Leadership Development through Executive Coaching: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis

By

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Submitted in Accordance with the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

The University of Leeds

York St John University Business School

July 2018

The Statement of Original Authorship

This is to confirm that the work contained in this thesis has not been published previously and due credit has been given where reference has been made to the work of others. Further, it is assured that the contents of this thesis are my own work undertaken as a partial requirement of completing my PhD. To the best of my knowledge, this work has not been submitted to this or any other institution to meet the requirements stated above.

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Acknowledgement

"A hundred times every day I remind myself that my inner and outer life are based on the labours of others" – **Albert Einstein**

I deeply appreciate and gratefully acknowledge Professor Bob Garvey's and Dr. George Boak's professional input throughout this vital assignment. The vision was set in 2005 and I continued to dream about it. Your support has been invaluable in helping me to reach one of my biggest goals in life. Your unconditional support and empathy will never be forgotten.

Moreover, it is worth mentioning the contributions made by all researchers, academics and practitioners who contribute to adult learning, leadership development and executive coaching. Your studies, practices and publications have been a great support throughout the research journey and inspired me to continue. Your efforts are acknowledged with great respect and value.

I also acknowledge all my teachers, friends, and family members who contributed to my life journey in many forms. Their professionalism, humanity, kind-heartedness, and all the assistance and encouragement I received, are impossible to put into words. Above all, my mother - my first teacher, motivator, and courageous leader who continues to influence me throughout my life's journey and deserves respect and acknowledgement - you dedicated your whole life towards my education. I would not be here without your unmatchable effort to educate me. Whenever I feel tired, I remind myself of the way you worked which inspires me to continue even through the times when goals appear impossible to reach.

My little family is my inspiration here, in England. My wife and son made things possible. Thank you very much for all your sacrifices. I owe you a lot. Last but not least, my whole life changed due to one book that I read in 2003, '*How to Win Friends and Influence People*'. The techniques presented in the book helped me to cope with the difficult phases of the PhD process and throughout my life. I am grateful to Dale Carnegie, the author, for his life-changing influence.

Dedication

I dedicate this thesis with love to my little son, Davian, inspiring leaner, explorer and a great motivation to our family. With him everything is possible.

You are a teacher, who silently teaches me a lot!

Abstract

This study explores the experience of executive coaching in a case study organisation from the perspective of both the coachee and the coach. My initial research question was "how do leaders who experience executive coaching make sense of their development?" However, my critical, reflexive and reflective engagement with the research process helped me to realise that the study addresses "*how do leaders interpret their dyadic executive coaching experience?*" This is a more inclusive research question that represents my particular interest in the process of executive coaching.

I critically evaluate both academic and practitioner literature placing a particular emphasis on how executive coaching works, thereby providing a narrative form of a conceptual framework for my study. The literature review emphasises that the question of 'how executive coaching works' is under-researched. Therefore, my aim is to develop a deeper understanding of the way in which executive coaching works. This qualitative research is conducted using Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. I use purposive sampling to recruit five participants and conduct two semi-structured interviews with each respondent. The interviews are transcribed verbatim and subjected to line by-line analysis.

My findings comprise seven themes, namely that coaching: helps to create understanding; develops opportunity; generates motivation; encourages action; supports the entire learning process; ensures continuity; and tackles specific problems. These themes appear as a narrative that demonstrates how executive coaching works. This narrative offers a unique contribution to the literature.

This study also demonstrates that executive coaching is used to tackle problems that leaders face. It reveals that an organisational agenda exists in executive coaching despite claims in the literature that the agenda is led by the coachee. I also found that coachees become coaches themselves due to their executive coaching engagement and that coaching results in contagious and continuous development within the case study organisation. These appear as theoretical contributions in this study. Moreover, incorporating IPA into coaching research, together with the innovative research design, also stands as a contribution to research methodology. My findings may also serve as an evidence base to inform future coaching practice.

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1. Chapter One - Introduction

1.1 Overview

The purpose of this chapter is to provide an overview of the research for the reader. This acts as 'lead-in-material' (Dunleavy, 2003) which leads the reader to the core of the research as it sets the context of the study. I explore the executive coaching experience of business leaders in a case study organisation in the United Kingdom. The aim is to create a deeper understanding of how executive coaching is experienced by leaders within the context of my study.

The chapter outlines the research background and then provides a justification for this research, exploring personal motivations and the study's contribution to both knowledge and practice. It highlights the objectives of the study and provides an overview of the methodology adopted. The chapter also develops a positional statement on the understanding that, by employing interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), I take an active role in this qualitative naturalistic inquiry. Finally, this chapter provides a summary of the overall structure of the thesis.

1.2 Research Background

The business environment has undergone unprecedented change in recent times and continues to change at a rapid pace (Jarvis et al., 2006; Ten Have et al., 2017). One implication of this is that effectiveness and success have been redefined (DeRue and Ashford, 2010; Owens and Hekman, 2012). As a result of the redefinition of work, businesses have been investing heavily (Laloux, 2014; Roe, 2014) in people development and placing extra emphasis on leadership (Best, 2010; Day et al., 2014). In the belief that leadership is a key component of organisational success (Inyang, 2013; Behrendt et al., 2017), a strong emphasis on managing talent has emerged, especially for senior positions in an organisation (Garvey et al., 2014).

Despite these investments and "decades of books, lectures, leadership-development programmes" (Pfeffer, 2015, p.193) and many other developmental interventions, according to CIPD (2011) and Pfeffer (2015), the required skills to perform in the current business environment remain unimproved. Furthermore, Petrie (2011) argues that the ability of traditional leadership development interventions to cope with the current demands, and the evolving nature of those demands, are no longer effective. Moreover, Athanasopoulou and Dopson (2015, p.140) believe that this changing

business environment "require[s] leadership development interventions that do not focus on management knowledge and skills but most importantly on the leader's personal development as an individual and also require[s] individuals who can successfully lead complex organisations". Furthermore, the CEB (2013) report reveals that the conventional training and development programmes for leadership are becoming increasingly obsolete. Thus, there is an argument that leadership in organisations is becoming unprecedentedly vital in business organisations. The context of the working environment of modern leaders in business continues to change at a pace which most find difficult to maintain. Thus, current business leaders must possess diverse skills to be successful. To cater to the varied skill demands, the conventional training and development seems inadequate (Petrie, 2011).

Therefore, a demand has emerged for business organisations to seek new forms of leadership development interventions to address the skills gap (Rost, 1993; Storey, 2011; Kennedy et al., 2013) and to meet the new "challenges facing contemporary leaders which tend to be too complex and ill-defined to be addressed successfully through (…) traditional developmental interventions" (Day et al., 2014, p.64). Petrie (2011) endorses the importance of encouraging innovative approaches to leading and leadership development to match the demands in the current business context and these appear to be taking a very individual rather than group development approach (Kakabadse, et al., 2008; Petrie, 2011).

Executive coaching has emerged as a result of this demand from the business environment (Baron et al., 2011). Garvey (2011) argues that, from its roots in the nineteenth century, coaching activity has always had both a performative and a developmental purpose, and Wilson (2007) notes that this performance development orientation of coaching has gained extra attention in the recent past. The interest in executive coaching has increased almost exponentially since the year 2000 (Passmore, 2007) and has become a common and popular approach to support leadership development (Stern, 2004; Joo, 2005; Gray et al., 2016). Garvey et al., (2014) emphasise the role of coaching in organisational innovation and agree that it plays an important role in all aspects of organisational innovation. More importantly, coaching is now considered a viable and credible alternative to the current training and development interventions more usually employed in business organisations (Kilburg, 1996; Bachkirova et al., 2014).

Executive coaching aimed at developing leadership ability has been establishing its presence (Ely et al., 2010; Korotov, 2017) and has become a widely employed

approach to support leadership (Feldman and Lankau, 2005; Peterson, 2007; Western, 2012). This rising interest in executive coaching as a tailored leadership development intervention has, arguably at least, transformed it into a successful industry in its own right (Turesky and Gallagher, 2011).

Considering the financial gains and the recent growth of the industry, professionals from various disciplines are moving towards coaching, marketing themselves as executive coaches (Smither, 2011; Western, 2017). Charan (2009) and Garvey et al., (2014) argue that the commercialisation of executive coaching has led to burgeoning literature on the subject. In general terms, this body of literature aims to build the credibility of coaching by emphasising the positive effects conferred by this approach. Western (2012) agrees, suggesting that it is very rare to hear about challenges and limitations in executive coaching because the industry has been highly successful at emphasising good news stories.

There is sparse evidence of a critical approach being taken towards the research and practice of executive coaching (Garvey et al., 2014; Shoukry, 2016; Western, 2017). It appears that there is limited literature or research that specifically considers the social-cultural context (Shoukry, 2016) of coaching. In addition, despite the developmental links since its inception (Garvey, 2011), coaching is still rated as a relatively immature intervention or a 'young' field (De Haan et al., 2013; Grief, 2017). Practitioners with vested interests promote coaching and these dominate the field (Styhre, 2008; Kim, 2011; Ellinger et al., 2014). Thus, the absence of critical perspectives, the continuous attempt to de-contextualise coaching (Western, 2017) and the scarcity of research, all raise issues (see below) that need to be addressed.

According to Athanasopoulou and Dopson (2015, p.157), executive coaching still appears to be "largely isolated from leadership and the leadership development field". The literature on executive coaching argues that leadership development is the most cited reason for the popularity of executive coaching (Bennett and Bush, 2011; Segers et al., 2011; De Villiers, 2012). Therefore, it would seem there are some missing links that need to be established through research. Additionally, Garvey (2011) emphasises that, since the first publication in 1937, (Bennett and Bush, 2009; Grant et al., 2009), there has been some apparent growth in research into the coaching phenomenon. Despite this progress, there remain unresolved questions surrounding executive coaching (Jarvis et al., 2006; Myers, 2017). These include:

- Does executive coaching develop leaders?

- If it does develop leaders, how does the process work?

- How does executive coaching work?

- Is executive coaching 'better' than traditional leadership development interventions? If so, what are the reasons?

- Can the effectiveness of executive coaching be measured? If so, how?

- How does the coaching relationship influence the effectiveness of development?

- Are there differences between the effectiveness of internal and/or external coaches?

- What skills should a coach possess in order to make executive coaching effective?

- What different coaching approaches should a coach employ to ensure leadership development?

This is not a conclusive list and questions continue to appear as coaching research and practice continue to grow (Gray et al., 2016). Thus, there is a demand for wider scholarly research. However, this study focuses on business leaders' executive coaching experience to deepen the understanding of how executive coaching works, a topic which is largely under-researched (Joo, 2005; Bowles and Picano, 2006; Bowles et al., 2007; Passmore and Fillery-Travis, 2011; Smither, 2011; Myers, 2017). Myers (2017, p.589) sees this as a "hot topic" in the field.

The uncertainties (detailed above) inform this study. The research explores the executive coaching experience of business leaders in a case study organisation in the United Kingdom. Having set the direction for my research here, the section below further justifies the research idea.

1.3 Justification for the research

My personal interest in leadership development is influential in initiating this research. My curiosity into how leaders become successful in their respective roles motivates me to seek further knowledge about the role of coaching as a leadership development activity.

The previously discussed demand for effective leadership in business organisations, together with the rise of executive coaching as an increasingly popular intervention to address these demands, encourages me to investigate this emerging trend. The idea was further strengthened due to the previously highlighted issues relating to executive coaching. Notwithstanding the increasing amount of research (Gray et al., 2016; Bachkirova et al., 2017), the "field (…) is in need of theory development" (Ladegard and Gjerde, 2014, p.634). This study caters to these needs through creating a deeper understanding of one such area within executive coaching which, as stated above, is under-researched. By placing human experience at the forefront of this thesis, it caters for the emphasised need for qualitative studies using recognised methods (Passmore and Fillery-Travis, 2011).

This research is initiated in order to explore executive coaching within the context of leadership development. Therefore, this study is of significant importance to the current field of executive coaching research and practice and a timely piece of research (Grief, 2017).

After justifying the reasons behind the initiation of this research, the section below briefly explores the aims of the study.

1.4 Aims of the research

The aim of my qualitative study is to deepen the understanding of the way in which executive coaching works by exploring the coaching experience of business leaders in a case study organisation. To fulfil this aim, the perspectives of both the coachee and the coach will be explored, thereby addressing a research void (Styhre, 2008; Myers, 2017). Moreover, the interest taken from both perspectives also supports the deeper understanding of the phenomenon of coaching in order to meet the aim of the study.

Initially I asked:

"How do leaders who have experienced executive coaching make sense of their development?"

This question helped me to articulate my area of study and to develop a clear focus (Agee, 2009). However, my critical reflective and reflexive engagement with the research process, and also the continuous iterative nature of the IPA data analysis, helped me to realise that the question above focuses more on outcome (product) of executive coaching rather than the process. Thus, the question was revised to make it more representative of my research interest. The question my study now addresses is:

"How do leaders make sense of their dyadic executive coaching experience?"

The change to the research question provides an example of the emergent and interrogative nature of qualitative studies (see Flick, 2014). This is also relevant to this IPA study (see Smith, 2004; Smith et al., 2009; Pringle et al., 2011), offering further evidence that "conceptualising, developing, writing and re-writing research questions are all part of a dynamic, reflective qualitative inquiry process" (Agee, 2009, p. 445).

The question denotes the qualitative nature of the study and its focus on ideography. The interest lies in the individual experiential accounts and the way in which the research participants give meaning to the coaching experience. Therefore, my interest lies in three basic elements:

- The executive coaching experience
- The interpretations of the experience
- Individual leaders

Human experience and the participants' interpretations are retained at the heart of my research and the three elements above closely connect the study with the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) methodology (see Chapter Three). Thus, the next section presents a brief description of the methodological orientation which is further developed later in the thesis.

1.5   An Introduction to the Methodological Orientation of this Study

This section provides an overview of the research methodology for this study. A more detailed account of ontological, epistemological and methodological justifications is further developed in Chapter Three.

