it integrates with other development processes, is addressed in Chapter 7.

2. Why is Executive Coaching so Popular?

There seems to have been a phenomenal increase in the use of executive coaches in recent years. The Business and HR press have been full of articles espousing an executive coach as something of a 'must have one' in management circles, and 'the winner of the hottest game in town' (Eadie, 2000). November 2000 alone saw articles on executive coaching in the *Financial Times* and *Management Today*.

Judging from the literature, the reasons for the increase in demand may well include changes to the organisational context, and changes to the nature of managerial work itself.

The number of individual coaches currently active in the US varies according to each author and the date of writing; the most recent estimates put the number above 1,500. There are no numbers available for the UK. Nearly all sources, including HRD practitioner associations such as CIPD and AMED, agree however, that the number is rising quickly. Cost estimates also vary between sources, but few authors expect coaching to be a cheap affair. Most in the US expect the basic cost to be in excess of \$400 per month per executive (or more, depending upon the time spent with the coach). In the UK, interviews with commissioners in organisations identified that figures up to 15 per cent of the executive's annual salary have been quoted to organisations, although £2,000 per day (equivalent to four two-hour sessions) does not seem uncommon. This compares with an average (mean) daily fee rate of £975 per day among management consultants across the UK (MCIS, 1999).

However, given that there are no widely recognised professional bodies or accreditation standards for coaches in the UK, anyone can set up in business as an executive coach. This is a matter of concern to almost everyone talking or writing about the subject.

2.1 The changing nature of organisations

One explanation for the rise of executive coaching is that lack of time and more frequent job changes leave fewer senior executives able to fill the role of a mentor figure in many organisations (Lutz, 1995). In addition since the widespread delayering of management hierarchies in the 1990s (Kettley, 1995), spans of command are much wider. This leaves top managers managing more people than they can realistically 'coach' themselves.

The growth of executive coaching is also attributed to a change to a more entrepreneurial economy. There has been a dramatic increase in the number of people working alone at home without an organisational support system (Caudron, 1996). In this situation, coaches can provide the kind of feedback and motivation once provided by bosses and co-workers. Caudron also points out that downsizing has eliminated many of the executives who used to be available as mentor figures in the past.

Other writers also pick up on the trend of 'flatter' organisations that provide fewer opportunities for traditional mentoring relationships to develop, and also result in the existence of more isolated managers (McCafferty, 1996 and Herriot *et al.*, 1998). Flatter hierarchies also make the jump from one level of management to another more difficult. In particular, the transition between general manager and director, and between director and chief executive both involve radical changes in the way an individual makes judgements and manages his or her own team (Clutterbuck and Megginson, 1999).

The shift towards a more explicit transactional relationship between employers and their employees, or mutual 'psychological contract', has been pursued by many organisations as a replacement for job security since the recessionary early 1990s (Herriot and Pemberton, 1995; Watkins and Drury, 1994). Coined 'new deals' by Herriot and Pemberton (1995), this shift involves employees being offered development opportunities to allow

them to maximise their chances of getting another job if their current job becomes redundant, *ie* enhanced employability. In exchange, employers expect high levels of commitment and performance in the short term.

The interest in employability from a public policy perspective has grown during the late 1990s (Tamkin and Hillage, 1999) and with it has followed questions about where the responsibility for development should lie. A recent definition from the literature is: 'Employability is the capacity of getting and keeping satisfactory work' (Hillage and Pollard, 1998). This definition implies employability is about an individual's self-sufficiency within the labour market.

A knock-on effect of these new deals, and the emphasis on employees taking control of their employability, may be that as a society we are starting to rely less on the 'work organisation' to develop us. Perhaps we are starting both to take responsibility for our personal development and also to see it more as an individual matter. Since executive coaching is an individually centred approach to development, it may be that its increased popularity among senior managers can also be explained in the context of this wider growing emphasis on the individual rather than the organisation.

2.2 The changing nature of managerial work

A review of the literature on senior management roles, plus case studies in 17 major UK employing organisations, concluded that modern organisations by nature demand senior managers that are flexible, able to adapt to change, and who possess certain soft skills (Kettley and Strebler, 1997). These new challenges place heavy emphasis on some of the personal aspects of management as well as the ability to work with high volumes of information. Kettley and Strebler identify these key soft skills as:

- gaining trust
- developing people
- encouraging and empowering others
- nurturing effective relationships
- communicating and influencing

- working with new information, concepts and strategies
- managing themselves effectively
- seeking and using feedback, and
- tenacity and integrity.

Kets de Vries (1996) has a useful model of two rather different roles required of leaders. The charismatic role is about envisioning, empowering and energising. The architectural role is as a designer of appropriate structures and systems. In his view, creativity and innovation demand less command and control and more self-managed teams. Organisations need more small autonomous units, but these must be linked by information and common values. They also need a learning culture, one adaptive to change and that values good corporate citizenship behaviour.

Perhaps the latest fashion is to see management as requiring 'emotional intelligence' defined by Goleman (1996) as self-awareness, handling ones own feelings, motivating oneself, recognising emotions in others and handling relationships. In an unpublished extensive review of the leadership literature, commissioned by The Post Office, Hirsh (2000) argues that emotional intelligence may be just a repackaging of messages which have been around for a long time about managing yourself and your relationships with others. Nevertheless, the concept does seem to have captured a current concern with the more personal aspects of managerial work.

Personal skills also emerged as crucial in a study of what makes for successful leadership in business alliances (Garrow *et al.*, 2000). An open style of leadership and the capacity to build personal relationships form the critical basis for dealing with the strategic partner when it comes to the more transactional aspects of alliances: communication, negotiation and operational effectiveness.

2.3 Development opportunities for senior management

How are senior managers to acquire the personal and soft skills that are demanded of them by organisations these days? Research into a range of management development programmes provided by organisations (Tamkin and Barber, 1998) concludes

that the learning programmes best placed to create these reflective, empathetic managers, are those with an emphasis on feedback and learning support. They go on to suggest that this kind of learning is unlikely to take place outside a carefully and deliberately crafted learning event. Yet the Anderson study of senior executives (Marx and Demby, 1998) showed that standard development programmes still prevail in most companies, with managers rewarded to a certain extent by attendance at prestigious business schools. However, these authors too argue that more individually tailored development such as executive coaching is likely to be more effective.

Many companies have defined generic and/or senior management competencies, although they vary in the extent to which these really underpin management development. Holbeche (1998) identifies many companies using competency approaches, 360-degree feedback, personal development plans and assessment centres to help link their succession planning processes with corporate and management development strategies. Many companies have also determined a set of generic leadership competencies, but Holbeche warns against the limited shelf life of success profiles when business requirements change.

Alimo-Metcalf *et al.* (2000) point to some of the same trends in leadership development: emphasis on feedback (including 360-degree feedback), action learning, cross-functional teamwork, and the involvement of senior people in delivering development themselves (*eg* as coaches or mentors). But as she points out, there are still few major companies with a well-embedded approach to delivering leadership skills and many in-company programmes are short-lived.

Pemberton and Herriot (1995), in a study of the development of board members, argue that neither role descriptions nor lists of competencies adequately define the skill needs of board members. They found that boards did not adequately attend to their own induction and development needs. Internal appointments were likely to get less induction to their new role on the board than external appointments.

In an exploration of management development specifically for the top jobs and taking an international view, Buley (1996) highlighted the need for organisations to work closely with the senior and younger potential individuals on their own

development. Buley links the need for more imaginative management development with the notion of 'double loop learning': a process in which the individual's learning challenges their assumptions as well as increasing their knowledge or skills.

Despite the evidence from the literature about what kind of development is most appropriate to support senior managers in successfully fulfilling organisations' changing expectations of what is required in these roles, it seems in practice that these opportunities may have been in short supply on the ground. Tamkin and Barber (1998) described the past lack of the most appropriate kinds of consciously constructed learning programmes on behalf of groups of middle managers in many organisations. Perhaps this can also in part explain the growth in the commissioning of executive coaches for today's lonely senior managers.

2.4 Can this growth continue?

Executive coaching is clearly a hot topic. But can it, or should it ever be used to address the needs of the whole management population in organisations? Executive coaching and other forms of individualised management development provision seem to have been used mainly on senior populations or other selected small groups such as graduate trainees, high potential personnel or for affirmative action. IES knows from the literature that some of these other approaches, such as 360-degree feedback, have been extended to much larger groups, although often with reduced attention to feedback. IES also knows that mentoring or coaching schemes and action learning sets require considerable support from HR specialists unless individuals can be helped to establish such supportive approaches for themselves. So is there a natural limit to the capacity of organisations to use executive coaching beyond a subset of senior management populations experiencing context or role changes?

Participants present at a recent IES Forum doubted the wisdom or practicality of extending an external model of executive coaching to the wider management population. Their reasons are twofold. There is the issue of cost, as external provision is expensive. In addition, the success of executive coaching is critically dependent on the quality of the coach, and companies do not believe there is a large enough supply of really good

coaches to meet a major increase in demand. It seems their belief is that externally provided executive coaching will remain of great interest for a while longer, and will then find its place as meeting the specific needs of fairly small populations within senior management ranks. If this proves to be the case, for the bulk of managers an internal model of providing executive coaching seems a more realistic prospect.

2.5 Chapter summary

This chapter should have:

- highlighted the growth in the popularity and use of executive coaching
- offered some reasons underlying this increase in popularity. These reasons include the knock-on effects of the downsizing and delayering of the 1990s, the demand for managers with key 'soft skills', and the failure of many business school and in-company standard development programmes to embed suitable feedback-based approaches.
- suggested that both the cost of executive coaching and the availability of skilled coaches may prove a limiting factor to the continued growth in its use by organisations.

The next chapter aims to define what executive actually is, identify what its key features are and, in particular, it should enable readers to differentiate executive coaching from mentoring.

3. What is Executive Coaching?

The first question posed by the study sponsors was *'what is executive coaching?'*. The term *'executive coaching'* sounds as though it ought to be straightforward. Surely it just means applying traditional coaching techniques to executives, *ie* senior managers and directors? And isn't it just *'executive mentoring'* by another name? With so much mystique surrounding the concept, we can all be forgiven for wondering whether there actually is any more to it than that. This chapter starts by examining what others have written or said, to see if a clear idea of what executive coaching really is emerges, and whether a helpful definition can be developed.

3.1 Definitions from the literature

Executive coaching, unlike mentoring, almost inevitably seems to include a financial aspect: the coach is being paid specifically for his or her coaching services. One source goes so far as to describe coaches as a *'hired friend'* as well as a business mentor and consultant (McCafferty, 1996).

Executive coaching is a practical exercise: a goal-oriented form of personally tailored learning for a busy executive. To some, the purposes of coaching can be many: to improve performance of executive behaviour, to enhance a career or prevent derailment, or work through organisational issues or change issues (Hall *et al.*, 1999).

Coaching is an interactive process that is designed to help individuals to develop more rapidly and produce more satisfying results. Coaches work with clients in all areas,

including business, career, finances, health and relationships. As a result of coaching, clients should be able to set better goals, take more action, make better decisions, and more fully use their natural strengths.

Executive coaches are usually trained to listen and observe, to customise their approach to an individual's (client's) needs, and to elicit solutions and strategies from that client. One underpinning philosophy described by a coach we interviewed is that the client is naturally creative and resourceful and that the coach's job is to provide support to enhance the skills, resources and creativity that the client already has. While the coach provides feedback and an objective perspective, the client is held responsible for taking the steps to produce the results he or she desires.

A recent definition of executive coaching is:

'Helping professional people to reflect upon their work in a frank and rigorous way and to establish new patterns of behaviour as a consequence.' (Sanger et al., 2000)

This is interesting, because it implies that the role of the coach is to help raise the consciousness of an individual. As a result they will perceive and work effectively with the culture, people and practices around them. Sanger's work is also novel in the literature, in that he is reported as insisting analysis of changes required should be based upon evidence collected by the coach, not relying on the knowledge and feedback of others inside the organisation (Pawsey, 2000).

Executive coaching is usually a fairly short-term activity, intended to improve managerial performance, but the competencies or behaviours underlying that performance can be identified through the coaching process and not necessarily in advance. Ford (1991) argues that executive coaching can transform performance by allowing executives to establish their own criteria for improvement. This is very important, as it seems to be moving development away from a culture of 'passports' such as professional qualifications and specialist or generic competencies, towards a focus on individual aspects of development. Alternatively, it may be that individuals still need to acquire these 'passports' in order to reach managerial positions, but once there the process needs to change to one of

rectification of skills and knowledge (Kirwan-Taylor, 2000). Executive coaching's goal-specific approach means that it is time limited, unlike mentoring which can be an open-ended commitment by both mentor and protégé.

Coaching is a performance and action oriented process, while mentoring as previously described is more of a role-model relationship. Coaching helps people learn how to do things more effectively, while mentoring gets at the intangibles (Hadden, 1997). Intangibles in this context refer to preparing for future changes and promotion.

Coaching doesn't have to be limited to just the target executive; some coaches will work with everybody in the team (Masciarelli, 1999).

3.2 Definitions from practice

The interviews undertaken with commissioners and executive coaches elicited some perceptions and definitions of executive coaching similar to those found in the literature. A personal development and learning theme was apparent throughout. The coaches described it as follows:

'It involves changing personal behaviour by involving managers in owning their own issues and actions. The process used enables the deepening of learning for individuals about their issues.'

'It's a process ... external, committed, independent, objective, respectful, nudging around the task, whatever the tasks.'

'It is an action orientated individual development intervention which enables individuals to be pushed in forwarding issues of importance to them.'

Descriptions elicited from the commissioners interviewed were as follows:

'It is an opportunity for a Chief Executive or a senior manager to reflect on their practice, to have a place where they can go to test out ideas, be challenged and be supported (but not uncritically).'

'It is a way for people to evaluate themselves and help them make important decisions. This is in terms of their managerial life – how they lead and how they manage – but also how they make

best use of their own abilities, so there's a personal element to it as well.'

'It's a training and development intervention that can be targeted to more senior individuals.'

One coach I interviewed, however, had a slightly different view and described it thus:

'I think it's called executive coaching because it's posher and you can get more money for it. I also coach unemployed people. So an executive has a wider remit, has to be more strategic, has to be clear about the effect of their decision making and has responsibility for the people they are making decisions about, but it's still just coaching as far as I'm concerned.'

This raises the question of whether this is a supply side issue, an industry created and marketed extremely effectively by willing suppliers? Alternatively, is the growth in the number of people offering executive coaching services rather a demand side issue, with increased supply an attempt to fulfil the growing demand for them?

3.3 Differentiating features

The main features that seem to define executive coaching are that it is a short-term, paid-for, goal-specific and action-orientated process, designed to support senior managers in producing results more quickly and of a higher quality than they may otherwise have been able to do.

The coaches reported frequent confusion in the minds of others regarding what executive coaching is. To some people it sounded like psychotherapy, mentoring, counselling or organisation development.

Each coach interviewed was clear about the distinctions between these other 'labels' and the executive coaching 'label'. However, the picture was further confused because they believed some providers were using the executive coaching label or badge for these other activities because it is a current buzzword and helped market these other approaches.

A summary of the key distinctions they identified is shown here in Table 1.

Table 1: Differentiating executive coaching from other processes

Features➔ ▼ Process	Originating tradition	Primary concern	Focus
Executive Coaching	Sports	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • solutions • action • individuals performing better in the present 	Rapid acquisition of knowledge, skills and behaviours
Psychotherapy	Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • understanding past experiences and current ways of behaving • reflection 	Dealing with long-standing emotional issues, thoughts and ways of behaving
Counselling	Social	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • preventing negative aspects from individual's past inhibiting future performance 	Coming to terms with event(s)
Mentoring	Apprenticeship	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • preparation • individuals performing better in the future 	Enhancing networking and career progression
Organisation Development	Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • processes preventing team and organisation performance 	Rapid implementation and adaptation to change

Source: IES, 2001

Participants at the IES Forum valued most those definitions of executive coaching which differentiated it from more long-term mentoring role-modelling relationships. This was because mentoring is a process with which they are already familiar. There was no one definition which was considered simple and understandable enough for them to adopt wholesale to use in their discussions with managers back in their own organisations.

A new definition

Having considered all definitions presented, a useable definition for organisations, encapsulating the essence of executive coaching, may be the following:

'It is a form of tailored work-related development for senior and professional managers which spans business, functional and personal skills.'

3.4 Chapter summary

This chapter has:

- defined what executive coaching is from the perspective of the academic literature and practice
- differentiated executive coaching relationships from more long-term mentoring role-modelling and other relationships.
- presented the key features of executive coaching as a:
 - short-term and time limited
 - paid for
 - goal specific
 - action and performance orientated
 - personally tailored approach to learningwhich is:
 - objective
 - and utilises feedback

Later, in Chapter 7, this report explores executive coaching in the context of other development interventions.

The next chapter looks at motivations of employers to involve themselves with executive coaching and provides examples of why some have chosen to commission and introduce it.

4. Why do Employers Introduce Executive Coaching?

The second pair of questions posed by the study sponsors was: *'why do organisations commission executive coaching? What is it that they hope to gain?'*. This chapter aims to categorise the reasons in general terms why organisations decide to introduce executive coaching. In addition, the description of some specific real life examples, in the form of 'vignettes' should enable readers to get a clear picture of what those organisations hoped to achieve.

4.1 What are employers trying to 'fix'?

There is little in existing research evidence or literature on what motivates most employers to introduce executive coaching. However, following this study, IES believes that five main reasons can be identified and proposed. We does not suggest that these five reasons constitute an exhaustive list, rather they are offered as a starting position, in effect a baseline from which further knowledge in this area can develop over time. The main motives that have been identified are:

1. Supporting the induction of a senior manager into a more senior or different role. This model does not necessarily assume that there are specific skills or competencies required for these new roles. Rather the aim here is to ease the transition period, enabling the individual to be 'up and running' in their new post as quickly as possible. This motive is concerned with accelerated development.
2. Supporting one or more individuals identified either as 'high potential' for senior management positions on the

organisation's succession plan, or as targets for extra support to increase the proportion of those from minority groups likely to reach senior management positions as part of an affirmative action plan. In effect, this motive is also concerned with accelerated development.

3. Supporting a number of individuals or teams through the introduction and/or implementation phases of major structural or cultural change. The precise aim here can vary, but typically will enable an acceleration of the time taken to achieve 'buy-in' and effective implementation of the desired change. Some people would consider this to be more properly termed organisational development or process consultancy rather than executive coaching. However, because these interventions are termed executive coaching by the players concerned and in recent literature, they have been included here.
4. Acting as a critical friend or independent sounding board for a senior manager, in circumstances where it is not practical or desirable to identify an internal or external mentor. Typically, the aim is to assist individuals with often large, complex remits to focus on getting the results they need. It may also help senior managers to re-motivate or re-focus their efforts. At the very highest levels of an organisation there may simply be no-one 'further up the tree' to act as the mentor figure.
5. Supporting the personal effectiveness of individuals by underpinning wider development programmes or processes, such as a 360-degree feedback programmes or development centres. Typically, the aim here is to support individuals in accepting the feedback, and challenge them in planning on-going development and actioning other changes and improvements.

Participants at the IES Forum indicated that the different purposes listed and categorised above were inclusive and robust enough to cope with the purposes and rationales adopted by their own organisations. They were easily able to identify and articulate their varying contexts and approaches by using these simple categories described above.

4.2 Company examples

Four 'vignettes' or 'mini case studies' are presented here to illustrate and set more firmly in a practical context these categories for the reasons employers introduce executive coaching.

Accelerated development

The first category of reason identified why employers introduce executive coaching is to support the induction of senior managers into a more senior or different role. An example would be the NHS Executive scheme for newly appointed chief executives, as outlined below. This was previously published in an IES Employment Brief on executive coaching exclusive to IES Research Club members (Carter, 2000).

The NHS Executive has been using external executive coaches for over eight years for a variety of purposes. Since 1998, one use has been as an element of an individualised leadership development programme, offered to all newly appointed chief executives of NHS organisations.

Called Personal Development Advisers, the purpose of commissioning these external coaches is to help individuals manage the transition from a director post into a chief executive's post in the same or a different organisation. The intention is to offer support in an holistic way, covering relationship and personal as well as operational issues. It is expected that sessions will allow individuals the time and space to plan how to: leave their previous post; build new teams; form a productive relationship with one's new chairperson; identify a personal development plan; and do the new job well without getting burnt out. The individuals themselves, however, determine what issues they choose to focus on. Eight hours of executive coaching per chief executive is funded. Some 26 new appointees accessed an executive coach through the programme in 1999.

Other aspects of the overall programme from which individuals can select, include networking events so they can get to know their peers, a local mentor such as a more experienced chief executive who already knows the ropes, and development activities or courses specific to an individual's needs. The programme is underpinned by an extensive induction pack. Participation in the programme is voluntary. However the ability of individuals to select which approach best suits their individual needs, circumstances and preferred learning style, is a key feature in achieving high levels of participation.