The objectivist approach was discarded, as discussed by Burrell and Morgan (1979), in line with my research interest to create a deeper understanding of how executive coaching works in a case study organisation. My interest in the executive coaching experience of business leaders and the way they make sense of it means that I am exploring the subjective experience of individuals within the given context. Thus, it does not comply with the concept that there are objective realities that are external to the business leaders (participants/social actors) (Hennink, et al., 2011; Flick, 2014). Instead, this study aligns with the nominalist ontological scheme of Burrell and Morgan (1979) and links well with Robson's (2011) view of social constructionism which believes that social properties and meanings are constructed through interpretations (of coachees and coaches in this study). It does not attempt to create universal truths

(Flick, 2014; Easterby-Smith, et al., 2015) but rather a contextual understanding of the subjective realities of the participants.

Therefore, this study is not value-free and objective but is unique and contextual (Johnson and Duberley, 2000; Burrell and Morgan, 1979). The anti-positivist epistemological position as outlined by Burrell and Morgan (1979) links well with the concept of interpretivism which is employed in this study. This argues that people and objects cannot be treated equally (Gray, 2017).

My ontological and epistemological positions (see detailed discussion in Chapter Three) link this study with the inductive research approach (Creswell, 2003; Gray, 2017). This research makes no attempt to create a deductive hypothesis and I reject the positivistic epistemological stance (Easterby-Smith, et al., 2015). However, I am aware that achieving full induction is a challenge (Flick, 2014) due to the use of the preliminary literature review conducted for this study, which brings theoretical influences into the research. Thus, pure induction seems impractical in this case (Creswell, 2003; Hamill and Sinclair, 2010; Flick, 2014). Nonetheless, this study represents a version of induction as I distance myself from the deductive approach.

With above in mind, I determined that the Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is a close match to my philosophical position for conducting the study because I am seeking a deeper understanding of human experiences in a given context (Smith et al., 2009; Pringle et al., 2011; Wagstaff et al., 2014) (Chapter Three provides more detail, and the alternative approaches I considered). IPA is a psychological research methodology often used in the field of health (VanScoy and Evenstad, 2015), but is a relatively new methodology for most other disciplines (Wagstaff et al., 2014). This innovative approach to research is based on three theoretical underpinnings: phenomenology, hermeneutics, and ideography (Smith et al., 2009; Wagstaff et al., 2014; VanScoy and Evenstad, 2015). My research focuses on each individual leader's (ideographic commitments), interpretation (hermeneutics) of their executive coaching experience (phenomenology). These links are discussed in detail in Chapter Three.

I purposively selected five participants and interviewed each twice using semi-structured interviews. The reason for conducting a second round of interviews was to explore their experience of coaching more deeply. I audio recorded the interviews and personally transcribed them verbatim then conducted a line by line rigorous analysis compliant with the IPA guidelines. In my discussion of the findings, I discuss seven key themes that emerged in line with the current critically evaluated literature in Chapter

Two. This helped me to identify the theoretical contributions and the wider implications of the study for both executive coaching practice and current business organisations.

1.6 Positionality Statement

This section looks at the possible personal and professional bias that I, as a researcher, may bring into the research process. This is important as a "researcher is not a neutral observer, and is implicated in the construction of knowledge" (Gray, 2014, p.606).

My personal passion for development derives from my mother's influence from childhood. Education and development were the only way to progress in my birth country, Sri Lanka, where I was raised. Therefore, my mother's influence encouraged me to take a positive attitude towards learning and development. I take an optimistic view of the place of learning and development in reaching one's own potential. Furthermore, being a graduate trainee in human resources, and rising to a managerial level position within a short span of time, also influenced me to be highly positive about people development.

Holding a white-collar job in human resource development, I was actively involved in developing people and helping them to realise their potential. Watching people grow increased my passion for learning and development. These personal and professional experiences implanted in me a positive attitude towards human resource development.

My educational background in human resource management, leadership and organisational behaviour, and my teaching experience in the United Kingdom over the last six years, has also influenced a positive outlook towards people development in business organisations. Moreover, the theoretical base I acquired through higher education and research in the field of management may also have influenced me to develop theories based on my prior understanding, rather than being based on data collected for the study.

Conversely, there is a risk that this background may also allow me to introduce bias towards the positive aspects of executive coaching and ignore the negatives which have been highlighted in literature (Charan, 2009; Western, 2012; Garvey, 2014; Garvey, et al., 2014). Furthermore, this is an ethical consideration (Willig, 2014) as my sense of optimism towards life generates a 'can do attitude' which undoubtedly motivated me to initiate this study and plays a role in the research and practice of leadership development and executive coaching. This sense of optimism also

unquestionably influences my positive attitude towards executive coaching in developing 'better' leaders to take up current and future business challenges.

1.7 Chapter Framework

This thesis is organised according to the conventional social science dissertation structure. The decision to follow this thesis format is influenced by my familiarity with the traditional approach. In addition, Dunleavy (2003) emphasises that utilising seven to eight chapters to organise eighty thousand words has been considered to be a good approach for 'big book' type dissertations. Thus, my familiarity with the traditional approach, together with published guidance, is influential in presenting the study as structured below.

The introductory chapter is thus considered to be one of the most important parts of the thesis. It sets a sound foundation for the whole document by explaining research problems, the justification for the research, the aims of the study, methodological orientation and my position. It follows the conventional format of literature review, methodology, findings, discussion and a final chapter that offers a conclusion and makes recommendations.

Literature Review: The next chapter of the thesis lays a sound theoretical foundation and a conceptual framework for the study. This critical evaluation establishes the research gaps in the field by exploring research that has already been conducted. The literature review chapter is divided into three sections.

The main section of this chapter evaluates the literature on executive coaching with special emphasis on how executive coaching works. The next section explores the evolution of adult learning theories and their relevance to coaching. The final section of this chapter briefly discusses my position on leadership and leadership development and links coaching into the discussion.

Methodology: The methodology chapter discusses the research design and philosophical instances in detail, justifying why they are appropriate for this research. Burrell and Morgan's **(**1979) assumptions of social science are used as the basis for exploring ontological and epistemological justification for the study. The chapter then justifies the adoption of Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis and evaluates its relevance to the research question, context and the nature of the subjects under study.

The research site, the sampling technique and the data collection method are then discussed, exploring their relevance to the study. The chapter also elaborates my

influences on the research and highlights the importance of reflexivity in the research process. Finally, I explore the quality and rigour of this qualitative exploratory study, explaining how these were ensured throughout the research project.

Findings: This chapter presents findings from the detailed case by case analysis following Smith et al.'s (2009) guidance. Here, I incorporate direct quotes from verbatim transcriptions to support superordinate themes. This helps to demonstrate that the interpretations are drawn from participant experience (through empathetic and questioning hermeneutics not suspicious hermeneutics). This approach further ensures the transparency of the research process. The chapter begins with a brief description of the participants followed by an overview of the generated themes. A discussion follows on how I went on to develop a more interpretative account of findings through the writing (considered as a part of analysis) before moving to a detailed explanation of participant experiences. Then, this chapter details the themes which are organised to reflect my research question.

Discussion: This chapter discusses the outcome of the research in relation to the critical literature review in Chapter Two. Initially, the chapter discusses an overview of my theoretical contributions and then moves to a detailed discussion of each theme. This analysis and synthesis against the extant literature also helps me to highlight the theoretical and practical contributions of the study.

This chapter leads to the final chapter of the thesis, conclusion and recommendations.

Conclusion and Recommendations: This chapter acts as the 'lead-out' material (Dunleavy, 2003) where I summarise the findings and contributions and their implications for the wider stakeholders of this research. The methodological contributions and the practical implications that the study makes are incorporated here. This chapter also presents recommendations for future research that emerge through the study and concludes with a brief refection of my research journey.

1.8 Summary

This chapter is presented as 'lead in' material for the study aimed at providing an overview of the thesis to its readers. The first chapter discusses the background of the research and highlights the gaps in the literature concerned with executive coaching. It goes on to justify the research idea, further citing my personal interest and the wider demands for research. It ensures the credibility of the coaching intervention for current business organisations and practitioners. It describes the aims of the research, clearly

citing the research question and interests of the research, thus laying the foundation for the next section, methodological orientation.

Here, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) is introduced and its match for the research question is briefly discussed. I consider it is important to highlight my position in this research and discuss the influences that I may have imparted to the research process. Therefore, I develop a positional statement to help readers to understand my position within the process. Finally, the chapter framework of the thesis is presented.

2 Chapter Two - Literature Review

2.1 Overview

This research aims to develop a deeper understanding of how executive coaching works in a business context. The critical literature review lays a foundation for the study and identifies research gaps in the field that this research attempts to address. It develops a narrative form of a conceptual framework (see Miles and Huberman, 1994) for the thesis which will then be used to critically analyse and synthesise the study findings in Chapter Five - discussion. The current chapter is divided into three main sections.

The first section evaluates the current literature in relation to executive coaching with a special emphasis on how executive coaching works. As discussed in the previous chapter, this area is considered to be under-researched. The literature review argues that coaching is a social activity. The lack of research into coaching is discussed and it is noted that much of the writing on this topic privileges the coach. The literature review highlights that very limited attention has been paid towards understanding 'how coaching works'. Then, the current critical discourses of executive coaching are discussed and the dominance of the 'developmental' discourse is highlighted. In the final part of this section, I evaluate Giglio et al.'s (1998) explanation of how executive coaching works by relating it to the wider literature on the topic of executive coaching. This develops a theoretical framework that demonstrates how executive coaching may work in a business context.

The next section discusses the evolution of adult learning theories. Here, the importance of an andragogy-informed open approach to development is highlighted. It also argues that much learning for adults takes place in a one-to-one relationship with a facilitator who plays a different role compared to that of a traditional teacher. This section also develops some critical arguments to demonstrate how adult learning theories link to coaching.

Finally, this chapter briefly discusses my position on leadership and leadership development, and then evaluates how the current practices of leadership development link to coaching and adult learning theories.

2.2 Inductive Reasoning and Literature Review

A preliminary literature review was conducted in order to develop my understanding of the field in general and to increase my awareness of areas of potential contribution to the theory and practice of executive coaching which this research may make. Conducting an initial review to generate understanding is an attempt to stay within the inductive reasoning of the study (Creswell, 2003; Hamill and Sinclair, 2010; Flick, 2014).

Meloy (2002) argues that working backwards - for example, by conducting the literature review after analysing the data - maintains an inductive stance and is a traditional way to conduct qualitative research. Flick (2014) believes that such pure inductive reasoning does not appear practical in the current context of qualitative research, thus acknowledging the act of conducting a preliminary literature review to familiarise the researcher to the field of study (as described above).

Moreover, Gray (2017, p.103) notes that the "literature review is not something that you complete early in the project and then put to one side". Conducting the second stage of the literature review in detail after the analysis was helpful for me in order to draw themes from the gathered data, giving priority to the participants' experience. This helped me to avoid "quick and dirty reductions" (Smith et al., 2009, p.82) based on my prior knowledge (see positional statement in Chapter One and Reflexivity section in Chapter Three). This is a widely accepted approach in qualitative research that is inductive in nature (Flick, 2014).

2.3 Coaching

Coaching emerged from several independent sources and spread through relationships and social networks and therefore, as argued by Garvey (2011), is a contextually dependent social activity. Similarly, Stelter (2014, p.191) sees coaching as a "process of social and personal meaning-making". This concept is further strengthened by Bachkirova (2017, p.31), highlighting the possibility of viewing coaching as a "process of joint meaning-making between the coach and client". Nonetheless, "a sea of confusion surrounds the term coaching" (Wilson, 2007, p.7). Garvey (2011) argues that the confusion is partly due to its use in a wide variety of contexts for a range of different purposes. Therefore, there are no universal realities in coaching and definitions appear to vary according to the context, purpose and the appropriateness of use (see, for example, Underhill, et al., 2007; Bennett and Bush, 2009; Garvey, 2011; Passmore and Fillery-Travis, 2011; Bond and Seneque, 2013; Maltbia et al., 2014).

The diverse versions of coaching continue to grow as coaches migrate to business contexts from disciplines such as sports, psychology, and psychotherapy. Thus, it appears that coaches incorporate different meanings into the term 'coaching' (Berglas, 2002). For example, the thirty seven definitions of coaching presented by Hamlin et al., (2008) are evidence of the diverse construct of coaching in the literature. The idea of diversity is further supported by Bachkirova and Kauffman (2009) as they present four different types of definition, as follows, focusing on:

1. Process
2. Purpose
3. Context
4. Clientele

Thus, coaching appears to be a contextually influenced and subjective activity (Garvey, 2011; Gray et al., 2016).

Therefore, the attempts to institutionalise coaching and the search for universal definitions are criticised (Garvey, 2011; Maltbia et al., 2014; Bachkirova and Lawton Smith, 2015), encouraging researchers to explore and accept the diversity within the field rather than aiming to institutionalise it. However, there is an on-going debate about industry standards and professionalising coaching (Fillery-Travis and Collins, 2017). The above-highlighted subjective perspective of coaching is challenged by professional institutes and positivistic researchers (Sherman and Freas, 2004; ICF, 2012; Grant, 2014) who continue to argue the importance of regulating coaching practice. For example, Sherman and Freas (2004) believe that having a universal definition is imperative to develop a professional image of the field. According to the authors, without such an agreement and control, the field resembles the 'Wild West', a metaphor that they rely on to explain the disorganised nature of coaching. Nevertheless, there is "little consideration given [by these authors] to the potential benefits of the 'Wild West' nature of coaching" (Garvey, 2017, p.682). For example, Garvey (2017) notes, that the 'Wild West' nature of coaching has the potential to energise creativity and to encourage people to do things differently.

Some researchers (Garvey, 2011; Brockbank and McGill, 2012) claim that by engaging in a coaching conversation, a positive impact can be made on people and the societies in which they live. However, these potential benefits within the discourse of the 'Wild West' nature of coaching seem to be neglected or unnoticed.