Source: IES, 2000

Implementation of change

As previously outlined, the second reason identified for introducing an executive coach into an organisation is to support the introduction of major structural or cultural change. Coaches are seen as useful when someone is needed to challenge long-established modes of working and behaving by individuals as part of the preparation for change. In effect, to '*speak the unspeakable*' (Hall *et al.*, 1999). They are also seen as useful in accelerating the effective implementation of change by supporting the leaders of the new teams and structures created by the change. An example of the former would be the financial services company M & G, as outlined in the practitioner literature by Pawsey, 2000.

Based in M & G's Headquarters in Chelmsford, the IT department has to cater for all the company's new financial products. As e-commerce grows, the company will have to replace its technology. Since the new systems will require less maintenance, some people will have to transfer to different departments, while others will stay on to be retrained. The organisation was concerned that the culture in the department was too rigid to withstand such changes. In particular, managers needed to be able to encourage more teamwork and flexibility among their staff.

Executive coaching that focuses on individual performance is being integrated with a traditional human resource development consultancy approach to deliver a training programme for all members of the company's IT department. The idea was to acquire an understanding of the organisation's culture that can be achieved by the objective research of an outside consultant. At the same time, a concern for individuality would be embraced by using executive coaching techniques operating at the interface between the personal and the professional.

The programme involves individuals carrying out self-assessments and being observed as well as being asked awkward questions, thus forcing them to address problems they may have been ignoring. The coaching has been delivered first to senior managers, team leaders and technical specialists. The idea is to extend it to all 200 staff in the department. It is hoped one knock-on effect will be that it leaves people better equipped to face the future, whether they stay or leave.

Source: Pawsey, 2000

Critical 'friend'

A third motivation for deciding to introduce an executive coach may be as an alternative to identifying an internal or external mentor for an individual senior manager. Large organisations have a tendency to be rigidly hierarchical. Although this doesn't stop mentoring relationships from forming, it can be a disincentive for them to do so. Formal mentoring programmes, in which individuals unknown to each other are assigned to be a mentor or a protégé, do not necessarily produce beneficial results (Schor, 1997). At the very highest levels of an organisation there may simply be no one 'further up the tree' to act as the mentor figure. A small government department provides an example of an approach that could be placed in this category.

Employing some 500 people, a civil service organisation has a hierarchical organisational structure. Back in 1998 it could have been described as 'a bit old-fashioned' in its management practices and not unusual in that expert professional knowledge was prized much more highly than management skills. It has used executive coaching in a number of contexts since then. One use has been to re-introduce the concept and importance of ongoing personal development. Six senior civil servants at director level have been involved. Action was necessary because of the significant management challenges arising from the 'Modernising Government' White Paper agenda.

The culture within the organisation was one where, once you become a senior civil servant, you were considered to have 'made it' and therefore did not require any more development. Undergoing training was perceived as somehow admitting that you had a weakness. Attendance on whole day courses was also perceived as an imposition into an already busy schedule. Rising through the ranks within that culture meant it could be threatening for directors to undertake development or training courses within the public gaze. The size of the organisation and the seniority of the directors meant there were not enough internal mentors. In addition, people had inhibitions about working with anyone internal.

Each of the directors targeted was found a different external executive coach and entirely confidential personalised objectives set between the coaches and coached. Coaching sessions were fitted around other meetings and commitments. A very careful matching process, the briefing of coaches and getting individuals to buy into the concept have been critical to achieving full voluntary participation.

Source: IES 2001

Underpinning wider personal effectiveness programmes

IES categorised another reason that was identified for establishing a coaching resource as: 'to assist individuals to take action upon the self-insight they have gained upon receipt of personal feedback as part of a development centre, 360-degree feedback or other development programme'. The idea of using coaches is both to support participants in accepting the feedback and also to challenge them in planning and actioning appropriate personal development plans or other changes. In this circumstance, coaching can be seen as an alternative to the provision of a self-managed workbook, encouraging participants to create informal networks or facilitated learning sets (Kettley, 1997). Coaches in this situation may be external or an in-house HR expert. There are numerous examples of this approach and indeed, it is this category of employer motivation for introducing executive coaching that has been most frequently encountered during this study. One example in this category is British Telecommunications plc, as outlined in the research literature about personal feedback by Kettley, 1997.

In the mid-1990s, BT used a 360-degree feedback instrument as an important input into ongoing performance management and development. All managers in BT were encouraged – and the top 150 required – to initiate the process and obtain up to date personal feedback.

The feedback report was structured specifically to help familiarise managers with the required competency profiles. The relevance of the competency framework for senior managers, on which the feedback framework was based, was validated.

A prime concern throughout was ensuring individuals had sufficient support to interpret the feedback they received. A network of coaches was developed to assist individuals in the interpretation of feedback and the creation of development actions *etc.* A written guide to working with feedback was also produced for all managers.

Source: Kettley, 1997

4.3 Other factors to consider

IES believes it is possible that there may be a sixth reason why those in employing organisations facilitate the commissioning of executive coaching – that of seeking to reward and retain senior managers. Although it was not encountered in the literature in relation to executive coaching specifically, IES is aware from a review of the employability literature of a counter-intuitive strategy termed by Tamkin and Hillage (1999) ‘keeping with kindness’. This is when employers seek to maximise, in the short or medium term, employee retention among notably already employable work groups, by providing excellent development opportunities that further enhance the employability of those individuals. The idea underpinning this approach to achieving competitive strategy is to give employees what they value so that they do not seek it elsewhere.

IES did not encounter this idea of reward and retention through its contact with executive coaching commissioning practice through this study either. However, we are aware from personal contact with those evaluating management education sponsorship schemes and in-house MBA programmes, that at least two employers have recently pulled the plug on the provision of support for professional and senior staff to study for MBAs. Both evaluation studies found, among many other things, that there were high levels of turnover among those completing these MBAs. Line managers were nominating individuals regarded as totally inappropriate, for central financial sponsorship, and/or funding attendance from within their own departmental budgets. One explanation proposed by the evaluators was that line managers were desperate to keep hold of their high performers for as long as possible. The implicit deal could be described as: ‘We can’t offer you a promotion but stay here and work for us for another x years and you will leave with an MBA’.

Given that having an executive coach is proving so popular with senior managers, it begs the question whether the provision of an executive coach might sometimes be a reward or retention strategy by line managers too. None of the participants at the IES Forum could confirm this to be the case and most were sceptical about the likelihood. Neither could any confirm whether line managers were supporting the private commissioning of coaches. But

would they necessarily know what their line managers were doing?

The interviews with executive coaches in this study found that the bill can be paid by the individual themselves or local departmental budgets as much as by central HR or corporate functions. The study also found that executive coaches believe that executive coaching is good for the retention of managers. Of course a line manager picking up the tab through local budgets is no indication that paying for an executive coach is a retention strategy. Nevertheless the potential exists.

4.4 Chapter summary

This chapter has identified the main reasons why employing organisations decide to introduce executive coaching and has categorised these as:

- accelerating development through supporting the induction of a senior person to a more senior or different role
- accelerating development through supporting individuals defined as 'high potentials', or identified from groups identified for affirmative action
- underpinning the effective implementation of organisation change through supporting teams and individuals
- to act as a critical friend or independent sounding board to a senior individual, where a mentor figure is not available or is undesirable
- supporting individuals engaged in wider personal effectiveness programmes.

A further possible category has been suggested as possible, although it was not encountered in this study:

- a means of rewarding and retaining key staff.

This chapter has illustrated these categories by the use of case examples. The categories and examples are all from an organisation's (or commissioner's) perspective. This report does not address the different expectations of those to be coached. It is hoped this may be an area of future research. However, in the meantime, commissioners may like to consider just how

different, or not, an executive's expectations might be from their own. Thinking about any 'gap' will help those introducing executive coaching to consider how much groundwork is needed, and through what means. It will also help in understanding how to engage reluctant executives.

In the next chapter we turn our attention to the executive coaching process itself and outline what it is that executive coaches actually do.

5. What do Executive Coaches Actually do?

This chapter aims to explain the executive coaching process and provide the reader with some insight into what it is that executive coaches do.

5.1 The role of coaching 'sessions'

Throughout the interviews IES undertook with executive coaches, it became clear that it would be a mistake to think of the coaching sessions themselves solely as being where the coaching takes place. Rather, the coaching can be a process which begins before the first session even takes place, when executives are asked to consider their situation and start to identify their issues. IES encountered practice whereby individuals are helped to do this through the provision of pre-session 'work'. This took the form of a structured workbook in some cases, or a straightforward set of questions in an introductory letter in other cases. Both approaches were designed to raise the individual's self-awareness prior to their first formal session.

Between sessions, further diagnostic tools may be used by the individuals or the action agreed implemented/practised. Some coaches referred to this affectionately as 'homework'.

The sessions themselves are used for a variety of activities, including the giving of candid feedback and role-playing, or practice/rehearsals for the action identified.

5.2 Phases in the executive coaching process

The actual approach adopted by each of the executive coaches varied, but based on both the interviews undertaken as part of this study and also its own consultancy experience, IES was able to identify six basic phases to the overall process. This process is presented overleaf as Figure 2.

Phase one: Entry and contracting

The first phase can be described as that of 'entry and contracting', whereby rapport between coach and executive is established, expectations and ground rules are clarified, and the executive's level of commitment to the process is established and enhanced.

The coaches identified rapport and trust as critical to successful coaching relationships and sought to establish it as early as possible. Effective dialogue is at the heart of coaching, and rapport can be thought of as the essential building block of good dialogue. Techniques for establishing rapport varied, but typically involved giving due regard to body language, tone and pace of speaking, matching language, and influencing mood and energy levels.

Commitment to the process and a desire to change on the executive's part were reported as a pre-requisite. If these could not be established, many of the coaches would not proceed further.