According to Gray et al., (2016, p.159), the authors who wish to establish universality are disturbed by the variations of coaching and the different "variations of meaning" as they "take a cause-and-effect, natural scientific perspective on these variations". Some researchers (Ives, 2008; Levenson, 2009) interpret this as a lack of clarity and posit that the industry's struggle with definitions is due to coaching's immaturity. Ives (2008) believes that these contradictions are signs of an emerging field, whereas Levenson (2009) believes that lack of clarity about 'what coaching is (for example), or what it delivers, or how effective it is, or 'how it works' is due to its diverse nature. The lack of understanding about 'how it works' is the interest of this study (discussed later in this chapter). Furthermore, the above highlighted notion that coaching is a social activity is derived from humanist philosophy (Garvey, 2011; 2017) which emphasises the possibility of having different interpretations of coaching in different contexts.

This view connects well with my interests as "it is about individuals having the right and the responsibility to give meaning and shape to their own lives" (Garvey, 2017, p.684). It is also believed that the underlying philosophy of approach, contextual focus and purpose of coaching also influences the various constructs of executive coaching (Walker-Fraser, 2011). However, these arguments are continuously developing and there are no signs of agreement despite the various efforts of some interest groups and the acceptance of diversity by others. My study does not attempt to resolve these debates around the definition of coaching but acknowledges that diversity is a normal part of human social activity.

Taking this view forward does not mean that other posibilities and views have been discarded. My acceptance of the diversity found in coaching, its subjective nature and the different realities that can exist within the field might appear as a rejection of the positivist philosophy of coaching. However, there is no intention to reject any other realities that may exist within the field.

My interest in human experience and the interpretation of that experience influences me to accept the subjective nature of coaching over the objective realities presented by some (Sherman and Freas, 2004; Grant, 2014; ICF, 2016), for example. Understanding the executive coaching experience, and the way that leaders give meaning to that experience, is a complicated exercise; therefore, I acknowledge the difficulty of standardising and developing a universal understanding (Garvey, 2013) and choose to explore the phenomenon subjectively and within a specific context.

Some writers (Yu et al., 2008; Passmore and Fillery-Travis, 2011) describe coaching as a facilitated conversation that mostly uses open questions to stimulate self-

awareness, and enables a new and/or different perspective of others and selves. Western (2012) agrees with the argument but articulates coaching as a helping profession that offers an energising social space for reflection which facilitates change and development. It is also considered as a coachee-led process where participants can set goals, and evaluate and monitor performance which appears to help a coachee to overcome any obstacles that would otherwise hinder performance (Fillery-Travis and Lane, 2006). There are similar constructs in the literature that agree with the coachee-driven nature of the intervention and the strong personalised agenda (Witherspoon and White, 1996; Thach, 2002; Garvey, 2011; Gray et al., 2016) that seem to equip people with the appropriate tools, knowledge and opportunities (Yu et al., 2008; Segers et al., 2011).

The individualised coachee-led nature of the intervention is widely acknowledged in the coaching literature. It is considered as one of its diffentiators from conventional development initiatives (Bowerman and Collins, 1999; King and Eaton, 1999; McCormick and Burch, 2008; Armstrong, 2012) and seems to have influenced businesses to facilitate one-to-one coaching with the aim of developing their coachees. The chosen organisation for this study is one such organisation.

The exploration of coaching in business contexts links this study with the concept that it is a professional practice (Grant, 2006; Vidal-Salazar et al., 2012). According to these authors, coaching is developmental, collaborative, result-oriented and fosters self-directed learning. Even though "its roots are in education, sport, psychology and psychotherapy" (Gray et al., 2016, p.16), the developmental links associated with coaching and the cited incorporation into business are considered to be major reasons for its popularity (Western, 2012). The development links and its popularity in the business context as a viable individualised intervention influence this study to explore the individual experience of both the coachees and the coaches. The aim is to develop an understanding of how coaching helps coachees to develop within a specific context.

Despite the associated development links, some (Coutu and Kauffman, 2009; (Levenson, 2009) argue that earlier organisational applications of coaching were initiated to resolve organisational issues, such as underperformance or ineffective behaviours (discussed later in detail). This further demonstrates the diverse interpretations and uses of coaching in different contexts (Beattie et al., 2014; Maltbia et al., 2014). Some authors (Garvey, 2011; Gray et al. 2016; Western, 2017) present the diverse interpretations as different discourses of coaching (discussed in section 2.3.2). The various coaching themes discussed above, such as an individualised

agenda, goal focused, non-directive facilitation, non-judgmental approach, have been criticised in the coaching literature (Carey et al., 2011; Western, 2012; Korotov, 2017; Western, 2017) and will be discussed later in this chapter. However, the exploration of the individual experience of the coachees' and the coaches' experience helps to understand how these themes play their role in the context of the case study organisation.

As discussed above, this study focuses on the developmental discourse of coaching in a business context (a case study organisation based in the UK). The developmental discourse is highlighted as one of the dominant discourses in the coaching literature (Kilburg, 1996; Peterson, 1996; Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson, 2001; Grant, 2006; Taie, 2011; Batson and Yoder, 2012; Gray, et al., 2016). Business organisations appear to put high emphasis on coaching as a leadership development intervention (Ely, et al., 2010; Western, 2012; Maltbia et al., 2014) and it is widely used (Stern, 2004; Feldman and Lankau, 2005; Western, 2012; Sperry, 2013). This mode of coaching for leadership or executive development is commonly known as either executive coaching or leadership coaching (Bowerman and Collins, 1999; Ely et al., 2010; Ladegard and Gjerde, 2014). In this study I explore the coaching experience of business leaders where coaching is used as part of their development (Ely et al., 2010; Western, 2012; Kempster and Iszatt-White, 2013). Therefore, informed by the diversity of definition and practice and the specific context of the study, I argue that executive coaching is:

'A formal one-to-one collaborative and conversational relationship between a client and a coach that facilitates the client becoming a more effective leader' (adapted from Kilburg, 1996; Peterson, 1996; Witherspoon and White, 1996; Kombarakaran et al., 2008; Sperry, 2008; De Haan et al., 2013).

This stance on executive coaching is also in line with my research interest to explore the individual experience of executive coaching and the meaning-making of that experience in order to understand how executive coaching works.

2.3.1 Coaching Research

Coaching research dates back to 1937 (Grant, et al., 2009; Passmore and Fillery-Travis, 2011). However, according to these authors, the field had a slow pace of growth at least until recent years. Most of the early publications are "discussion articles, and opinion or social commentary pieces rather than empirical research" (Grant et al., 2009, p.396). There are positive signs of a growth in coaching research (Ely et al.,

2010; Garvey, 2011; Gray et al., 2016) but the field is still in need of more research evidence (Visser, 2011; Bachkirova, 2017). This scarcity of research into coaching applies to the studies that explore the results delivery and effectiveness of executive coaching (Kilburg, 1996; Smither et al., 2003; Linley, 2006; Berman and Bradt, 2006; Passmore, 2007; Nelson and Hogan, 2009; Ely et al., 2010; Ladegard and Gjerde, 2014; Page and De Haan, 2014).

The lack of research evidence influences organisations to use executive coaching cautiously as the rationale for investing in coaching is not fully established (Ellis, 2005; Ely et al., 2010). Therefore, the buyers of executive coaching continue to demand research evidence to justify their investment (Burglas, 2002; Grant, 2012; Lawrence and Whyte, 2014). A number of authors (Western, 2012; Garvey et al., 2014; Gray et al., 2016) argue that the established positive perceptions of executive coaching held by many stakeholders largely remain unchallenged despite the increasing popularity and growth of this intervention (Nelson and Hogan, 2009; Ely et al., 2010; Gray et al., 2016; Bachkirova et al., 2017). Thus, coaching is in need of a sound evidence base (Feldman and Lankau, 2005; Passmore and Gibbes, 2007; Bachkirova, 2017) to confer more credibility (Sperry, 2013) and to become a 'knowledge-based discipline" (Bachkirova, 2017, p. 23).

The field is considered to be a practitioner dominant discipline (Western, 2012; Ellinger et al., 2014; Garvey et al., 2014; Bachkirova, 2017; Korotov, 2017) where theory related to coaching finds it difficult to keep up with the practice (Lowman, 2005; Western, 2011; Page and De Haan, 2014). There is also a perspective imbalance in coaching research, possibly due to the dominance of the coach's perspective and a distinct lack of the coachee's perspective (Coutu and Kauffman, 2009; Ellinger et al., 2014). According to Ellinger et al., (2014), the focus of research is to establish benefits for coachees but, as Coutu and Kauffman (2009) point out, coaches have been given more say on this matter compared to coachees.

The popular opinion-based practitioner work (see Rogers, 2012; Whitmore, 2012) appears to communicate the models and observations that have worked for the coaches. The lack of criticism and the popularity of these models seem to make them widely accepted. Coaching is apparently a socially contagious process which encourages others to accept these models and theories without critique. Therefore, there appears to be a demand for wider research and a more critical approach to coaching. This study is a result of these demands. It attempts to address the perspective imbalance within the field by exploring both the coachees' and the

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coaches' perspectives. The study also promotes the importance of the subjective and contextual understanding of the field.

Despite the stated popularity, the research that does exist is criticised (Passmore and Fillery-Travis, 2011; Grief, 2017) as being predominantly case study led descriptive studies, based on self-reported data which are mostly qualitative. Therefore, the reliability of these outcome studies has been questioned (Grant, 2014; Theeboom et al., 2014) but the reliability lens that these authors bring appears to be a more positivistic perspective (Bachkirova, 2017). This is evident with Grant's (2017, p.64) recent notion that "the aim of formal research is to produce more generalisable knowledge". Grant (2017) does not fully discard the importance of qualitative studies in coaching but does not appear to create much space for it in his writing. Thus, the positivistic dominance within the field continues.

However, some literature demonstrates diversity within coaching research. For example, some authors (Smither et al., 2003; Hernez-Broome and Hughes, 2004; Evers et al., 2006; Grant et al., 2009; Bozer and Sarros, 2012) attempt to move away from qualitative, self-biased case study research to control group designs which are based on experiments. According to Page and De Haan (2014), these studies have developed more logical comparisons. Some researchers (Bowles et al., 2007; Feggetter, 2007) also conduct longitudinal studies with the aim of meeting the demands which may have influences from related disciplines, such as psychology and psychotherapy (Garvey, 2011; Western, 2017). This demonstrates a considerable variety of study designs in coaching which accommodate the positivistic demands within the field. However, the demands for more positivistic studies appear to be rooted in medicine and physics with an aim to develop laws that govern human behaviour (Bachkirova and Kauffman, 2008). This is in contradiction to my research interest. It is also contestable "whether coaching outcomes can be studied in a scientific manner" (Grief, 2017, p.569) due to the heterogeneous nature of coaching results.

Coaching studies have been conducted in different settings, such as within the military (Bowles and Picano, 2006), the medical (Olivero et al., 1997) not-for-profit sector (MacKie, 2014), and in business contexts (Jones et al., 2006). In addition, the sources from which data has been collected vary from a single case study to fourteen different geographical locations (Grant, 2014). The diversity of sample sizes is also evident in coaching research. For example, in ascending order, Olivero et al. (1997) had 31 respondents, MacKie (2014) employed 37, Jones et al., (2006) recruited 67 participants, Hall et al., (1999) studied 75, Wasylyshyn (2003) had 100 respondents,

Thach (2002) had 281 and Smither et al. (2003) recruited 1361 participants for their study.

Therefore, there seems to be sufficient evidence to suggest that coaching studies have been conducted using a wide variety of methodologies, methods and samples in different contexts (Bachkirova and Kauffman, 2008). This leads me to argue that not having a sufficient understanding of, nor the answers to, the questions in Chapter One is not solely due to limitations of methodology, methods, and insufficient sample sizes; it appears that there has been insufficient attention given to address the essence of these questions.

Myers (2017) believes that this applies to the question 'how does executive coaching work' which he argues is a hot topic in executive coaching research. Thus, developing an understanding of how executive coaching works appears relevant and timely. As argued above, different approaches can be employed to address this question. However, subjective information appears as "powerful a conduit to truth as objective information" (Bachkirova and Kaufman, 2008, p.108). Therefore, "focusing (…) upon how various individuals experience an event or process (such as a coaching encounter) is valid (…) as an avenue of inquiry".

To re-state, even though I discard the objectivist view for this study, I acknowledge that "all research paradigms have space within coaching" (Passmore and Fillery-Travis, 2011, p.77). Having this balanced perspective in coaching research is important, unless there is an attempt to reduce the field to a dry and mechanistic process (Bachkirova and Kaufman, 2008). If the latter view pertained, it would have very little to do with what actually happens in the coaching situation (Bachkirova and Kaufman, 2008; Fillery-Travis and Cox, 2014; Bachkirova, 2017). Supporting this view, Passmore and Fillery-Travis (2011, p.80) emphasise that "qualitative studies using recognised techniques, such as IPA [Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis], grounded theory, (…) and discourse analysis have a valuable role to play in helping us to understand the human interaction of coaching at a deeper level".

Therefore, there is an apparent demand within the coaching research to accommodate qualitative studies in order to address some key issues (see Chapter One). My study addresses one such issue; 'how executive coaching works'. Despite the importance of understanding how executive coaching works, the idea is criticised by Western (2017, p.46) citing it as a result of dominant focus on "micro practices of coaching". Rather, the author highlights the importance of exploring the wider social, organisational and theoretical issues within coaching. The incorporation of a research methodology

(Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis) that recognises and appreciates the contextual understanding embedded in the culture. (Smith et al., 2009) helps to address this issue.

Prior to this evaluation, the notion of discourses in coaching is discussed to take into account the context in which coaching happens and to highlight this study's focus on a developmental discourse within coaching.

2.3.2 Discourses in Coaching

Discourses are used to understand how power and knowledge are rooted in, and shape, our understanding of how we think in social interactions and settings (Western, 2017). Gray et al., (2016) present discourses as a means of conveying meaning within social contexts. Therefore, discourses may contain both truths and lies (Gabriel, 2004). This demonstrates that the discourses emerge as a result of interpretations of the particular context that they inhabit. Thus, a brief understanding of discourses in coaching may help to better understand the interpretations of coaching engagements. Gray et al., (2016, p.4) acknowledge this concept emphasising that "coaching (…) as a dialogic (…) learning activity, the notion of discourse and meaning are of critical importance". The dominant discourses appear to influence our values and our relationships with society (Western, 2017). Therefore, the understanding of these discourses may help to make sense of my findings (see Chapter Five).