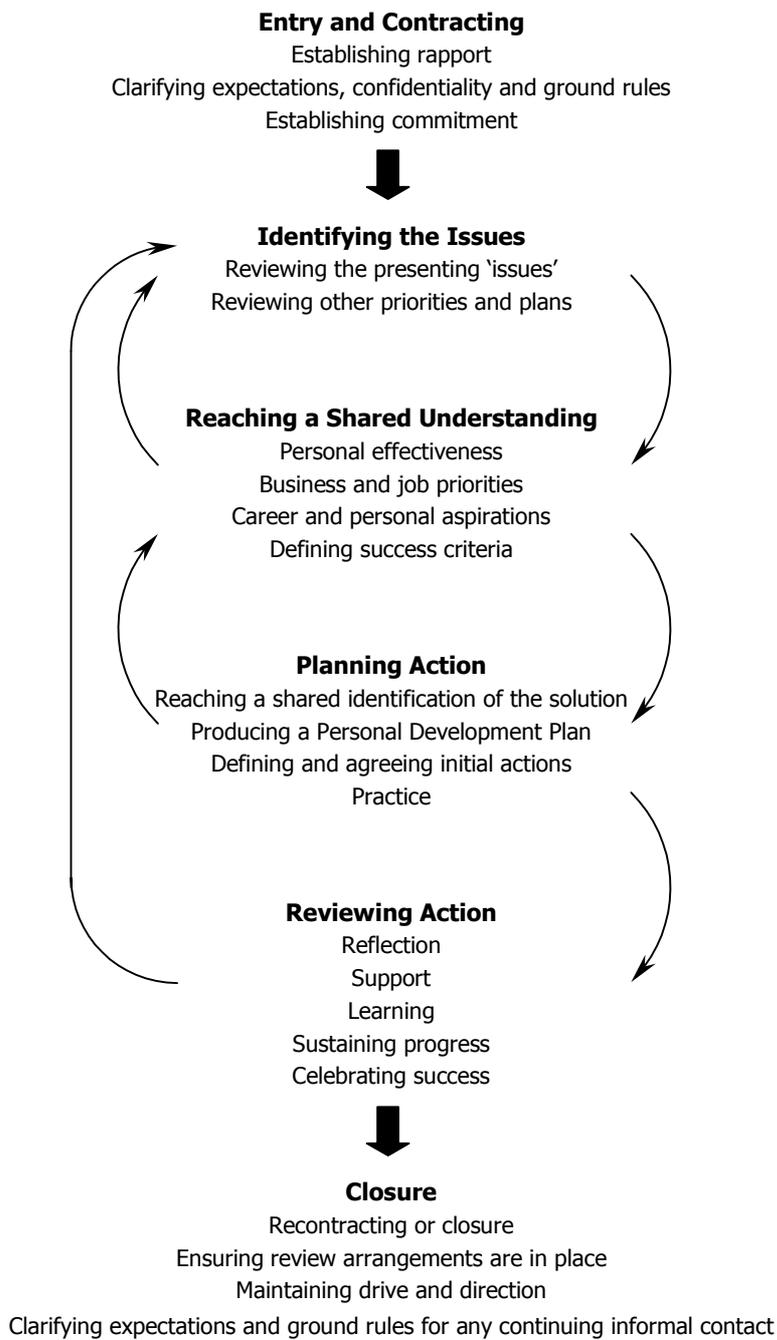
Phase two: Identifying the issues

The second phase is identifying the issues that the executive wants to address. As Lyons (2000) described it:

'Perhaps the greatest challenge is to engage the executive in a dialogue of emerging purpose. This disarmingly simple question 'What should we talk about?' can be a hard question to answer. Thus the coach often works with the executive as a kind of scout, whereby selecting an appropriate path is a mutual activity.'
(Lyons, 2000)

Setting off in the wrong direction is likely to be ultimately disappointing to the executive and their organisation, so the process of identifying the right path is critical.

Figure 2: The six phases in the executive coaching process



Source: IES, 2001

All the coaches interviewed stressed the importance of identifying the issues of importance to the individual and seeking to forward these. In that sense, the individual always defines the agenda. The role of the coach during this phase of the process therefore is to help them identify what the problem or agenda actually is.

Discussion of the presenting 'issue' or explicit reason the organisation was hiring the coach, forms only one part of the content of this phase. Equally important is setting that problem or issue within the wider context by reviewing other priorities, plans and issues relevant to the executive.

Phase three: Reaching a shared understanding

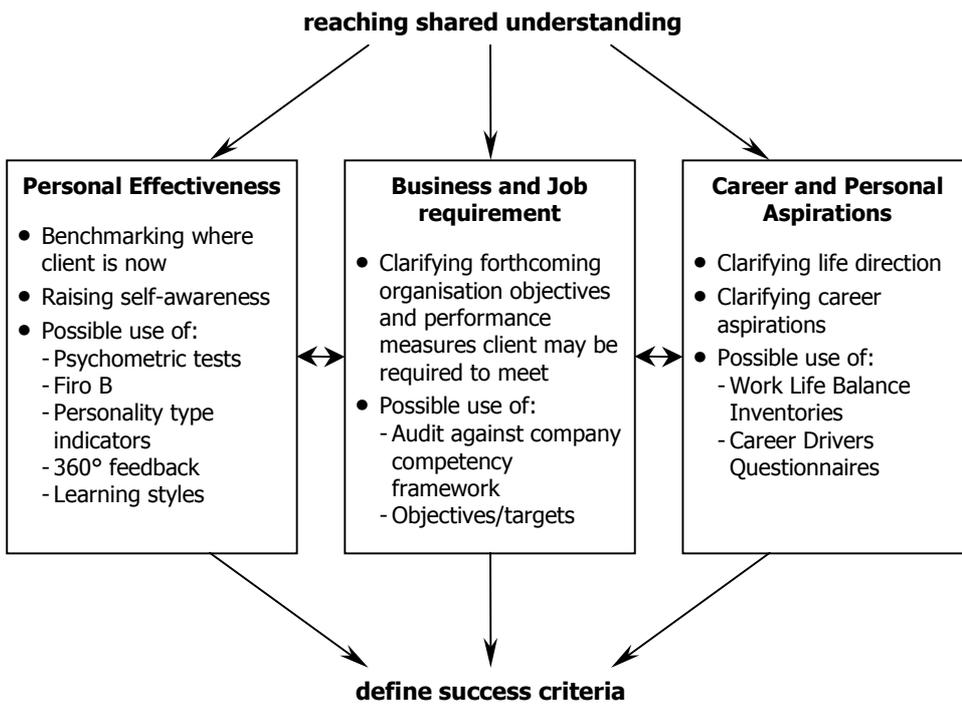
Reaching a shared understanding or diagnosis of the agenda to be pursued forms the third main phase of the overall process. It was during this phase that the differences in how different coaches operate and the importance they attach to different aspects, was at its most diverse. Each gave at least some consideration to three main aspects which IES has categorised as: 'personal effectiveness', 'business and job priorities', and 'career and personal life aspirations'.

The degree to which each of these three considerations is explored in practice, and the importance attached to each of them, seemed to be dependent upon two factors. The first factor was the underpinning philosophical beliefs of the coaches about what was important (which may be connected with their own professional backgrounds or coaching framework). The second factor was the type of issue identified, together with the techniques which they were trained in using.

The different paths coaches took to reaching a shared understanding, together with some of the techniques they variously employed along those paths, is presented in more detail in Figure 3.

For instance, if the issue(s) identified were predominantly behavioural in nature, the personal effectiveness path seemed to receive priority. A coach with occupational psychology roots seemed more likely to employ the diagnostic techniques of psychometric tests or personality type indicators, such as MBTI

Figure 3: Reaching a shared understanding



Source: IES, 2001

or FiroB. A coach with training and development roots however, seemed more likely to select 360-degree or learning styles inventory techniques. If the issue(s) identified were predominantly business requirements or job role related in nature, diagnostic techniques relevant to that area would be receive much more attention.

Figure 3 therefore demonstrates three possible primary paths and examples of the techniques from which different coaches might select, in order to assist the individual in diagnosing what may lie beneath their issues.

Coaches expect that the use of these techniques will lead to a greater understanding of the issues, as well as leading to new issues being identified.

Phase four: Planning action

The fourth phase in the overall process that IES identified, is that of planning. This involves taking the shared diagnosis reached during the previous phase, together with ideas about what would constitute a successful outcome in terms of changes to be made (*ie* success criteria), and using these to consider and identify solutions or actions to achieve the change desired.

The list of development needs and actions for addressing or solving these changes needed, was typically termed as the production of a Personal Development Plan. Often, however, this document was less formal or structured than the term might suggest. It was seen as the responsibility of the executive to produce the plan. The role of the coach was to assist the individual to review the options and identify the solution(s) that would help them reach their goals. This assistance included ensuring the option appraisal process gave due regard to factors such as the work/life context within which the executive was operating. It should also give regard to the opportunities available to the individual, as well as weighing these up against the preferences of the individual and their attitude towards risk-taking.

In circumstances where the executive coaching has as its core purpose support for an individual through a wider development programme (such as 360-degree feedback or a development centre), it is after the planning phase that the coaching relationship may end. The production of a personal development plan which takes into account the specific feedback from the programme elements, and considers it in a wider context for the individual before producing that PDP, can be the end product. However, in most other coaching situations it is merely the foundation for them in supporting the individual in their efforts to action and implement the items contained in the plan. It is this action which is at the heart of the coaching process in most other contexts.

Phase five: Reviewing action

The fifth phase of most coaching processes is typically the longest in terms of elapsed duration. It is what IES has called the reviewing action or implementation phase. The coaches interviewed described an iterative process of:

- executives reporting back on actions attempted or behaviour practised
- a period of critical reflection and challenge on their degree of success, making the learning on the reasons for their experience conscious
- supporting their modification or practising of actions to reattempt, and
- motivating them to sustain progress and celebrate successes.

Readers familiar with other action-orientated approaches to learning and development, such as action learning sets, will recognise this kind of cyclical approach, perhaps best outlined in the ideas of Revans (1982) in connection with action learning and Kolb (1984) with his famous 'learning cycle'. The length of time needed for this phase to be completed will be dependent upon many factors, not least the number of issues to be addressed and the speed of success of the individual in achieving them. New issues and new solutions may be identified and added as business, job and personal circumstances change over time, or as the individual's experience of taking new actions leads to greater understanding of the nature of the issues. Reviewing action can often lead to identifying or reframing the issues to be addressed.

Phase six: Closure

In order to prevent an executive becoming dependent upon their coach during this iterative process of reviewing action through support and challenge, the final phase needs to be introduced, which IES has termed 'closure'.

Most of the coaches we interviewed considered it good practice to take a temperature check on how the individual felt about ending the relationship at regular intervals. Over time, sessions and other support required are likely to significantly reduce in any case as progress and confidence is raised. Recontracting every few months on a new basis in terms of process (support required, frequency of sessions *etc.*) is common. Recontracting on the basis of different issues or actions to be addressed (*ie* content) is also common. It is worth bearing in mind that a coach is not meant to be a life-long mentor. Ending is important so that closure of actions is reached.