This section briefly explores the diverse discourses discussed in the coaching literature before exploring the development discourse of coaching, which is the main interest of this study.

Western (2012) presents four different discourses in coaching. It appears that the author's main focus is on coaches, coach trainers and coaching institutions in discussing these discourses. The four discourses are 'soul guide', 'psy expert discourse', 'managerial discourse' and 'network discourse', Western (2017). These discourses may influence coaches to take different approaches to their coaching practice as each discourse is based on its own basic assumptions and beliefs. According to Western (2017: 2012), understanding these discourses helps coaches to reflect on their practices and question them.

The soul guide discourse challenges the idea of goal setting and places more emphasis on how coachees place meaning on the activities that they engage in and explore how to live more meaningful lives (Western, 2012). Coaching in this discourse

appears to be less focused on goal achievement or on increasing effectiveness. This idea is supported by Garvey et al., (2009) and Garvey (2011). These authors believe that goal setting itself can harm the creativity and innovation of the organisation. They also highlight the possibility of goal conflicts. The coaches who follow this discourse are inspired by the deviations that the process brings rather than following a linear path to achieve set goals (Western, 2017). Thus, the coaching creates the possibility of reaching the unexpected; there seems to be space for the coachee to be creative and innovative rather than driven by set goals. The soul guide coach, according to Western (2017, pp.45-46) "seeks to collaborate with the client to help them discover wisdom rather than knowledge and fulfil desires rather than goals". A concept like this, however, may contradict with the managerial discourse of performance and goal orientation and measurement. Therefore, 'selling' this approach to coaching may be difficult. One such possible difficulty would be its lack of openness to a results orientation in favour of creating a more fulfilling life for the coachee. Here, the organisation does not appear to be important, at least in theory. On the positive side, the coaches can possibly argue that openness to results and creating more fulfilled individuals benefits the organisation in return.

On the other hand, the psy expert discourse uses psychological tools to enhance individual performance (Western, 2012). This is partly an accommodation of demands from psychologists to include psychology as a core training tool in coaching, claiming that the absence of psychological knowledge is a deficiency for the coaches (Zeus and Skiffington, 2002; Linley, 2006). Compared to the soul guide discourse, this discourse places more emphasis on the outer-self (Western, 2017) in the form of behaviour change, reducing stress to enhance performance or improve communication. The primary force is to explore organisational performance (Western, 2012). The outward focus of this discourse appears to attract the attention of HR professionals, institutions and organisations, as there are some visible and measureable outcomes that "they can attempt to quantify and reward/punish changes in behaviour" (Western, 2017, p.47). Therefore, it is possible to argue that the psy expert discourse links well with contemporary business needs. It also links with the demands of incorporating psychology and psychotherapy into coaching practice driven by the organisations that seek to professionalise coaching. Western (2017) believes that this discourse is also aligned with scientific rationalism, and the rise of positive psychology and Neuro-Linguistic Programming (NLP) complements the scientific view of management. In general, this approach goes well with societal demands as the majority of the population is trained and educated in line with positivistic thinking (Bachkirova, 2017).

Nevertheless, to coach employees in order to align them to organisational goals, values and desired behaviours can be viewed as an autocratic approach. This approach also links to executing power over the organisation's employees. Casey (1995) argues that these attempts may lead to employees failing to realise how they have been defeated by, and lured into, one corporate culture. Therefore, it would be a challenging exercise for coaches to go beyond this reductionist approach (Garvey, 2017) and accept the possibility of non-compliance of the set goals due to, for example, individual differences in culture and values. Focusing on goals has the possibility of leading coachees to goal conflicts, frustration and lack of improvement (Spreier et al., 2006). Garvey et al., (2009) argue that goal orientation limits coachees from having a broader perspective and deeper understanding. Regardless of these possibilities, this discourse does seem to speak the language of contemporary business expectations.

The managerial discourse, as Western (2012) argues, is about the assumptions of managerialism within coaching practice. This discourse intrudes into coaching practice through organisational culture, incorporating internal coaches with the managerial assumptions and employing consultancy firms and business schools with managerial mindsets to deliver coach training and coaching (Western, 2017). Similar to psy expert, the managerial ethos is driven by cause and effect rationality (Western, 2012). The coaches who follow the discourse claim neutral engagement and take an indirect approach to support coachees' aims rather than promoting their own aims and objectives (Western, 2017). Western (2017) says that coaching circles often raise the issue of serving two masters: the coachee and the organisation. It is also acknowledged that ethical issues and goal conflicts may arise due to this tri-partite relationship (Iordanou et al., 2017). There is also the possibility of breaches of confidentiality agreements and hidden agendas between the involved parties. The claim of the coach's neutrality to support the coachee's aims contradicts with what appears to happen in practice. However, Western (2017) believes that if all parties cooperate well, the issues related to these conflicts of interest would be less critical.

Similar to the psy expert discourse, the managerial discourse is driven by goals and performance. For example, Western (2017, p.52) believes that, for some, these measurement-based approaches would be helpful; however, this does not seem to guarantee "holistic understanding or bring deeper meaning to our lives". The author continues to argue the importance of the holistic view to avoid coachees becoming familiar with the short-term strategies and thinking to achieve the set goals. Garvey (2011) is an advocate of this idea of developing broader views and keeping things open rather than having a restricted focus with goals. Mintzberg (2004) identifies a shift

within some forms of managerialism, emphasising the importance of exploring the abilities of managing subjectivity in contemporary management. However, this shift does not appear to be acknowledged within the managerial discourse in coaching. This discourse appears to aim for role fulfilment (Western, 2012). Therefore, its applicability for organisations which are progressive is questionable. The successful organisations in the current business environment seem to have moved away from mere role focus. They appear to encourage a more open, flexible, supportive and networked atmosphere. Therefore, according to Laloux (2014), the practices in this discourse do not fit the 21st century workplace.

According to Western (2012), the network discourse emerges as a response to the globally linked and technologically advanced world. This discourse aims to coach leaders to reflect on their practices to support them for the new challenges; this is also an acceptance of lateral relationships and the breaking of organisational barriers (e.g. hierarchy, structure) to support employees. The network discourse facilitates leaders to operate in "fluid organisational structures and without the necessity of positions of power and hierarchy" (Western, 2017, p.54). The discourse goes beyond performance improvement or leading a better life and appears to exceed the expectations over and above the "person-in-role and improving their operational output" (Western, 2017, p.55). However, they may be possible if the organisation and its culture support the concepts of the network discourse.

Therefore, all four of the perspectives discussed here present with many difficulties and practical issues. Western (2017) argues that there seems to be a less clear separation in coaching practice. Perhaps one is more influenced by a discourse but that does not mean that they adhere to that discourse itself. One possibility is that a coach's practice is informed by a mixture of these discourses (Western, 2017).

Despite these possibilities, it is clear that these discourses are coach-centric; therefore, the coachee perspective appears to be ignored here. This seems to have influenced the coach perspective dominance within the field, both in research and in practice. It also appears to have an impact on the popularity of coaching and a tendency to highlight its more positive aspects. This indicates the importance of exploring the coachees' voice in order to develop a balanced understanding. Thus, this study's primary focus on the coachees' interpretation of the executive coaching experiences helps to address this void.

Furthermore, Garvey (2017) argues that there are at least twelve different discourses within coaching. The number demonstrates the different interpretations of coaching

discourses that exist. Garvey's (2011) emphasis on an 'individualised agenda' as a discourse is a good example of the diversity that presents within coaching discourses. Within the list of discourses presented by Garvey (2017), 'performance' appears as another discourse. My study does not aim to explore in detail all the discourses available within coaching and the possibility of such an act is also questionable.

Therefore, rather than focusing on all the possibilities, the study focuses on 'developmental discourse'. This is relevant given my interest in exploring how executive coaching works in a case study business organisation. However, the developed understanding of possible discourses within coaching may help to improve the understanding of possible power relations and different agendas within the coaching relationship. The approach to coachee development possibly differs from the coaches who immerse themselves in a particular discourse. There can be a similar possibility with the organisation for which the coachees work. Therefore, there is a likelihood of seeing development differently in different coaches and organisations. The coachees' perspective also appears to play a role in how the development is viewed and approached. Organisational culture also influences people's perceptions, values and the way they do and see things (Deal and Kennedy, 1983; Trompenaars and Hampden-Turner, 2012; Chidiac, 2013; Schein and Schein, 2017). Thus, it can be argued that the discourses and interpretations are also informed by the organisational culture (Gao, 2017). My aim is to analyse how the coachees and coaches makes sense of their executive coaching experience. Therefore, I employ a methodology that facilitates a deeper understanding of the contextual and subjective knowledge embedded within the culture of the organisation (Smith et al., 2009).

My interest is within the developmental discourse. Therefore, the developmental perspective of coaching is evaluated below whilst discussing a shift in the literature from derailment to development.

2.3.2.1 Derailment to Development

Segers et al., (2011) argue that executive coaching focuses on deficiencies and explores ways of addressing performance gaps. In a similar vein, Kempster and Iszatt-White (2013) emphasise that the initial applications of executive coaching in organisations are based on a 'deficit model' (Philip, 2008). Therefore, coaching can be seen as a solution for organisational and managerial derailment. It relies on the notion that something is wrong and needs fixing. Therefore, White (2006) calls it a 'medical model'. According to Wampold (2001), this view has influences from psychotherapy which assumes that there is a definable problem to deal with through coaching. This is

understandable, considering the influences that coaching gains from fields such as psychology and psychotherapy (Grief, 2017) and links to the psy expert discourse of coaching, as discussed above.

This perspective (medical model) links coaching to a context where something is done by the coach to their clients (or the coachees). Garvey et al., (2014, p.148) see this as a 'compliance mindset' as this model seems to assume that the coachee needs to be taught or directed. It appears to contradict with the shared nature of coaching (Bachkirova and Kauffman, 2009) where the coach and coachee co-construct and contribute to develop their own realities. My position on coaching also does not fit with the idea of 'compliance mindset' but acknowledges the coachees' engagement with the coach to construct their own realities. This positions the idea of exploring the coachees' and coaches' interpretations as a good way of developing understanding within the field.

Some (Hall, et al., 1999; Anna, et al., 2001) suggest that addressing performance issues, preventing derailment, or working through organisational issues, are the goals of executive coaching. Joo (2005) believes that the rise of executive coaching in the 1980s is due to its reduced punitive stigma and the increased developmental focus. However, according to Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson (2001) and Feldman and Lankau (2005), executive coaching practices were corrective even in the early 1990s.

The remedial involvement or the corrective nature of coaching is viewed as a traditional approach (Hall et al., 1999; White, 2006; Coutu and Kauffman, 2009; Kempster and Iszatt-White, 2013) and these authors suggest that it is an obsolete concept. Coutu and Kauffman (2009), for example, emphasise that in the 1990s, companies engaged executive coaching to fix behavioural issues. In contrast to these arguments, Western (2012) discusses two concepts of the self; wounded and celebrated. According to this author, the wounded-self is "damaged, fragmented or emotionally hurt and is the domain of psychotherapists and psychologists" (Western, 2012, p.3). This can be interpreted as directing coaching more towards the celebrated self that "offers a hopeful optimisation of the self, the potential to grow and to improve our happiness and well-being" (Western, 2012, p.7).

Some authors argue that it has come to be perceived as a positive leadership development intervention (Paige, 2002; Underhill et al., 2007; De Haan et al., 2013). Supporting this view, some researchers (Fillery-Travis and Lane, 2006; Underhill et al., 2007; McCormick and Burch, 2008; Segers et al., 2011) suggest that executive coaching has become a central part of an executive development strategy in modern

organisations. This trend is growing and positively promoted (Kilburg, 1996; Anna et al., 2001; Diedrich and Kilburg, 2001; Sherman and Freas, 2004; Joo, 2005; McCormick and Burch, 2008; Bono et al., 2009; Baron et al., 2011; Nelson et al., 2011; Walker-Fraser, 2011; Edwards, 2012). Moreover, Edwards (2012) believes that leadership development is the main purpose of executive coaching. This purpose appears to influence the popularity of coaching and, according to De Villiers (2012), the developmental perspective is more pragmatic and result oriented. As a result, executive coaching is currently considered as a viable leadership development intervention by many authors and professional bodies (Gray, 2006; Mosca et al., 2010; Walker-Fraser, 2011a; De Villiers, 2012; ICF, 2012; Western, 2012; CIPD, 2013; ICF, 2016) rather than an intervention to tackle the problems of executives. Therefore, it is clear that some authors claim that the coaching industry has shifted from derailment to development and suggest that 'addressing issues' using executive coaching is part of an older, more traditional approach. My aim to understand how executive coaching facilitates leadership development is influenced by this developmental discourse. However, I do not discard other potential uses of executive coaching which may include addressing specific performance or behavioural issues.

There is also an apparent reluctance to accept that coaching is used to address specific issues (Western, 2012; Stokes and Jolly, 2014). For example, Garvey et al., (2014) discuss the use of coaching to reduce drug taking, crimes and performance lapses. The authors do not highlight these as specific issues but emphasise that there is a need for changing behaviours. Therefore, there is an indirect acknowledgement here; for example, coaching is used to address performance lapses. The term "let's drop the negative discourse and use an inclusive one" (Garvey 2014, p.57) provides some direction to argue that there is a tendency to hide the negatives or at least to highlight the positive aspects of coaching as some researchers (Western, 2012; Garvey et al., 2014; Western, 2017) claim. This tendency of neglecting the negatives and the success of communicating the positive aspects of coaching may have influenced the unpopularity of the derailment discourse within coaching. However, this unpopularity and the dominance of the developmental discourse do not mean that addressing the specific issues is an obsolete concept. My study's exploration on individual interpretations of the coaching experience may help to further the understanding in this area.