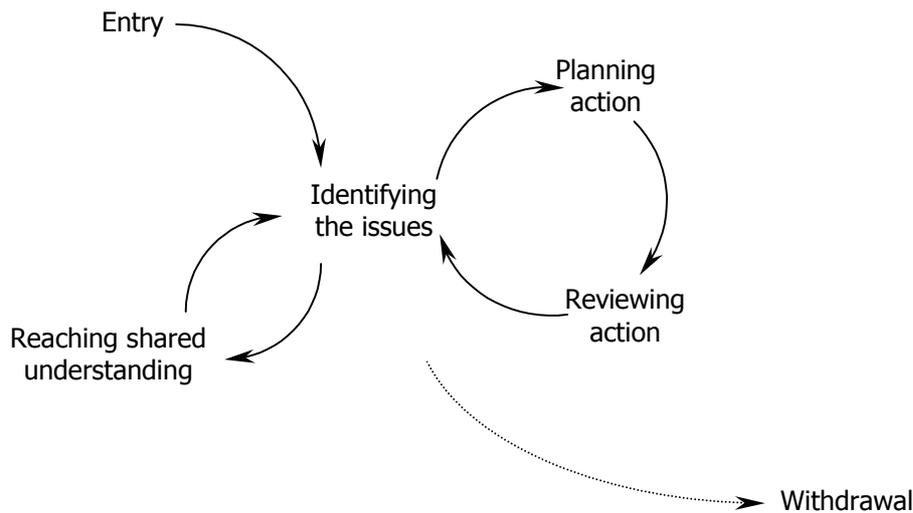
'Coaching should not be seen as a consultant's annuity.' (Hall et al., 1999)

Sometimes an end is reached because of external factors, such as organisational commissioners determining the desired changes have been observed and the intervention is no longer required. On other occasions, the money allocated to the intervention runs out, regardless of progress. Sometimes the executive just decides they can now manage the rest of the actions on their own.

The six phases in the executive coaching process can be illustrated by the diagram in Figure 4. It is important to bear in mind that this figure illustrates the process from the perspective of a coach and not an executive. The diagram indicates the iterative nature of the process.

Assisting an executive in identifying the 'right' issues is central to the process. The process of reaching a shared understanding of the agenda to be pursued can involve revisiting the issues several times. Often this will involve adding, subtracting or reframing some of the issues. Whilst the executive is engaged in developing actions or 'trying out' new behaviours, the coaching process is about enhancing the executive's learning from these activities.

Figure 4: The executive coaching process, from the coach's perspective



Source: IES

Planning and rehearsing for experimenting using new ways of working or behaving is followed by a structured review with the individual about the outcome(s). This leads to subtracting, adding or reframing the issues to be addressed. Reframed issues lead to adjustments in action needed. Most coaches expect to go around this circular part of the process many times on an executive's most difficult issues, and perhaps just once on their other issues.

There are a number of points at which, in practice, a coach can withdraw. Ideally this would be when 'closure' is mutually agreed, following the building up of a resourcefulness in the executive to carry on improving their performance without them, *ie* when they have also learnt about managing their own learning.

This chapter should have given readers some insight into the process, from the executive coach's perspective. An understanding of the entire process should better enable commissioners of executive coaches to specify what their own expectations are, in their unique development context.

The next chapter focuses attention on the practical aspects arising from implementing executive coaching into an organisation, and highlights the key issues for commissioners or scheme organisers to consider.

6. Implementation Issues for Organisations

The third question posed by the sponsors of this study was: '*what are the issues for implementing executive coaching that commissioners need to be aware of?*' Once the decision to go down the route of using executive coaching is made, how should organisations go about introducing the approach? This chapter outlines the practical considerations that need to be taken into account, whether the intention is to source the coaches externally or internally. It also highlights some of the issues that may arise as a result of using the approach.

6.1 Background of coaches

Opinion is divided in terms of the literature over whether industry- or field-specific experience is a given for a good coach. Some sources argue that a 'post-heroic' coach who has already proved himself an expert in the relevant field is the only kind to have credibility in the eyes of the tutored executives. Others (Caudron 1996 *etc.*) argue that it is not as important for a coach to know the details of a particular field as it is for the coach to understand how business (in the broadest sense) works, and have the ability to coach the executive sensitively towards his or her goals.

Internal vs external

There is no uncertainty or divided opinion, however, on the need for trust between the coach and the coached executive. The executive needs to be certain that his weaknesses and concerns

are not going to be broadcast to his peers or the organisation in general. External coaches, with no 'axe to grind' in the internal politics of an organisation are seen as particularly valuable for this very reason.

'It's easy to use a coach as a safe place to discuss issues when there are so few people one can trust at the executive level in the workplace.' (Hall *et al.*, 1999)

An outsider, however, may not have an intimate knowledge of an organisation, its culture, history, politics and current situation, and they can be perceived to be expensive where the coaching of many managers is involved. Three executive coaches IES interviewed first came to coaching through undertaking the role as internal coaches within major employing organisations. They all expressed the view that coaching can be effectively carried out perfectly well by an insider, especially within large organisations. One of the coaches outlined her view thus:

'There is no reason why an internal training and development specialist couldn't take on the role if they have the right skills. There are three tests the company would need to be satisfied about: whether the prospective coaches are perceived by the individual managers as having the independence and respect for confidentiality about the issues arising; whether from a resourcing point of view the skills to do it already exist or the company can afford to develop, acquire or maintain them; and whether the coaches might share the same assumptions and 'blind spots' about the organisation.'

Professional training and affiliations

According to the literature, coaches are occasionally perceived as having an agenda that diminishes their effectiveness. A coach's desire to sell a particular conceptual model or process as a way of managing may not necessarily match the organisation's or executive's goals (Hall *et al.*, 1999). Understanding the conceptual model or framework of coaching that each executive coach uses is therefore a consideration for organisations when commissioning them. IES was not able to identify any existing research evidence about the professional backgrounds or affiliations of executive coaches. The prior work experience and professional training of the executive coaches that IES interviewed as part of this study varied. This appeared significant in terms of appreciating the

underpinning coaching framework and philosophy within which they operated, and therefore the very different experience of coaching their clients were likely to encounter.

One of the coaches interviewed was from a trained counselling background and was a long-serving member of the British Association of Counselling (BAC). This necessitates operating within the ethical code of that association, which includes an emphasis on respecting the confidentiality of the client (or coached individual's) issues and progress. Membership also requires professional supervision arrangements to be in place to support the coach.

Other coaches interviewed were former trainers or management development or organisation development specialists within employing organisations. These coaches belonged either to the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD) or to the Association of Management Education and Development (AMED) which require or encourage continuing professional development but do not explicitly require ongoing supervision. The actual training of these former coaches varied from the 'role consultation' approach of the Tavistock Institute through to the use of Gestalt processes, Jungian analysis and Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP).

The other coaches interviewed were former senior managers or management consultants. These coaches belonged to associations such as the British Institute of Management and the International Coaching Federation (ICF), based in the US. One was operating as an executive coach employed by a company specialising in the provision of executive coaching, which used its own framework and approach to coaching based on 'life balance' principles. ICF members have to adhere to a code of ethics in their business dealings and coaching relationships. The ICF is interesting as it is attempting to develop an accreditation scheme for its members. However, this is extremely expensive for coaches to participate in, due to administration and monitoring costs, and its reach in the UK is at present very limited.

Conceptual frameworks

We do not take the view that one conceptual framework of coaching is better than another. Rather, commissioners may like

to bear in mind that the principles underlying the various approaches that coaches adopt do differ, and some may appeal more to individual executives than others. As one of the coaches interviewed phrased it:

'It wouldn't matter if the conceptual framework is NLP or anything else, as long as you felt good about the quality of coaching you were getting and that the concepts were not oppressive ... as long as it is competent, has a structure and the coach has been trained in it and isn't just dabbling.'

In addition, commissioners may like to enquire into the backgrounds, professional training and supervision arrangements of potential suppliers to reassure themselves of the likely approach and concern for ongoing quality assurance that the executive coaches have.

A further issue arises for organisations considering the internal sourcing route for their executive coaching provision, *ie* 'buying in' or 'growing their own'. This is the extent to which it may be helpful having all their coaches trained in and using the same conceptual framework and structure. To do so would certainly better enable peer review arrangements to be put in place and maintained.

6.2 Selection of coaches

There are two aspects to selecting executive coaches that seem to require attention. The first is the practical aspects **of identifying a coach or pool of coaches** suitable for the organisation's purposes. The second is the process of then **'matching'**, *ie* making sure that a specific executive and specific coach are paired well in terms of needs and the ability of a particular coach to provide what the executive needs. All writers on the subject of coaching agree that the 'fit' between the personalities of a coached executive and the coach is a basic 'given' in any coaching situation. The two of them need at least to get on most of the time.

Identifying a pool of coaches

In terms of identifying, recruiting and selecting coaches, the study encountered one basic approach in use by all the

organisations in which interviews with commissioners were undertaken. This was not very different from the approach widely used by organisations in commissioning other kinds of consultants, of which IES is aware.

The process adopted by a large distribution company provides an example. The emphasis in the process on identifying potential coaches is particularly extensive in this example, as potential executive coaches were unfamiliar to the commissioner.

In 1999, a large distribution company, operating internationally, wished to identify and contract some executive coaches to work with one or more of the 15 newly appointed managing directors of its business units. In particular, coaches were needed to offer support to the MDs and their new teams to deliver some challenging performance goals within a short timescale. These new performance goals were crucial to ensuring the achievement of the organisations overall 'business balanced scorecard'.

First, a detailed generic tender document or 'specification' was produced that outlined in broad terms what the coaches would be required to deliver, the context within which they would be expected to deliver, and the success criteria against which the results of their work would be evaluated. This was to form the basis of a formal invitation to tender process.

Having no existing contacts, it needed to identify potential providers of executive coaching. An advertisement was placed in *People Management* magazine, a literature search of companies/individuals mentioned in published articles was undertaken, and names were sought from a leading development consultant. After initial basic enquiries for appropriateness, this initial 'long list' was reduced to 12 organisations who were then sent the specification and invited to submit proposals or 'bids'.

The resulting proposals were very detailed. It was important that exactly which coaches would be working on the contract was clearly identified. A 'shortlist' of companies was invited to present their proposals and clarify issues in the form of a commissioning interview panel. Following references from previous commissioners and executives coached, four organisations, representing ten coaches, were selected.