The growth of the developmental discourse "cannot be viewed as unproblematic" (Beattie et al., 2014, p.185). One such issue is the relative lack of research evidence (De Haan et al., 2013; Beattie et al., 2014; Garvey et al., 2014; Gray et al., 2016; Grief,

2017). Beattie et al., (2014) also note that the positive frame of reference given to coaching without a sufficient research base is an issue. According to the authors, this may lead coachees, coaches and organisations to undermine the challenges that coaching brings in as a developmental intervention. Furthermore, Du Toit and Sim (2010) argue that, in coaching, there are very limited critical approaches both in theory and in practice. Such beliefs have left the industry with some unanswered questions (see Chapter One). My research addresses one such question with its aim to develop a deeper understanding of how executive coaching faciliates leadership development.

Despite the lack of understanding and research evidence, there is a positive perception within the current literature that coaching works. The section below critically evaluates the literature on 'how' coaching works.

2.3.3   Does Executive Coaching Work?

Some researchers claim that executive coaching 'works' presenting diverse arguments to support this view (Grief, 2017). This is evident in both practitioner literature (Starr, 2008; Megginson and Clutterbuck, 2009; Whitmore, 2009; KimSey-House et al., 2011; Rogers, 2012; Downey, 2014) and the research-based literature. There seems to be little debate within the practitioner literature to evaluate if coaching works. The authors cited here more often focus on introducing practices that have worked for them. One possible reason for this is that most of these authors are coaches. Thus, having such positive perceptions may be an attempt to gain a business advantage. Given the research interest here to develop evidence and understanding of how executive coaching works, this section focuses on the literature with some research background to discuss the argument that executive coaching works.

Horn et al., (2010) argue that executive coaching works and gets results. They develop a justification for their claim through studies from Olivero, et al., (1997), McGovern et al., (2001), Thach (2002), Smither et al., (2003), and Horn et al., (2010) who label these as rigorous studies on which they can place reliance. In a similar vein, Baron et al., (2011) cite the same studies and include Evers et al.'s (2006) study into their list to claim that it works. However, studies such as McGovern et al., (2001), for example, are criticised for their lack of quality, focus (return on investment) and poor methodology (Smither, 2011). Therefore, relying on such studies to argue that executive coaching works is questionable.

Another argument to support the claim that coaching works is its alleged ability to help goal attainment (Hall et al., 1999; McGovern et al., 2001; Wasylyshyn, 2003; Feggetter,

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2007; Kombarakaran et al., 2008; Wasylyshyn, 2008; Grant et al., 2009). Moreover, all these authors apparently believe that executive coaching develops some flexibility within the coachee, appears to create work-life balance, and supports behavioural changes and self-understanding. Taking goal attainment forward, Bowles et al., (2007) argue the importance of goal setting with the coachee as a collective exercise. However, these authors also acknowledge Thach's (2002) view that the link between goal attainment and goal setting is poorly established.

There are various interpretations of 'goal' in the coaching literature. Bowles et al., (2007), for example, admit that some of these goals are organisationally imposed and some are self-defined by the coachee. It also appears that the nature of goals varies within the context of the coaching. In some study contexts (Giglio et al., 1998; Bowles et al., 2007; Page and De Haan, 2014), self-development, developing self-understanding, skills development, developing resilience, work place wellbeing and also reaching more measureable targets like productivity efficiency, have been cited as examples of goals. Notwithstanding the nature of the goal, these authors seem to support the idea of goal attainment through coaching and use it as a means of claiming that coaching works. This complies with the managerialist and psy expert discourses and supports the goal-oriented nature of the business environment.

However, if the coach and the coachee focus only on goals, the idea of "individuals find[ing] meaning and identify[ing] how to live more fulfilling lives" (Western, 2017, p.44) is challenged. According to Western (2012), this is the primary focus of the soul guide discourse of coaching where the coach is rarely interested in targets. Garvey et al., (2009) believe that a goal can limit the potential outcome of coaching due to its narrow focus. Focusing on goal attainment and performance enhancement may also impact learners to avoid learning about themselves (Askew and Carnell, 2012). Critical theorists, like Habermas (1970) and Marcuse (1991) suggest that goals have the possibility of distracting people from taking a critical stance of the whole system. This focus on goals alone can also be considered as a way of strengthening power relations within organisational settings where management imposes goals and performance targets which may lead to social inequalities within the organisation (Brockbank and McGill, 2012; Shoukry, 2016). My attempt to analyse both the coachee's and the coach's perspectives would help to understand the potential disparities and their influences. This also helps to avoid the perspective imbalance within coaching research and practice.

Given the very limited, or absence of, focus on goals within Western's (2012) 'soul guide' discourse, it is interesting to understand the possibility of the existence of such discourse within a business organisation. Given the current challenges that organisations face, it is quite difficult to justify the investments for coaching if there is nothing to expect within the organisation in return. This is in line with Western's (2012) psy expert and managerialist coaching discourses as they accommodate supposed scientific means of measuring and realising set goals which allegedly ensures that there is a visible return on investment (Western, 2017). Some (Kilburg, 2000; Zeus and Skiffington, 2002) believe that executive coaching closely links with this discourse. These claims make it difficult to argue whether focusing on goals has a positive or negative impact on outcomes. However, Western (2017) emphasises that a mere focus on goals would result in individuals becoming mechanistic and, according to Gray et al., (2016) and Garvey (2017), this approach is reductionist. Therefore, it contradicts the 'developmental discourse'. Businesses continue to demand that people become more innovative and creative (Drucker, 1985; Goodman and Dingli, 2017). The reductionist approaches and goal boundaries do not appear to facilitate innovation and creativity (Bernstein, 1971; Garvey, 2017). Therefore, presenting goal achievement as a way of claiming that 'executive coaching works' appears to link with some issues, especially in terms of sustainability and effectiveness. It appears to require a better mechanism to claim that it works. My exploration of how it works in a business context potentially develops a deeper understanding of these issues.

Another argument in the literature claims that coaching works as a return on investment (McGovern et al., 2001; Smither et al., 2003). For example, De Meuse et al., (2009) report a relatively positive return on investment through their study which is based on studies such as Luthans and Peterson (2003), Smither et al., (2003), and Evers et al., (2006). Even though the authors argue that executive coaching works based on these study outcomes, they note that most of the claims regarding return on investments are overrated (De Meuse et al., 2009; Smither, 2011). For example, the study conducted by McGovern et al., (2001), shows a very positive return on investment of 5.7 times (Fillery-Travis and Lane, 2006). This study is heavily criticised for its self-reported biases and the weak methodology employed (Feggetter, 2007; Passmore and Gibbes, 2007). However, the outcomes are widely used, often by practitioners, as evidence to claim that executive coaching works. McGovern et al., (2001) are also coach practitioners which may have additional implications for the overly positive outcomes of this study. A control group study conducted by Smither et

al., (2003) also supports the claim but there is a decrease in effect size compared to McGovern et al.'s (2001) study.

Despites the use of return on investment (ROI) as evidence to argue that coaching works, some authors (Laske, 2004; De Meuse et al., 2009; Lawrence and Whyte, 2014), criticise the idea by highlighting the subjective nature of coaching and the potential issues of quantifying the coaching outcomes. For example, Grant (2012, p.74) argues that the "financial return on investment (ROI) is an unreliable and insufficient measure of coaching outcomes, and that an overemphasis on financial returns can restrict coaches' and organisations' awareness of the full range of positive outcomes possible through coaching". Grant (2012) also hints that mere focus on financial returns may result in negative consequences, such as job stress and anxiety. The question here is whose agenda requires coaches to demonstrate a positive return on investment in financial terms? Gray et al., (2016) argue that these expectations are driven by science and rationality expectations informed by the managerialist discourse in coaching. Western (2012; 2017) believes that both managerialist and psy expert discourses have the language that the current business organisation expects to hear. This leads to the argument that coaches are driven to prove the financial return of the intervention to satisfy one of their key stakeholders, perhaps to gain business advantage. Therefore, to argue that coaching works by citing rather dubious return on investment (ROI) research is also contestable. My approach to develop understanding by analysing individual interpretations of both the coachees and the coaches appears justified as an alternative. My position on coaching (see section 2.3) further rationalises this approach.

Executive coaching is also positioned as an individualised learning and development intervention in both the informed research and the practitioner literature. This positioning of executive coaching is also used to argue its effectivenss and additionally to claim that it works. Traditional developmental interventions are often set up to train large numbers and individual needs are not fully considered (Underhill et al., 2007). In comparision, executive coaching seems to offer a diferent approach that facilitates development that caters for individual needs in their natural setting (Kilburg, 1996; Passmore and Fillery-Travis, 2011). Executive coaching, therefore, is considered as a more person-centred (De Haan et al., 2013; Grant, 2014; Theeboom et al., 2014) and holistic developmental intervention than traditional training and development (King and Eaton, 1999; Abbott et al., 2006). Executive coaching apparently provides a much greater say about the development agenda and the process (Giglio et al., 1998), which according to Tobias (1996), makes it more relevant for the executive. However, the

idea of the individualised nature of executive coaching appears to be informed by the westernised influence of individualised democratic capitalism (Western, 2012; Shoukry, 2016) where interpreting solutions and/or problems from the individuals' perspective, may lead to a disregard for more team oriented or collective activities (Schultz, 2010; Shoukry, 2016). Swan (2010) believes that this focus is due to a therapeutic culture which is informed by an egoistic focus which discounts societal needs. It is a focus on 'I' rather than 'we' (Lasch, 1978). Despite these criticisms, it is worth considering how the organisation that employs the coachee influences the concept of the individualised and tailored agenda promoted by coaching's supporters. This is relevant given that my study's focus is on understanding how executives give meaning to their executive coaching experience in a business context.

Moreover, executive coaching is said to explore ways of helping and facilitating learning and development through engaging in a genuine develomental relationship (discussed later in detail) that is non-judgmental and supportive (Kilburg, 1996; Giglio et al., 1998; Hudson, 1999; Wang, 2012; Ladegard and Gjerde, 2014). This has also been used to claim that executive coaching 'works'. The developmental relationship appears as a unique feature that distinguishes it from conventional training and development (Kilburg, 1996; Giglio et al., 1998; Hudson, 1999; Hamlin et al., 2016) because it seems to encourage individuals to be confident and act on their own development (Hudson, 1999; Baron et al., 2011; Wang, 2012).

Another argument found in the literature is that executive coaching enhances the productivity of executives (Bennett and Bush, 2011; Bowles et al., 2007; Olivero et al., 1997). Self-awareness also appears as a key outcome of executive coaching and this awareness is said to be the key that makes executive coaching work (Joo, 2005; Boyatzis, et al., 2006; Ely et al., 2010; De Haan et al., 2013). Some studies (Hall et al., 1999; Hernez-Broome and Hughes, 2004; Joo, 2005; Bowles et al., 2007; Feggetter, 2007; Passmore and Gibbes, 2007; Grant, 2014), which focus on executive coaching's effectiveness and outcomes have demonstrated positive behaviour change and overall satisfaction with the intervention. For example, Feggetter (2007, p.134), in her mixed method study, claims that executive coaching works because the participants "liked to be coached and perceived it to impact positively on their effectiveness in the job". Thach (2002) finds that executive coaching enhances leadership effectiveness and productivity of those who were studied. This is supported by Ladegard and Gjerde (2014), claiming that executive coaching enhances leadership effectiveness and trust in subordinates. The idea of enhanced effectiveness is also demonstrated through a study conducted by Perkins (2009) which claims that executive coaching influences

leadership behaviour changes (enhanced effectiveness in meetings). Furthermore, Gyllensten and Palmer (2007) and Theeboom et al., (2014) argue that coaching positively enhances coping skills and goal-directed self-regulation. These authors also argue that the effect of these coping skills and self-regulation are significant. Some others (Cox, 2006; Garvey, 2011; Bachkirova et al., 2014; Du Toit, 2014) suggest that executive coaching facilitates learning and ensures coachee development by creating self-responsible learners.

These are the arguments that claim that executive coaching works. Irrespective of these agreements, there are apparent contextual and conditional arrangements that authors suggest make coaching effective. For example, Edwards (2012) argues that coaching should be structured, transparent and measured. Similarly, Joo (2005) highlights the importance of addressing the uncertainties (see listed questions in Chapter One). Despite the claims that it 'works', there are some doubts in the field and these may be related to the 'black box' effect of executive coaching (Smither et al., 2003). Smither et al., (2003) argue that not knowing why it works, how it works, or in what context it works, are reasons for these uncertainties. This lack of clarity is attributed to some researchers holding assumptions such as 'it works' and 'it is effective' (Laske, 2008). Holding these positive predispositions and their wide acceptance may have influenced the slow growth of research in this field. The multiple purposes of coaching have also been cited as a reason for the lack of clarity (Levenson, 2009). According to Ives (2008), it is due to the emerging nature of the field. The scarcity of research in coaching appears to be another key reason for that ambiguity.

Therefore, despite these claims that 'it works'; it is rare to see studies that investigate how coaching works (Myers, 2017). The need to re-direct the focus of executive coaching research from outcome studies, which have been used to argue that 'it works' to explore 'how it works', is both relevant and timely (Fillery-Travis and Lane, 2006; Grant, 2014; Theeboom et al., 2014; Myers, 2017). Fillery-Travis and Lane's (2006, p.23) question "Does coaching work? Or are we asking the wrong question?" is apposite here.

The table below (table 2.1) shows the paucity of studies that ask, 'how it works?' Most studies tend to avoid the question, perhaps due to the demands within the industry. The list of studies in the table appears as an effort to support the coaches (practitioners) to justify their practice by highlighting the outcomes or arguing that it works. This is understandable given the practitioner dominance in the literature. The

table also demonstrates the lack of attention and the paucity of studies that ask 'how it works'. This implies that we might have been asking the wrong question or, at least, the same question too frequently. Thus, as discussed, "academic literature on coaching is largely devoid of studies on how executive coaching works" (Styhre, 2008, p.275). This further justifies my attempt to explore how executive coaching works in a case study organisation.

Study	The interest of the study
Theeboom et al., (2014)	Individual level outcomes of coaching in an organisational context
Bozer et al., (2014)	The executive coaching guidelines that work
Ladegard and Gjerde (2014)	Leadership coaching as a developmental tool, enhancing leadership efficacy and trust in subordinates
Grant (2014)	Effectiveness of executive coaching in terms of change, but Grant discusses how it works
Page and De Haan (2014)	Does executive coaching work?
De Haan et al., (2013)	Executive coaching effectiveness, active ingredients of executive coaching
Bozer and Sarros (2012)	Effectiveness of executive coaching
Ely et al., (2010)	Evaluations of leadership coaching
Baron and Morin (2010)	Impact on self-efficacy related to soft management skills
Perkins (2009)	Leadership behaviour change and meeting effectiveness
Grant et al. (2009)	Focus on goal attainment, resilience and workplace well-being
Kombarakaran et al., (2008)	Claim that it works but not how
Spence (2007)	Goal attainment
Feggetter (2007)	Explores whether executive coaching works for high potentials
Bowles et al. (2007)	Goals, performance and buy-in but build up from Bowles and Picano (2006) to argue the case how it works
Evers et al. (2006)	Management coaching effectiveness
Fillery-Travis and Lane (2006)	Does coaching work? The authors wondered if they were asking the right question
Bowles and Picano (2006)	Developed a model to demonstrate how executive coaching works
Thach (2002)	Impact of executive coaching and 360 feedback on leadership effectiveness
Giglio et al., (1998)	Discusses how executive coaching works
Olivero et al., (1997)	As a training transfer tool and effects on productivity of executives

Table 2-1 Coaching Outcome Research

The lack of understanding of how executive coaching works drives this study as I seek to create a deeper understanding by addressing:

"How do leaders make sense of their dyadic executive coaching experience?"

The next section explores the literature on 'how it works' by exploring the process of executive coaching rather than its outcomes.

2.3.4 How Does Executive Coaching Work?

This section explores the published literature that discusses the process of how executive coaching works. There are various models and approaches, for example: the GROW model (Whitmore, 2009); solution-focused coaching (Cavanagh and Grant, 2014) and narrative coaching (Drake, 2014); Egan's (2006) skilled helper three stage model; person-centred coaching (Joseph, 2014); positive psychology approach (Boniwell et al., 2014); ontological coaching (Sieler, 2014). However, this list is not conclusive (Cox et al., 2014; Garvey et al., 2017). In addition, it appears that similar to therapy research, most research in coaching is positive, regardless of the method, methodology or approach (Kilburg, 2004) followed by the coach practitioners in their practice or the researchers investigating its effectiveness. Most of the authors cited here explain the approaches that may work in coaching engagements but do not engage with the discussion on 'how coaching works'. This is possibly one reason why 'how coaching works', still appears as a "hot topic" (Myers, 2017, p.589).

Giglio et al., (1998, pp.96-97), reflecting on their practice as coaches; provide some insight into this question. This paper, although largely uncritical and practitioner-oriented, provides a platform to develop a critique of 'how' executive coaching works. Giglio et al., (1998) outline three phases:

- Enhancing commitment and personal transformation
- Moving the coachee forward
- Facilitating the personal transformation

For the authors, these three phases explain how coaching works in their practice. The phases are critically discussed below.

2.3.4.1 First Phase: Enhancing Commitment and Personal Transformation

According to the authors, this phase consists of four steps, namely: establishing a relationship that fosters learning; the coach acts as an objective analyst; the

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information provider, and then both coach and coachee jointly, identify the problems and opportunities.

Here, Giglio et al., (1998) place more emphasis on establishing a learning relationship, an approach that is widely acknowledged in other coaching literature (Peterson, 1996; Frisch, 2001; Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson, 2001; Grant 2006; Taie, 2011; Batson and Yoder, 2012). This approach pertains where a strong focus is developed for the coachee's development rather than addressing any issues (performance, work relationships) that the coachee may have been facing (Coutu and Kauffman, 2009). Some argue that the coaching relationship itself seems to enhance the trust between the coach and the coachee (Giglio et al., 1998; De Haan and Duckworth, 2013; McCarthy and Milner, 2013). Trust helps to develop a better understanding of each other and appears to sit in the centre of interest of both practitioners and researchers (Du Toit, 2014; De Haan and Gannon, 2017). Gyllensten and Palmer (2007, p.173) argue that "the relationship is the basis upon which the coaching is built and without a relationship the coaching will not be as effective as it could be". The gradual development of trust and understanding, according to Giglio et al., (1998), and Brockbank and McGill, (2012) removes the pressure from the executives, which helps them to be more natural and open for development.

These arguments continue to appear in the literature and have been widely acknowledged and accepted both in the practitioner literature and the more academic literature. The consequence is that the quality of the relationship helps the coachee to make progress towards their expected personal outcomes. However, the relationship does not appear as a simple phenomenon, mostly due to the wider influence of power dynamics, cultural implications and the diverse agendas that different stakeholders shape into what coaching means (Louis and Fatien, 2014). This also appears to complicate the coaching relationship. Coaching's reliance on the relationship means that this aspect requires further attention and investigation and recognition of the contextual implications of developing such relationships. For example, the time and performance pressures within the organisation (Gray et al., 2016) possibly have an influence in the coaching relationship. Individual values and organisational culture influence the way people see and do things (Deal and Kennedy, 1983; Trompenaars, and Hampden-Turner, 2012). The involvement of the different interest groups may lead to contrary agendas within the relationship. There is a possibility here that the coaches become directive in order to cater to the organisational expectations.

The different power positions have also been identified as having potential implications (Hunt and Weintraub, 2002) for coaching which may create problems between the coachee, the coach and the organisation. According to Louis and Fatien (2014), the power dynamics between the three parties may create a situation where either the coachee's organisation is marginalised or the organisational agenda dominates. Hawkins, (2008) suggests that, in coaching research, there is an under-estimation of the power dynamics that the triangular relationship brings into coaching.

In addition, the coachees' expectations and experience have implications for the relationship (Gray et al., 2016). Downey (2003) emphasises a similar view but from a coach perspective where he acknowledges the potential power implications of the coach's motivations to support, develop, address problems, enhance performance and be in control of the relationship. It is important, therefore, to explore the wider stakeholder influences for coaching relationships. Thus, by giving the coachees a voice rather than relying solely on the coaches, this study attempts to address this issue. Therefore, the primary focus of my study is the coachees' interpretations. The coach interpretations are used to develop further understanding of the coachee voices and how they make sense of their experience.

According to Gyllensten and Palmer (2007), and Gan and Chong (2015), the rapport that is developed in the coaching relationship determines the openness, trust, understanding, and the ability to handle issues that may be encountered during the relationship. Additionally, Theeboom et al., (2014) claim that trust, confidentiality and openness are attributes that have positive implications for coaching outcomes. Theeboom et al., (2014) also suggest that the confidentiality of the relationship enhances the trust. Trust, as discussed by Grant (2014), reduces stress and anxiety for executives. These trusting relationships developed by coaches and coachees appear to help coachees to explore their performances gaps in a non-judgmental space (Zenger et al., 2011). The transient nature of this relationship has made things difficult for researchers and practitioners to effectively understand its implications (Jowett et al., 2012). However, the assertions above suggest that there are positive elements in the coaching relationship which contribute to successful outcomes within executive coaching. My interest is not within the coach and coachee relationship. However, it is related to how executives experience coaching. An awareness of these implications helps with the understanding of the interpretations of coachees and coaches of their executive coaching experience.

Another element that seems to contribute to the development of the coaching relationship is the coach being objective but empathetic. Giglio et al., (1998, p.98) suggest that the coach "becomes a classifier, questioner, elaborator and motivator. (…) s/he earns the right to ask, probe, and when necessary, direct questioning about decision making strategies, interpersonal style and behaviour". This notion of 'questioning' is widely represented in the executive coaching literature (Turner, 2006; Yu et al., 2008; Petrie, 2011; Passmore and Fillery-Travis, 2011; McCarthy and Milner, 2013; Athanasopoulou and Dopson, 2015) as a supportive factor in coachee development. The coachees' readiness to absorb the questions and make sense of them seems to have been paid very limited attention in both the practitioner and the academic literature. This potential lack of readiness on the coachees' part may lead to the break-down of the relationship. Despite the lack of consideration of the coachees' perspective within the literature, there are some, (Gallwey, 1974; Yu et al., 2008; Fillery-Travis, 2011), who position questioning as a supportive and positive tool that is employed by coaches. For example, Turner (2006) argues that executive coaching is a dialogue, or a facilitated conversation powered by meaningful and objective questions that stimulate understanding. This understanding apparently helps them (coachee and coach) to jointly work towards identifying factors that obstruct their development and also helps the executive to build confidence (Giglio et al., 1998). However, as previously discussed, being objective and maintaining a goal-oriented approach may bring challenges to the coaching due to its narrow focus on goals. Goal orientation has the potential to hinder creativity and harm the freedom of the coachee to think innovatively (Garvey, 2011; Goodman and Dingli, 2017). This issue is not considered when Giglio et al., (1998) claim the importance of goal orientation and the objectively driven nature of coaching. Their argument here is influenced by the psy expert and managerialist discourses of coaching (Western, 2017). According to Western (2017), these discourses speak the language that organisations like to hear and employ scientific rationalism. Thus, goal setting appears as a popular concept within coaching despite the highlighted issues presented previously in this chapter.

However, the first phase of Giglio et al., (1998) aims to prepare the executive for development by creating understanding, trust, and recognising the need for development. This first phase, according to Giglio and colleagues, is about 'unfreezing' which sets the platform for the next phase.

2.3.4.2 Second Phase: Moving the Coachee Forward

This phase consists of three steps which comprise: detailed information gathering; empowerment and giving coachees the opportunity to identify what needs to be done; and to generate deeper understanding of the importance of development (Giglio et al., 1998). Brockbank and McGill (2012) support these views and consider them as vital for one's development. Giglio et al., (1998, p.100) argue that this is where "establishing new behaviour" begins within the process.

The independence or ownership within the executive coaching process is highlighted by Giglio et al., (1998). It is also widely accepted and discussed in the literature (Petrie, 2011; Segers et al., 2011; Whitmore, 2011; Vidal-Salazar, et al., 2012; Grant, 2014). This ownership of their own development that coachees gain in executive coaching is said to positively influence motivation and commitment to reach what they aim to achieve (Ely et al., 2010; Batson and Yoder, 2012; Law, 2013; Smith and Brummel, 2013; Narayanasamy and Penney, 2014). Thus, Giglio et al., (1998) argue that having coachees who are responsible for their own development and who take ownership of the process makes development more viable. The coachee-led nature of executive coaching has been discussed as its unique feature (Yu et al., 2008; Petrie, 2011; Segers et al., 2011). These claims often appear as a result of highlighting the positives of coaching over the negatives, or as a result of a less critical approach in the current coaching literature to establishing these arguments (Du Toit and Sim, 2010; Garvey et al., 2014).

In contrast to the above, some research highlights that the organisation also plays a part in the coaching engagement. Therefore, the coachee-led nature of the coaching is further challenged. However, the later arguments appear to dominate both the academic and practitioner literature. Some (Natale and Diamante, 2005; Coutu and Kauffman, 2009; Garvey et al., 2009; McCarthy and Milner, 2013; Athanasopoulou and Dopson, 2015) argue that it is not solely about the coachee but also the organisational involvement within executive coaching that is important. These authors also argue that there is an apparent reluctance to accept that the organisation plays a part. For example, Coutu and Kauffman (2009), Kahn (2014), and Athanasopoulou and Dopson (2015), agree that the coaching is designed to meet the needs of both executive and the organisation paying for the service. Khan (2014) emphasises the importance of the coach attending to the needs of both the coachee and the organisation. Western (2017) interprets this idea as serving two masters (the coachee and the organisation). Thus, the paying authority has a say in what needs to be done (Gray et al., 2016). In

similar vein, Louis and Fatien (2014) acknowledge the existence of an organisational agenda within the coaching engagement, seeing it as an issue related to power dynamics within organisations. According to Louis and Fatien (2014) organisational involvement is neglected within the coaching literature. One reason may be the popularity that coaching has gained as a coachee-led agenda within practice and in the literature. Thus, the other potential agendas within the engagement go unnoticed. This can be an intentional act by some authors (both practitioner and academic) who promote coachee-led agendas over those of the organisation or perhaps an implication of focusing on the positives of executive coaching (Western, 2012).

However, due to the complexity of this tri-partite relationship (coach – coachee, coach-organisation, coachee – organisation), Louis and Fatien (2014) also argue the possibility of having hidden agendas between the coachee and the organisation. The idea is supported by Western (2017, p.56) highlighting the possibility of "ethical and practical dilemmas". If this is the case, the stakeholders of coaching should aim to avoid such hidden agendas and accept the importance of transparency within the stakeholder engagement. For this to happen, open discussions and research about the organisational agenda and its implication for results would be helpful. The idea of organisational involvement within the coaching agenda is further strengthened more directly by Natale and Diamante (2005, p.362). They emphasise that written contracts are used "where parties, executives, coach and sponsoring company define the terms of performance and to avoid any misunderstanding". Thus, they accept the organisational involvement but mostly at the contracting stage of the coaching process. This argument is further supported by Coutu and Kaufman (2009) and Stokes and Jolly (2014), accepting that it is a partnership with the organisation that pays for the service, the coach and the coachee all working together.

Therefore, the authors cited here do not appear to see the organisational agenda within the coaching process as a positive implication for the practice but there is an acceptance of its presence. They also tend to discuss the importance of understanding the existence of such agendas rather than evaluating the benefits of such involvement.

What is clear here is that, within the critical literature, some practitioners take a less accepting approach of the ability of the client organisation to execute power over both the coach and coachee. This links well with the managerialist and psy expert agendas. Practitioner literature often positions coaching as emancipatory. However, it appears that there are some contradictions between practitioner claims and what is actually

practised. My attempt to deeply analyse the individual interpretations of both the coachee and the coaches may help to identify such contradictions.