Source: IES, 2001

The process of 'matching'

In terms of matching specific coaches to specific executives, the approach used in practice varied. What determined the approach appeared to depend on the degree to which either the executive coaches or the target executives were already known to the commissioner or scheme organiser. Which of the parties was already known provided the starting point for a matching process that primarily involved making judgements about the other party in a search for likely 'fit'. Where neither party was known, a process of getting to know both potential parties was recommended. Handling matching well was identified as important by all the commissioners interviewed. Sometimes matching was the responsibility of the commissioner, whereas other approaches gave the responsibility for final selection to the executives themselves. Three of the commissioners interviewed described the approaches they adopted thus:

'A certain amount of the science of matching is pretty much like an Indian matchmaker. I had to rely on my own intuition about who would work well with whom. Knowing enough already about the person and what I wanted the coaching to do enabled me to talk to a potential coach and make an initial judgement about whether they might work well with that person. Arranging an initial meeting with no obligation to continue (by either party) is essential.'

'We have a core group of ten coaches that we work with. Some of these I know quite well. I know what their style is, what techniques they are likely to use and what level of challenge they will offer. When somebody needs a coach, we would offer the names and profiles of say three or four of these coaches, together with feedback on what previous people have said about what working with that coach was like. Determining these is basic. I ask about any gender preferences and how they want to work and what they want to achieve. I don't always get it right ... if the chemistry doesn't work the individual can pull out after the first session and we find them someone else.'

'Each (individual) was allocated a coach as soon as possible. On reflection, we probably should have spent more time making sure that the match was appropriate and facilitating introductions. We left the decision on how the coaches were used, and exactly for what, to them (the individuals). There was progressive take-up. Some have chosen not to use it all and we have not put pressure

on them. It was a facility made available if they chose to use it. We did say to the (individuals) and the coaches that if a problem emerged we would deal with it – such as a personality problem – so everyone knew that they had the flexibility to change if they needed to.'

6.3 Managing demand

'Coaching envy'

Once executive coaching has been introduced into an organisation for one person, it can rapidly spread through the upper echelons of management (Dutton, 1997). In the literature, coaching was generally seen as a very satisfactory experience for those executives who participate. The coaching process was seen to add value to the executive, as they acquired new skills, abilities and perspectives that allowed them to accomplish things after coaching that they could not do before (Hall *et al.*, 1999). 'Coaching envy' is one term used for the process, where coaching is seen as such a positive activity that everyone wants to get involved (Hall *et al.*, 1999). A drawback for an organisation therefore is in creating and then having to satisfy a demand for the 'special attention' that positive (as opposed to remedial) executive coaching can create among staff.

'Executives like the confidentiality and personal attention; they also like what coaching does for their careers.' (Hall *et al.*, 1999)

Many of the participants at the IES Forum had encountered the reality of this concept we called 'coaching envy' and agreed it was becoming an increasing problem. None reported having yet attempted to manage it proactively, beyond persuading the individuals that other methods of development might be more appropriate for their particular needs. However, it could be that organisations can establish clear guidelines for the use of executive coaches so that access or approval becomes a more explicit part of development process selection.

Demand vs supply

As outlined in an earlier chapter, Forum participants doubted the wisdom or practicality of extending an organisation-sponsored model (particularly an externally provided one) of executive

coaching. Their reasons are twofold. There is the issue of cost as provision is expensive. In addition, the success of executive coaching is critically dependent on the quality of the coach and the participants did not believe there is a large enough supply of really good coaches to meet a major increase in demand.

The way in which executive coaching is introduced into the organisation can require careful handling. Bringing in a coach may be perceived as a statement of (in)competence by a manager who may wonder why an executive who is up to the job needs a coach in the first place (Masciarelli, 1999). In organisations where there is a perception that executive coaching is for the incompetent, it may be that managing demand will not be a problem.

If the demand in the wider business community continues to grow for having an executive coach, 'personal trainer' coach or 'life coach' (Edmunds, 2000), managing demand may become a more pressing issue for organisations. As an alternative, executives may just find and hire their own coaches. According to the business and trade management press (Edmunds, 2000 and Lyons, 2000) many managers are already initiating their own ongoing and expensive relationships with external coaches to help them re-evaluate their lives, or as a response to dealing with stress at work. Organisations may not even be aware where these relationships exist. Organisational awareness may not matter if these arrangements are privately funded or on a small scale.

There is a question organisations may wish to ask themselves: is coaching being used by executives without reference to their organisations in order to remedy their self-perceived weaknesses, or as an investment to improve their personal value and remuneration? Does this matter? The interest of central HR functions may be raised if these coaching arrangements are found to be linked to issues such as stress at work, unmet development needs that are common across the board, and if they are being funded on a widespread basis.

6.4 Determining how much to pay

Where executive coaching is widely used, the cost can become an issue. But how much should an organisation expect to pay for an executive coach? In the introductory chapter, a figure of £2,000

per day (equivalent to four two-hour sessions for one individual) was presented as a not uncommon fee to be quoted by a potential coach to the commissioners we interviewed. Behind this figure lies an array of prices quoted and numerous models or 'packages' of delivery.

Some of the experiences and perceptions about quoted and actual costs of the commissioners interviewed are outlined below:

'Some organisations we have used insist that you buy a year's worth for each individual, although if you push them they will agree to six months initially.'

'One package we bought includes telephone support, email support and other kinds of support as well as face to face sessions. It cost us about £1,800 a month for the most expensive one we used for one individual. It lasted nine months in the end, but I have to say that in the initial stages I believe there were weekly meetings, pretty constant contact and I know the outcomes were particularly successful.'

'Some organisations asked for ten per cent or 15 per cent of the (executives) salary.'

'We have different arrangements for different coaches. We have some good ones at a very reasonable price about £800 per day, and also some good ones who charge us £2,500 a day. You have to be careful though, because you sometimes assume you are buying two hours of coaching, but can be charged a full half day for that.'

'Some coaches ask to have an initial meeting with the manager before quoting. They then feel in a better position to identify with the individual what needs to be done and how many sessions might be needed.'

'Very occasionally, we organise a series of one-off sessions for a particular purpose. These sessions can work out as little as £200 per person for a few hours. What we would tend to do in these circumstances is buy a day of the coach's time, bring them in here and trundle the individuals through.'

'We negotiate wherever possible. For example, there are some coaches we use who work for a company where their individual rate is expensive. But because we use a number of their coaches, they give us a special rate. Although the coaching takes place over a period it could be viewed as working out around the £1,800 per day mark (if you assume eight hours of coaching per day for the coach).'

The interviews with the executive coaches indicated a flexible approach to pricing. Only two agreed to answer this enquiry directly, and their responses are quoted below:

'My fees vary from £0 for voluntary work I decide to do, to £2,000 a day for companies I believe can afford it. Typically, I charge £400 per each two-hour session.'

'I don't really have a set price. It varies depending on who approaches me and what they need from between nothing for unemployed people to £1,500 per month for a fixed period for an employed senior manager in a finance or other successful private sector company. The regularity of meetings and other support varies but it seems to average out at about one session per person every three weeks.'

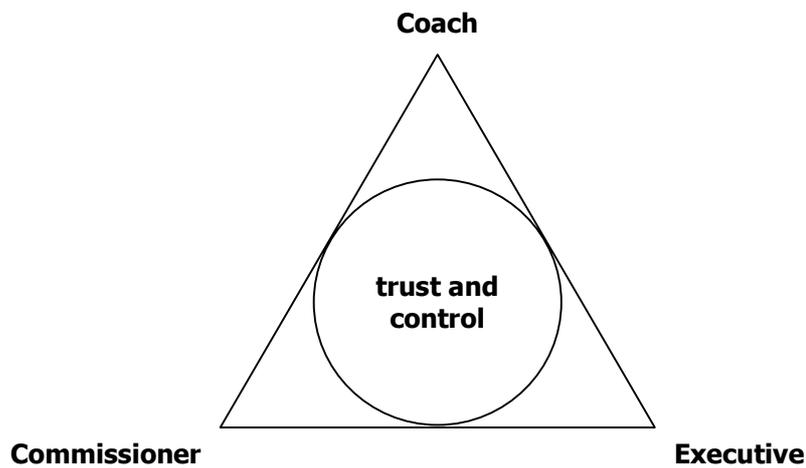
Clearly, extensive use of coaches could result in a considerable cost to the organisation. Consideration of measures to reduce these costs that IES has encountered, include the negotiation of special rates with one or more preferred suppliers and substituting cheaper alternatives such as self-help workbooks for some individuals.

For large employing organisations or those seeking to make extensive use of executive coaching, an in-house coaching resource may be a much more cost-effective option. IES has been told that recruiting experienced executive coaches is difficult at present, with the market for executive coaching being so buoyant. 'Growing our own' is the option being adopted by a number of the organisations present at the IES Forum. Typically, the internal supply to be trained seems to come from upskilling former trainers and developers rather than reskilling senior or operational managers. This may be in part due to the current availability of trainers as a potential resource pool following the widespread contracting out by organisations of their direct training delivery. It will be interesting to see the degree of success organisations have in retaining and rewarding these executive coaches, once trained, if the external market for these skills and services does continue to expand.

6.5 Trust and 'control'

Two of the strongest themes to emerge from the interviews were that of trust and control and these seemed to be strongly linked with each other.

Figure 5: The executive coaching relationship 'triangle'



Source: IES, 2001

There is more than one significant relationship to consider, *ie* coach and executive, coach and commissioner and commissioner and executive. Issues of control emerged in seeking to understand the interplay between these various relationships. This research project did not include direct contact with executives (the coached) themselves. However, the interviews with coaches and commissioners enabled a view to be formed about one side of a relationship 'triangle', presented in Figure 5. Some insight can also be offered into the other two sides of the triangle.

Executive and coach relationships

The concept of trust between an individual and their executive coach was regarded by all interviewees as being critical to the success of coaching as a personal development intervention. The coaches IES interviewed identified building trust as the single most important consideration for a productive and successful coaching relationship. They identified achieving rapport and respecting the confidentiality of the individual's issues and progress as central to this. In that sense, using executive coaching can be viewed as no different to using action learning sets or mentoring. Information derived from the process (by the coach in this context) is regarded as confidential and will not be communicated to anyone else. Any sharing of information gained, without the explicit agreement of the individual would

be considered a breach of that trust, which would undermine the value of embarking on the process in the first place. The commissioners interviewed acknowledged the importance of respecting the convention that the individuals should 'own' this data. Indeed, they recognised that trust for a coach partly comes from their role as an outsider to the immediate work environment. These views are supported by advice in the practitioner literature.

'The individual must feel free to speak without fear of being judged or of the conversation being repeated to others Once that trust has been lost or compromised ... then the coaching relationship is doomed.' (Bolt, 2000)

Given the private and confidential nature of coach-coached relationships and the agreement that individuals need to 'own' their data, who then owns or 'controls' the process – coach or executive? The coaches interviewed were all clear that the executives should be in control of the whole process as they need to set the agenda both in terms of content (objectives and issues to work on) and also in terms of process (nature, frequency and length of contact). However, they as the coach would expect to challenge and negotiate these with the individual executives.

Commissioner and coach relationships

How does this all square with the expectations of organisations where they have commissioned coaches for a specific purpose and within a particular contractual framework that they will need to monitor and evaluate? This question was central to the concerns of participants at the IES Forum.

The issue of control between commissioner and coach comes to the fore when the relationship is put under pressure, for instance where the commissioner believes no change in behaviour is occurring. One commissioner IES interviewed described her frustration thus:

'My briefings are all verbal and extensive. You have to give the coach the right set of tools to work with or the coach is going to take a heck of a lot longer to get there themselves. It's a waste of money if they don't listen and we've got an organisational issue. We are the client in the sense of hiring the coach. So it isn't the person who's the client. At the end of the day that's the thing that probably needs to be made clear to the coach is that I am the client.'

One of the coaches described her feelings about commissioners in a way that seems to encapsulate what all the coaches reported:

'It doesn't matter to me who is paying It's very tempting to bring up 'isn't he doing well?' but I would not expect to go back to the senior manager and do that. The work is completely our private business. But I'll argue that with the person whose paying before I take the contract'.

A commissioner's trust in the coach seems to be at the heart of a commissioner's degree of comfort in passing management of the process to the coach, after the coach has been selected and contracted, knowing that the coach in turn will pass control of the process to the executive. One commissioner said:

'I think if someone has got real difficulties in some way, a coach might well be expected to encourage (the executive) to talk to us ... they will help them manage it and we might or might not be part of that picture. But we are not trying to say that we want things shared. We don't expect to see the personal development plan, but we ask that it be shared with us in part where that helps us identify anything we need to be doing.'

Commissioner and executive relationships

The commissioners were clear that in most circumstances they would not be directly involved in the arrangements or mechanics of making the coaching happen. Meetings or other contact were the responsibility of the other two parties. Sometimes this took the form of commissioners effectively delegating the money or time already 'bought' to the executive and empowering them to draw upon these entirely as and when they saw fit up to a maximum agreed budget. The essential role of the commissioner in these circumstances can be said to be sourcing the right coach and securing 'buy-in' from the individual at the outset. Both need to be undertaken effectively, since the individual may otherwise choose to do nothing with the opportunity.

On other occasions, this took the form of relying on the coach to take the initiative, on the commissioner's behalf, in making things happen and re-contracting with the commissioner after predetermined periods of time. In these circumstances, securing 'buy-in' is a shared responsibility between coach and commissioner, although again an individual has the right to choose not to respond to the opportunity.

6.6 Evaluation

Despite the lack of evidence to date, the overwhelming feeling which comes over from the literature is that executive coaching is a worthwhile investment of time and money for those organisations that have used it. Their executives benefit and, since the performance of executives is critical to the success of the business, the organisation in turn benefits too. There is an assumed, but untested, link to impact on the bottom line or service development. There is no evidence base for this feeling, other than some published anecdotal accounts of benefits to individual executives (Brotherton 1998, Chambliss 1999 and Masciarelli 1999).

All the organisations IES interviewed confirmed that they too were similarly positive in their belief of organisational benefit having been achieved. However, to date all were lacking in data or evidence to support their feelings and would welcome assistance in this area. The study found that the area of evaluation was the single most widespread source of concern to commissioners of executive coaching. The majority had struggled with setting formal evaluation criteria for their coaching interventions, although they all had written objectives of a broader nature.

Although this study did not attempt to investigate the perspective of those coached, all of the organisations we interviewed had sought and monitored feedback from the individuals concerned, either through written questions or formal discussions. Some of this feedback included the identification of actions taken as a consequence of the coaching they had received.

One commissioner said:

'It's easy to evaluate from the individual's perspective and easy from the coaches' point of view, but the corporate perspective is really difficult.'

This section focuses on the issues that arose from the steps they had taken to date.

Sources of information — who to ask?

There was disagreement amongst those interviewed about the best source of information about progress and outcomes.

One of the coaches interviewed suggested that progress should be monitored by the commissioner with reference to the executive and others within the organisation, and not the coach. For instance, if the main purpose of the coaching was a matter of public knowledge and involved issues such as working on presentation skills, image management, confidence or interventions in meetings, then these are physical benchmarks. The executive will have a perspective in terms of how they feel about progress, but colleagues or others they work with will have a legitimate perspective on any change they have observed as well. The advice from this source was clear — for evaluation at the level of individual executives, ask those in a position to observe.

Some of the commissioners suggested that asking the individual to assess or measure the success of their coaching was not always the best approach. One commissioner said:

‘Some of the best interventions just aren’t measurable by the person themselves, and that’s why they need the coaching in the first place.’

Methods used in practice

Reference forms

In one organisation, all individuals who have received executive coaching are asked to complete a reference form. The form includes seeking a description of the way the coach worked with them as well as enquiring into the degree of success of the process from the individual’s point of view. This form effectively doubles as a general satisfaction form to support evaluation of what has gone before, and an internal reference to support future ‘matching’ decisions. The HR function refers to it in determining whether to hire that particular coach ever again. In theory, coaches could be crossed off the organisation’s books if the reference was bad, although in practice that had not actually happened. The organisation had found its second use much more helpful, whereby prospective individuals needing coaching

can refer to part of it to determine whether that particular coach might have an approach they feel would also suit them.

Development interviews with those coached

A few organisations regularly held interview discussions with those who had completed their executive coaching sessions. These discussions covered a range of issues, including eliciting feedback on their coach, as well as identifying what they had achieved and what else they might still need in terms of support for their personal development.

Bringing together the pool of coaches used

Two organisations had adopted the practice of occasional meetings, whereby all the coaches used are required (as part of their original contract terms) to meet and share in general terms what has been working, not working well and what the organisational issues might be. No personal information on the executives is shared. Rather the focus is on what key themes have been coming up among the people they have been working with, and whether there are any corporate lessons than can be learned.

This approach was thought appropriate where there is centrally initiated coaching activity and where there is a small cohort or pool of coaches working with more than about six people each. It was also thought appropriate where coaches have all been hired to support a particular organisational change or wider development programme. The advantages claimed for this approach were that it enabled the organisation to monitor progress in terms of the change or programme, as well as identify barriers or blockages outside the control of the executives. These the organisation needed to ensure were addressed through other interventions. In addition, it gave the organisation the opportunity to identify where coaches were not taking 'a corporate line' on issues, and suggest that they gave a bit more emphasis to that. The disadvantage cited was the cost; external coaches have to be paid for attendance.

Linking into existing individual performance measures

One large organisation had clear criteria for the personal behaviours, business competences and capabilities it believed

would lead to improving business performance, and these applied to all its senior managers. Incoming executive coaches are all briefed on their role in supporting these. The senior managers are all regularly assessed by the organisation against these criteria, in addition to a self-assessment by the individuals, as part of the regular performance management process. Since the executive coaching, in part, was introduced to assist individuals in meeting these criteria, it was considered crucial that any differences in the level of achievement be monitored to feed into an overall evaluation exercise.

Monitoring existing organisation performance measures

Rather than attempt to evaluate the success of executive coaching only at the individual executive level or at the executive coaching investment level, some organisations choose to concentrate on indicators of the quality of management in general. This included monitoring staff perceptions about the approach and behaviour of managers through the indicators embedded in annual staff attitude surveys. Certainly, this is an approach that has also been used to judge the success of some 360-degree programmes. According to Kettley (1997), year on year improvements have been used as part of evaluating effective leadership in the Post Office for some years.

The missing piece of the jigsaw

This exploratory study has sought to identify and increase understanding about the issues for commissioners of executive coaching in organisations. This is a perspective often ignored in studies of development processes.

It has not, however, given a 'voice' to those who have been coached. This means that it has not been possible in this particular study to hear from executives as to what exactly it was about this kind of development intervention that was helpful or otherwise. Nor has it been possible to investigate what it is about the learning process you experience through working with an executive coach that's different to any other development processes involving close 'social' learning collaboration. The perspective of those coached could add much to any on-going debate about evaluation and the benefits of this type of development process. IES is currently working on a consultancy

basis with a range of employing organisations in pursuing the theme of evaluating executive coaching in practice. It is hoped that these assignments will encourage further research and follow-up work on the important issue of evaluating the outcomes and the impact on executives and their organisations.

6.7 Chapter summary

This chapter has identified a range of implementation issues that organisations should bear in mind when introducing and managing the provision of executive coaching services. In particular it has:

- identified a range of backgrounds and professional training of coaches and the implications that this has for the approach they bring to providing their services
- recommended having a process in place to maximise the chances of a successful 'match' between the individual manager and the coach
- highlighted the existence of 'coaching envy' and the potential need to manage the demand for executive coaching
- shared some of the experiences regarding the cost of commissioning external executive coaches
- explained the 'relationship triangle' between commissioner, executive and coach. Here it also offers insight into the underlying issues of trust and control which need to be present in order to the maximise the success of the executive coaching, from each of the three perspectives.
- highlighted the lack of evaluation of the impact of this type of intervention to date.

The next chapter seeks to position executive coaching within the plethora of other development intervention and processes.

7 ■ Integration with Existing Development Processes

The fourth and final question to be answered is: *'where does executive coaching fit in terms of the management learning theory?'*

IES found that the relationship between, and integration of, executive coaching and other development processes (such as personal development plans, career counselling and appraisal) has also received very little attention in the literature to date. It may be that senior executives don't participate in all these activities and that coaching acts as an alternative elite process in some cases. More likely, perhaps, is that organisations may be unsure how to tie everything up into a coherent and consistent whole. This chapter explores where executive coaching might sit within the plethora of other development processes.

7.1 A management development intervention?

In many organisations, there may be a degree of reluctance to accept that managers at the top actually have developmental needs. The top two or three levels of management are occupied by individuals who see themselves, and are seen by others, as 'having arrived' (Mumford, 1981). In addition, coaching peers and associates isn't usually in an executive's job description, despite the need for executives to take on the role of coach to their own teams (McDermott, 1996; Waldroop and Butler, 1996). There is an interesting paradox here, in that senior managers may not see themselves as targets for development, nor as developers either.