However, Coutu and Kauffman (2009) suggest that organisations do not always get what they expect from coaches. This can be interpreted differently, for example:

1) Coaches are intentionally ignoring what the organisation wants from coaching and helping coachees to develop their own agenda;

2) Organisational involvement is there but just at the contracting stage and then it is down to the coach and the coachee, so they may deviate from what the organisation wants;

3) Coaching does not work in the way that the organisation, coachee and the coach expect.

Despite all these possibilities, the overall discussion here shows that there is some involvement of the organisation within the executive coaching process (Hooijberg and Lane, 2009) but it is not clearly articulated in the literature and it is often contested. Thus, there is insufficient discussion around the organisational agenda to understand its involvement within executive coaching literature. However, the emerging critical literature in coaching highlights the possibility that coaching is yet another form of organisational control (Reissner and Du Toit, 2011) which targets the employees' (coachees') 'hearts and minds' (Fodge, 2011, p.66). This view is endorsed by Fatien and Nizet (2015), saying that coaching is used to shape the coachees' values and to align them to the organisational values and belief system. Fodge (2011, p.67) emphasises this as "governmentality". This contradicts the widely accepted notion that executive coaching is a coachee-led intervention and the power within coaching engagement appears to have been ignored in the coaching literature (Welman and Bachkirova, 2010). However, the belief that executive coaching has a coachee-led agenda is currently a dominant view as opposed to a vehicle for the organisational agenda to be played out. Therefore, Giglio et al.'s (1998) claim that coaching provides an opportunity for the coachee to be independent is an uncritical one.

Apart from claiming that coaching is a coachee-led intervention, Giglio et al., (1998) also emphasise the importance of creating deeper understanding, being a critical friend and asking probing questions. Brockbank and McGill (2012) consider these initiatives as a means of creating understanding, linking with the first step discussed by Giglio et al., (1998), but appearing to go beyond the initial understanding created during the first phase. This is reflected by the phrase used by the authors, 'creating deeper

understanding'. According to Giglio et al., (1998), the understanding according plays a vital role in changing the coachees' behaviours (discussed in adult learning section). This second step of the authors' process leads to the personal transformation of the coachees.

2.3.4.3 Third Phase: Facilitating the personal transformation

The third phase of the model has three steps:

- Set action plans that are realistic, achievable and within the executives' control
- Weave a safety net
- Self-generated motivation and continuous improvement (Giglio et al., 1998, pp. 103 – 105)

In the initial phase, the executives set goals that are achievable. The theory relies on three steps, as follows. The understanding and support through the process helps the executive to set realistic goals (Fillery-Travis and Lane, 2006; Scriffignano, 2011). The executive's ownership of the process seems to enhance the commitment and motivation towards the goals and helps to facilitate attainment (Grant, 2006; Spence, 2007; Grant et al., 2009; Law, 2013). Once the goal is set, the appropriate support should be available to reach those set goals (Giglio et al., 1998).

It is argued that support is ensured in the executive coaching process in various ways; for example, by demonstrating empathy, providing support for reflection, listening, and being available for further conversations (Ladegard and Gjerde, 2014). In Grant's (2014) view, support is an essential element within the executive coaching process, especially if there are any setbacks which, according to him, help executives to be more resilient and better able to regulate themselves. The support extended through the executive coaching engagement is also widely acknowledged in the executive coaching literature (Kilburg, 1996; Grant, 2006; Bowles et al., 2007; Ely et al., 2010; Wang, 2012; MacKie, 2016). However, in describing 'support', these authors do not give any impression that the coach is actually doing any work for the coachee.

Whilst accepting the relevance of 'support' in coachee development, the appropriate challenge (Wang, 2012; Du Toit, 2014) and assessment (Chelimskey, 1997; Saunders, 2006; MacKie, 2016) also appears important in developmental support that the coach offers. The assessment is a challenging exercise in coaching due its subjective and contextual nature (Ely, et al., 2010). Therefore, there seems to be a need for an on-going evaluation with a formative focus (Smither et al., 2003; Ely et al., 2010; Ling,

2012). In return, this helps the coachee to keep improving throughout the process (Schwandt, 1997; Ladegard and Gjerde, 2014) due to coaching's development focus and its embedded nature within the context of the executive.

If there is no universal meaning as to what coaching is, having a universal means of assessment or defining such criteria may be unrealistic (MacKie, 2007). Flaherty (2011) states that that no model of assessment is sufficiently comprehensive to capture human interactions, actions and their improvements. Therefore, if coaching is tailored to individual coachees, the tailoring of assessment on an individual basis to explore progress or to encourage further development appears relevant. According to Grant (2014), the evaluation is part of ensuring the progress of executive coaching and understanding any obstacles that come the coachees' way. It also appears that the developed understanding of the aims of assessment by the coachee makes feedback more relevant for their development (Gentry and Leslie, 2007). Assessment in coaching is a conversational engagement (Flaherty, 2011), so it becomes a participatory and inclusive engagement (Garvey, 2017). Therefore, it also appears as a form of support that the coach offers in their coaching engagement. Kaiser and Kaplan (2006) recognise the importance of a form of social support for indidivuals to achieve a personal transformation. Such support initiatives, through assessment and challenge, seem to enhance development opportunities and establish positive development relationships (Peterson, 1996; Grant, 2006; Taie, 2011; Batson and Yoder, 2012).

The extent of challenge and the coachees' readiness to accept the challenges posed by the coaches needs consideration and attention here. According to Giglio et al., (1998) this aspect should be addressed in the first phase of the coaching. Bowles et al.'s (2007) argument on 'buy-in' may also relate to the readiness of the coachee to accept the challenges coming from the coach.

According to Grant (2014), the coaching support may need to return if there is need identified through the evaluation. Therefore, evaluation seems to re-generate focus and further support the development. Grant (2014) believes that the evaluation is a part of ensuring that the executive is progressing well and to understand any obstacles. Thus, "it is perceived as helpful, trustworthy, respectful and (…) a properly focused" (Giglio et al., 1998, p.98) developmental activity. As discussed earlier, these conclusions from Giglio et al., (1998) are not based on research evidence. However, the above discussion supports this view, where the coachee has been respected and considered resourceful in the process of the assessment whilst providing appropriate support and challenge.

In Giglio et al.'s (1998, p.104) view, 'supporting' means not only being available to have a conversation and being around but educating their coachees "self-monitoring skills, and [to] work on improving personal management skills, so that (…) they [coachees] can cope with failure, reduce stress, and learn from this challenging experience". This is acknowledged by few authors in the coaching literature (Redshaw, 2000; Knight and Poppleton, 2008; McCarthy and Milner, 2013). All these authors believe that coaching is self-perpetuating, but they condition the argument by highlighting the importance of a positive experience of being coached. These authors also believe that a positive experience of executive coaching not only helps the coachee to self-coach but to coach others. This idea of becoming coaches themselves and others appears to be conceptual. These authors do not support the argument with research evidence.

Moreover, becoming coaches of themselves as well as of others could be seen as making a positive contribution to the general understanding of coaching. Despite this potential, the idea is under-represented within the current literature even as a concept. Analysing the interpretations of the coachees and the coaches of their executive coaching experience may help to identify if this is a possibility within coaching.

Giglio et al.'s (1998) three phases convey some understanding of 'how' executive coaching may work in a business context. This understanding is in need of research support. Giglio et al., (1998, p.98) acknowledge that the "process is different for every executive, but a common framework has been developed in order to focus the dynamics for the reader". This shows that the authors acknowledge the subjective nature of coaching and its application. It is also interesting to note that Giglio et al., (1998) suggest that it is important to complete the first phase before moving to the second. According to them, the success of the second phase depends on the success of the first. This shows that the authors accept that there may be concrete stages in the coaching process as they discuss 'how' coaching works. However, if, as they also argue, the process is different from person to person, the authors' expectation to complete the first phase before moving to the second is contradictory. My attempt to address the research question by exploring the interpretations of the individuals would provide some insights into how coaching works within the context of this study. It may also develop some research evidence to resolve the highlighted contradictions.

Despite the critique throughout this discussion of Giglio et al's (1998) framework, it demonstrates 'how' executive coaching may work in a business context.

This section of the chapter explores development links of coaching and how it facilitates development. The next section of this chapter evaluates adult learning theories to link how coaching may facilitate adult development.

2.4 Adult Learning and Coaching

My position of executive coaching and interest in this study make exploring the concepts of adult learning relevant. The section first explores the roots of adult learning theories, and then compares traditional learning and development interventions with coaching. Finally, this section explores how adult learning links with coaching.

2.3.5 Adult Learning Theories and their Evolution

Adult learning is a widely researched phenomenon. This section does not intend to conduct a comprehensive review of all the theories and concepts. Considering the research interest, the section below critically discusses the theories and relates them to coaching.

- Cognitive theory
- Andragogy
- Experiential learning
- Social learning
- Situated learning
- Transformative learning
- Reflective learning

Vygotsky (1978) appreciates the idea of collaborative learning. Whilst Vygotsky is primarily interested in child development, his ideas have relevance to coaching. Vygotsky (1978) establishes the idea of a proximal development zone which is a space where learners can get Vygotsky some help from more knowledgeable peers or experts to expand what they can learn and do alone. This implies the possibility of enhanced understanding and learning if there is support and guidance available to the learners (Garvey, 2017). Vygotsky developed the concept of 'scaffolding' (Wood et al., 1976). The term used by Wood et al., (1976) is meant to highlight the importance of support from someone (a learned) to develop a learner. The term also recognises the temporary nature of support which links to coaching where the aim is to develop self-directed learners.

Vygotsky's notion that social interactions precede learner development suggests that the social context of any learning is important. He also recognises the value of collaboration (Gray, et al., 2016). Vygotsky's key argument (1978) is that learning is social which appears as an initial challenge to the classroom-based education, a dominant learning mode. The concept of classroom education at the time was based on learning outcome directed teaching which is teacher-led. The dominance of this view (learning outcome led teaching) may have influences on coaching in relation to, for example, goal setting (Garvey, 2017). This approach is rarely questioned. As Garvey (2017, p.685) suggests, "we have become so used to this approach that we no longer notice it".

It was during the 1970s, when people started differentiating child development from that of adults, the idea of 'andragogy' was introduced (Knowles, 1975). Knowles (1975) argues that adult learners are able to control themselves and be more responsible for their development when compared to young learners. Therefore, adults are considered as self-directed responsible learners. In the context of this study, the concept appears relevant as the investigation is about the most senior leaders. At least in theory, leaders of such calibre are expected to be responsible and accountable. Contrasted with pedagogy, this self-directed, self-initiated and self-motivated learning that adults undertake is labelled as andragogy. This has had a great impact on the evolutionary thinking of adult learning and development (Cox, 2006). Adding to Knowles' (1975) notion, Candy (1991) emphasises the importance of self-direction in adult learning and continues to reiterate that learners are more capable of defining their learning requirements than anybody else. The barriers of defining their own learning requirements, and having resources allocated for them, have not been given sufficient attention, especially in organisational contexts.

Another interesting and relevant perspective is learning from experience (Bachkirova, et al., 2014) although the idea was originally suggested by Dewey in 1938 (Gray, 2006). The argument behind experiential learning is that learning is not merely acquiring abstract knowledge (Kolb, 1984). The technique and the process are more important in experiential learning rather than the content where the immediate concrete experience of learners is considered as the basis for observation and reflection (Bachkirova et al., 2014). Reflection then develops a learner's position on a particular phenomenon and this, in turn, leads to actions (Brockbank and McGill, 2012). Here, learning appears as a process where experience is transformed into skills, knowledge, attitudes and beliefs (Jarvis et al., 1998) as it changes the perceptual 'schemas' of individuals by bringing them to the 'surface level' through sense-making exercises (Du

Toit, 2014). Du Toit (2014, p.286) further argues that "we are more often than not unaware of our schemas and sense-making" According to the author, enhanced awareness of these schemas helps learners to better understand themselves. This appears to link with coaching as it is known for creating deeper understanding (as discussed above).

The concept of learning through reflecting on experience was first introduced by Kolb and Fry (1975) and later developed by Kolb (1984) in his seminal work on 'experiential learning'. The idea was complemented by Schön (1987), emphasising the importance of reflective practice to develop professional skills. Kolb (1984) argues that learning is a continuous process grounded in an individual learner's experience. He also emphasises the importance of re-learning. In doing so, Kolb (1984) argues the importance of not only imparting new thoughts in learners' minds but also encouraging/facilitating learners to unlearn and modify the existing ones. Bandura (1977) is also a contributor to the experiential learning domain, and discusses the importance of social interactions in experiential learning. He dismisses the idea that, as people, we have inborn repertoires of behaviours. Thus, the concept of being born into some types of behaviour is challenged and the importance of social interactions for learning is highlighted. This is in line with coaching's approach towards development, and my stance on coaching as a social activity also complies with this view.

Honey and Mumford (1982) realise that Kolb's (1984) experiential learning is relevant and appealing to business organisations. They attempt to make it more relevant to the business world, but it appears as a reproduction of Kolb's notion with different labels. However, the work of these authors, including Kolb (1984), helps in the understanding of alternatives to the traditional "didactic and traditional classroom approaches" (Bergsteiner et al., 2010, p.29). Therefore, experiential learning can be considered as a milestone of adult learning where innovative approaches to learning and development are encouraged. Coaching appears as a process that moves away from this traditional mode of learning and encourages a more innovative and creative approach to learning and development. My study explores how coaching facilitates development by analysing the subjective individual interpretations of both the coachees and the coaches.

Looking at learning as a social practice as Bandura (1997), Reynolds and Mason (2002), Garvey and Williamson (2002) and Garvey (2011) do, it is arguable that Lave and Wenger (1991) use the concept of social learning to illustrate situated learning, particularly in the adult and executive learning context. They place learning and

development in a social context rather than perceiving it as acquiring a certain type of knowledge or behaviour. These were challenging notions for the traditional practices and assumptions where learning was considered as the acquisition of certain knowledge and as an activity that has an absolute beginning and end. Psy expert and managerialist discourses of coaching seem to accommodate this idea of a concrete beginning and an end which is accomplished through set objectives and assessments linked to those objectives and expected learning outcomes. This idea seems to link with goal setting in coaching. Society appears to accept the idea of structured development which is something that people have been used to since their early education and entry into the school system. Therefore, challenging the dominant discourse of objectives and goals is very difficult. There is also an apparent contradiction here between the theory of goals and objectives applied to the coach and what the coach writers say about coaching. Therefore, the analysis of the individual interpretations plays an important role to understand how coaching delivers what it promises.