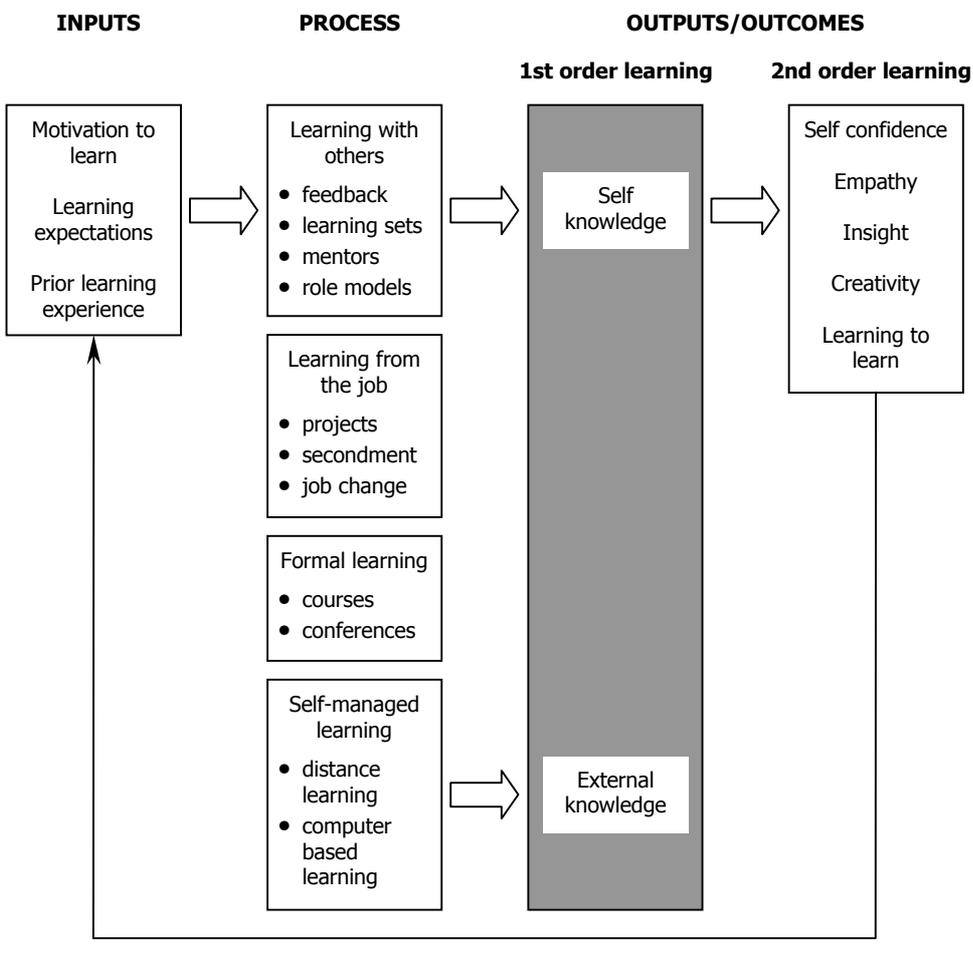
One of the strongest strands in current management development and learning literature is the emphasis on the individual as a self-managed, self-organised learner. Executive coaching seems to sit comfortably within this approach. Modern organisations are experiencing great change, there are rising demands for increasing flexibility, of increasing autonomy and responsibility, as organisations adopt the principles of total quality management, or deal with the aftermath of downsizing or delayering (Tamkin *et al.*, 1995). Because of the nature of the work they do, managers in particular need to be able to self-develop (Burgoyne *et al.*, 1980). As self-managed learning places the responsibility for learning on the individual, it appears to offer an attractive approach to HR departments in organisations, to delivering personal and career development needs in leaner times and in devolved structures (Tamkin *et al.*, 1995).

Burgoyne, Boydell and Pedlar (1980) argue that learning theories divide into two broad categories: those that view people as passive patients, *ie* what they do is the result of the combination of innate factors and what subsequently happens to them; and those that view people as self-actioning agents who originate action. Self-directed learning as a technique sits much more easily with the latter. If individual managers need to be more accomplished at self-directing learning, then ways in which this can be enhanced, and how learning opportunities can be maximised, is clearly of importance. It is possible, then, that executive coaching can be seen as a process that enhances senior managers in self-directed learning.

Tamkin and Barber (1998) have represented the complex phenomenon of management learning as a process model (see Figure 6) whereby the entry into learning and the progression throughout it are dependent of certain factors.

In order to make sense of executive coaching, it is useful to speculate about where executive coaching might sit within such a model. At first glance, the answer seems simple – surely as a process of learning with others, in this context the other being a coach. This is true at the level of knowledge and skill acquisition, however, the executive coaching's context of work-based development means it is a process ideally suited to initiating and maximising learning from the job. In Chapter 4 of this report, we identified one of the most common uses by organisations of

Figure 6: The learning process



Source: Tamkin and Barber, 1999

executive coaching as that of underpinning wider personal effectiveness programmes, which utilise feedback to increase the self-knowledge of individuals.

The coaches we interviewed would argue that the benefit of an executive coaching approach is that it can be used as a 'meta-process' underpinning all other processes. Hence any, or all of the other processes of 'learning with others', 'from the job', through 'formal' and 'self-managed' learning are all sub-processes from which executive coaching extracts and maximises the achievement of both first and second order learning. A big

claim indeed, but nonetheless one that seems to make sense of the very wide and variable motives and approaches of organisations using executive coaching.

Participants at the IES Forum found this focus a helpful frame around which to think about why they commission it and what they hope to gain. The group reflected that one of the reasons it is philosophically so attractive to commissioners may be because it is so in tune with the self-managed learning ethos that many of their HR functions are now advocating. This includes a continued emphasis on 'learning to learn', active self-managed learning and the desire to use forms of management development which are tailored to individual needs and close to the job in hand.

7.2 A career management intervention?

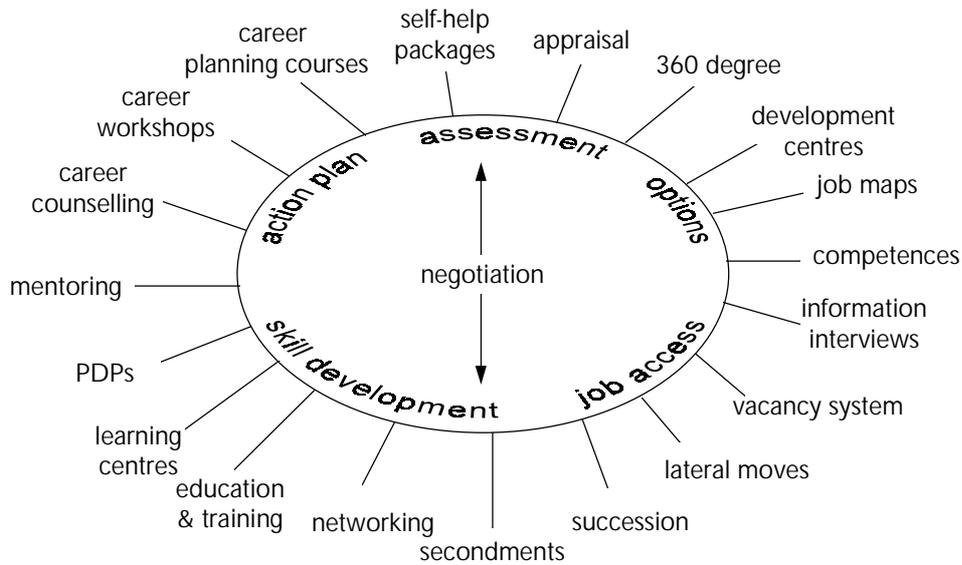
The executive coaches we interviewed were all clear that executive coaching is an individual intervention that enables individuals to be pushed in forwarding issues of importance to those individuals. They described an action-orientated individual, not an organisation development intervention, the content of which is likely to include work-life balance and career issues. Many of them also used a range of personality type indicators or self-assessment tools, such as MBTI and FIRO-B to help individuals understand themselves better. Because executive coaching helps people to develop quite particular skills and strategies for coping and performing better in their existing environments, coaches point out that it can be good for retention. Nevertheless, one coach clarified in my interview with her:

'Whatever the organisation's purpose in hiring an executive coach, they have to accept that people who are being coached can move on from the organisation and often do.'

Hirsh and Jackson (1996) developed a now well-known model of a minimum set of functions designed to assist organisations in developing a coherent set of career development processes. The model is reproduced here as Figure 7.

As the diagram shows, there are many processes which can be used (shown around the outside of the diagram), but they may all be performing relatively few central functions in terms of

Figure 7: The core functions of career development



Source: Hirsh and Jackson, 1996

enabling both organisationally-managed and employee-managed career development (in the inside of the diagram). As Hirsh and Jackson explain, the functions in the upper part of the diagram (assessment of skill, knowledge, attitudes *etc.*, supply of information on job options, and career and development action plans) can be seen as being concerned with *thinking* about career development. Those functions around the lower half (access to skill development and jobs) are concerned with *action*. If an individual needs the support of others in achieving action, then some kind of negotiation process is required which mediates between the '*thinking processes*' and the '*action processes*'. The model also makes clear the need to have both '*thinking*' and '*action*' processes, as well as mechanisms for linking these different types of process together.

In order to make sense of executive coaching, it is useful once again to speculate about where executive coaching would sit within such a model. On one level, it is possible to position it around the outside of the diagram alongside career counselling or mentoring, *ie* as just one of many development processes than can be used. This is probably where most of the organisations IES

has spoken to seem to view it. However, because of its focus on harnessing feedback and its goal-orientation, it is also entirely reasonable to position executive coaching right in the middle, *ie* as a mediator between 'thinking' and 'action' processes. Certainly, this is probably where most of the coaches IES has spoken to seem to view it.

7.3 Chapter summary

This chapter has begun to explore and conceptualise a number of ways of thinking about where executive coaching might seem best to sit within the whole portfolio of management development. It has focussed this thinking to the specific contexts of self-directed learning and career development approaches.

It could be argued that the specific context and culture of the organisation may be a key determining factor in whether or not executive coaching is used in addition to, or instead of, other processes to support the development and learning of senior managers. Alternative ways of positioning executive coaching include seeing it as:

- a development process similar to other identifiable development processes which offer support and challenge through close collaboration (*eg* learning sets, mentoring or career counselling)
- an approach to management 'learning from the job', different from, but nonetheless comparable with, projects or secondments
- a 'meta-process' underpinning and maximising the learning from a range of other management development interventions and processes
- a mediating process between the career management 'thinking' processes (action planning, personal assessment and job option appraisal) and the 'action' processes (skills acquisition and accessing jobs).

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