In addition, Lave and Wenger (1991) argue that learning is a 'situated' activity and acknowledge it as a process of social participation. This means that learners actively participate and involve themselves in activities in order to learn. As a result of this involvement, learners gradually improve their abilities and become contributors to the process within the community. This shift is called the "move from legitimate peripheral participation into full participation" (Lave and Wenger, 1991, p.37). This view of learning seems to cover some concepts discussed above, such as experiential learning, andragogy and reflective exercises. It also appears to relate to Cross's (2009) idea of distancing the teacher from the learner to create a more self-directed learning environment. Moreover, Lave and Wenger's (1991) concept of communities of practice encourages learners to be part of a social community in order to learn. These authors argue that a full contribution to the community is only possible with this active participation. This suggests the importance of the contextual knowledge that learners should acquire and constructs knowledge that fits the context that they are currently in. Therefore, it can be argued that coaching as a situated and social learning process may have considerable implications for learning. My study acknowledges the significance of the situated and social nature of learning and development and explores how coaching facilitates it.

In comparison to the discussion above, transformative learning theory redefines the educators' role in learning. Mezirow (1991) emphasises that educators should be responsible for fostering the critical self-reflective abilities of learners and encouraging

them to act. He further argues that educators should encourage learners to critically examine their experiences and predispositions. This appears as an amalgamation of the concepts presented above, for example, learning through experience and reflection. The aim, as Mezirow (1991) notes, is to transform learners' perspectives of the world to a more meaningful, valuable one. However, transformation is not complete until the learners start acting on these new perspectives. This seems to link with Lave and Wenger's (1991) idea of full participation within the community of practice. Transformative learning seems to have challenged the structured, learning outcome (goal) driven learning and development. Mezirow's (1991) approach appears to lay a foundation for innovative learning and development approaches; the centre of his argument is to get learners to act on learned perspectives and continue to challenge these through reflective exercises. This idea is complemented by Palma and Pedrozo (2016, p.2) saying that "transformative learning seeks to promote changes that go beyond behavioural change, posing a challenge to existing beliefs and ideas, and promoting the reconstruction of meanings").

Therefore, it is possible to argue that learners are facilitated through a transformation and given space to reconstruct meaning to their experiences and attitude towards a phenomenon. Coaching encourages this though questioning and conversation. The analysis of how the coachees give meaning to their coaching experience therefore appears a good way of knowing how they learn and develop.

The brief discussion above on reflective learning (Kolb and Fry, 1975; Honey & Mumford, 1982; Kolb, 1984; Schön, 1987) demonstrates that reflection on individual experiences and the experiences of others is important. The idea of reflection for learning and development is strengthened by Mezirow (1991) who argues that critical reflection creates awareness. This intentional reflective exercise is an internal process where the social context and experiences are acknowledged, and learners are active individuals, open to challenges and to being challenged (Du Toit, 2014). Brockbank et al., (2002) emphasise that the outcomes of these acts involve transformation and improvements of both the individual and the organisation. However, whilst intrapersonal reflection may be effective in offering opportunities for learning, it is unlikely to be sufficient to promote transformational learning (Brockbank and McGill, 2012). According to Brockbank and McGill (2012), it is important that individuals engage in reflective dialogue with another in a dyadic developmental relationship. These arguments support the idea of dyadic relationship for adult learning. Coaching appears a good match here as it facilitates a critical reflective space and seems to link well with the above notion of intrapersonal reflection. Thus, it complements the idea of

exploring coaching as a development intervention. Table 2.2 demonstrates the different perspectives of adult learning. These are critically discussed above and draw some potential links to coaching.

Theory	The way learning is perceived
Cognitive Theory Vygotsky(1978), Piaget (1929)	Connects learning towards given objectives and considers it as a mental process, acknowledges the importance of support for learning
Andragogy Knowles (1975)	Recognises adult learning as a different paradigm from child education and development
Experiential Learning Kolb (1984)	Places learning in real world situations, encourages learning by doing and also through reflecting on experience
Social Learning Theory Bandura (1977)	Learning as a social activity. Learning in a mutually beneficial environment.
Situated Learning Bandura (1977), Lave & Wenger (1991) Reynolds and Mason (2002)	Situate/place learning in organisational and group learning contexts.
Transformative Learning Mezirow (1991), Gray (2006)	Students/learners as resourceful self-directed individuals, tutor facilitates their learning.
Reflective Learning Honey & Mumford (1982), Argyris (1960) Argyris & Schön (1996), Schön (1987) Brockbank and McGill (2012)	Reflection as a learning and development tool, explore personal change, development and learning through critical reflection

Table 2-2 Adult Theories and Their Position of Learning

Moreover, the table denotes that the context of learning, social cultural influences, moral issues and diverse experiences, and personal transformations are all influential in learning and development (Garvey, 2011). The table also promotes the idea of having many different ways of learning and development in the context of adult learning. I do not discard any of these views but emphasise the diversity within the concepts of adult learning. This diversity appears to be accompanied well by coaching.

The discussion also highlights that there is a dominant view of learning which is referred to as the traditional mode of learning (Garvey, 2011). As stated above, the focus of this mode is on competencies and goals which are teacher/trainer centred, controlled and contain defined stages (Gray et al., 2016).

Knowles et al., (2015) present the characteristics of andragogy and confirm Knowles' (1975) notion that people learn best in settings which are informal, comfortable, trusting and non-threatening. Knowles and colleagues' work also emphasises the idea that learning is a process. Moreover, the key features of human learning (social, cultural, situational, transformational, continual, natural human experience, moral issues) presented by Garvey (2011), denote that learning is a contextualised, subjective, social process. This complies with Knowles et al.'s (2015) arguments of andragogy. Garvey (2011) does not totally discard the more traditional linear or closed approaches to learning. He believes that there is space for them. However, evaluation of the nature of subjects, the purpose of learning and the different abilities of learners seem to have been ignored within the traditional approaches. These considerations may also have implications to the approach that the learners should follow. The required level of guidance and direction can also be varied due to the implications of these factors. Therefore, I argue that a process, andragogy informed, and open curriculum has more potential to generate creativity, innovation and learning (Bernstein, 1971; Garvey, 2011). Coaching appears as an appropriate intervention to facilitate such learning. The developed arguments of how coaching links with adult learning theories within this section is further discussed and analysed below.

2.3.6 How Adult Learning Links with Coaching

The discussions above argue that there are different ways of learning and development (Drake, 2011). Acquiring knowledge can be viewed as the development of skills, attitudinal change, and as a living and social process (Drake, 2011; Garvey, 2011). If learning is considered as a social process, it "is less about objective observation and more about subjective conversations, less about fact and more about narrative" (Drake, 2011, p.145).

This view of learning influences my study which takes a constructionist view of teaching (Burr, 1995) as it believes that the learning takes place through people's interactions. As mentioned above, this position does not mean that I discard the other possible ways of learning and development. Kotter (1988) was quite early to recognise the idea of tailoring development according to individual needs. He included one-to-one-development in his list of development interventions at the time. However, the idea did not grasp the attention until recently. The difficulty of administration (Garvey, 2011), allocation of resources and positivist implications (Bachkirova, 2017) can be highlighted as some of the reasons that the concept of tailoring development did not look appealing to many. However, despite there being a wide range of learning and development interventions in the current business context, one-to-one development interventions such as executive coaching have been given prominence in recent years (De Haan et al., 2013). Coaching caters to the individual's development needs through developing supportive relationship that enables coachees to learn from one another which results in skills development, career progression and performance enhancement (Garvey et al., 2014).

Coaching appears to support the idea of learning as a social construction and as a social process. It also sets learning in the context where the learner is an active agent of learning (Knowles, 1984; Mezirow, 1991). The first section of this chapter reveals that there are challenges and criticism around the possibility of empowering individuals and the extent of freedom that can be facilitated through coaching. However, coaching literature acknowledges the idea of 'coachee-led' development which seems to link well with the adult learning concepts discussed here. Brockbank and McGill (2012) believe that the learners' active role enhances their ability to develop a critical perspective into their own practice. This complies with Kolb's (1984) idea of reflective learning but Brockbank and McGill (2012) emphasise the importance of a facilitated reflection with the support of a critical friend or a facilitator (coach).

The literature argues that coaching also supports a self-directed desire to learn and develop with intrinsically enhanced motivation (Giglo et al., 1998; King and Eaton, 1999). This is in line with the principles of andragogy that adults are intrinsically motivated to learn given the need (Du Toit, 2014; Knowles et al., 2015). This does not mean that the external motivators do not count but that the sustainability appears to lie in the former (Bachkirova et al., 2014). Moreover, as discussed, the focus of experiential learning lies with the process and the technique rather than with the content. This is closely linked with coaching as it has a similar focus (Gray et al., 2016). In adult learning, concrete experience is considered as the basis of observation and

reflection which are assimilated to theories to generate critical thinking which becomes an internal process (Brockbank and McGill, 2012).

Coaching also recognises the impact of experience in individual learning but emphasises that it has the ability to act as a barrier, as developed mental models and 'schemas' over the years can hinder learning and development (Bachkirova et al., 2014). However, the coach's position as a critical friend is well placed to challenge predispositions that the coachees (learners) hold. Thus, coaching appears to encourage learning and unlearning. These are both important aspects for development (Du Toit, 2014). The coach helps coachees to find themselves and develop greater understanding. A coach connects individual values and needs into results where a sustainable model of learning and development happens (Bachkirova et al., 2014; Du Toit, 2014). Therefore, coaching seems to accommodate the contextual and subjective nature of adult learning. Thus, it can be argued that there are links between coaching and adult learning theory (Bennett and Campone, 2017).

The next section discusses leadership development, aiming to link how these discussed theories link to leadership development.

2.4 Leadership Development

This section briefly explores how leadership development is attempted in the current business context. It justifies my position on leadership development and evaluates different perspectives of it by reflecting on diverse interpretations of leadership. Finally, it critically discusses how leadership development is attempted, linking both executive coaching and adult learning theories.

2.4.1 Leadership

There are diverse discourses around leadership and different interpretations of what it means within the field which continue to appear in the current literature (Northouse, 2016). I acknowledge Grint's (2010) idea that "three thousand years of pondering and over a century of academic research into leadership, we appear to be no nearer a consensus as to its basic meaning" (Grint, 2010, p.1). This is understandable given the complex interactions among leaders, followers and situations (see Hamilton and Bean, 2005). Thus, for my study the leadership "is (…) seen as a social influence process" (Day and Dragoni, 2015, p.35). Therefore, it is not a "property of individual but rather the actions that people engage in and the social process through which people place meaning on those actions" (DeRue, 2011, p.130).

2.4.2 Leadership Development

The way leadership is viewed influences the way leadership development is viewed (Kennedy et al., 2013; Rao, 2013). My position on leadership influences the way leadership development is seen and interpreted (Kennedy et al., 2013; Rao, 2013). For example, the belief that leadership as the person (Grint, 2010), tends to argue that it is about getting the right people in the right place. Therefore, "finding a leader becomes (…) a process of selection rather than development" (MacKie, 2016, p.43). This may lead businesses to look for certain skill sets or competencies that individuals possess (Kark, 2011). Here, leadership development is seen as developing people who are designated as leaders in organisations (Day, 2001; Galli and Muller-Stewens, 2012; Hagemann and Stroope, 2013; Kennedy et al., 2013). Hence, there is a tradition where individuals attend a course or two, mostly away from work, to improve some job related skills.

This focus on universal ways of developing leaders contradicts the humanist and subjective nature of leadership and may distract and ill-direct development (Petrie, 2011; Hanson, 2013; Cairns-Lee, 2015). In addition, earlier in this literature discussion, the traditional view of learning was positioned as ineffective because it neglects the relational and contextual elements (Cunningham, 2010). Moreover, this viewpoint, according to Cunningham (2010), considers leadership development as a one-off event. Therefore, this approach is criticised (Kakabadse, et al., 2008; Petrie, 2011) by highlighting the importance of the subjective and contexual nature of leadership development.

Day et al., (2014) argue that the elimination of contextual elements from leadership development and the focus on individuals are partly due to the dominance of traits theories. Furthermore, the ease of administration and measurement has been cited as a reason for not considering subjective elements within leadership development (McCall, 2010). There is also a tendency to structure leadership development initiatives to achieve quick fixes (DeRue and Ashford, 2010). This "insatiable hunger for short-term results" (DeRue and Ashford, 2010, p.24) appears to influence organisations to get leadership development routinely wrong. As a result, the industry still lags behind 21st century leadership development demands (CIPD, 2011; CIPD, 2016).

However, with new developments, the focus on a 'skills set' has shifted to focus on 'mind set' (Kennedy et al., 2013). Kennedy and colleagues argue that this shift marks an important milestone in leadership development research and practice. With this new focus, leadership development is now considered as a process of enhancing the

capacities of the organisational constituents (McCauley et al., 1998; Osborn, et al., 2002). Thus, it is not considered as a one-off activity (Day, 2001; Houghton and DiLiello, 2010; Day et al., 2014; MacKie, 2016).

Leadership development, therefore, appears now as "one of the most complex processes" (Athanasopoulou and Dopson, 2015, p.150) both in research and practice. Avolio and Gardner (2005) and Western (2011) claim that this complexity is due to its involvement with culture, dynamic contexts, history, followers and technology. Thus, leadership development now "is less directly concerned with developing a set of discrete skills and is increasingly concerned with participants' understanding (…) of assumptions and how these shape possibilities for the future" (Kennedy et al., 2013, p.10). Therefore, "there is little agreement about the best strategies for developing and exercising (…) leadership development" (Hackman and Wageman, 2007, p.43).

However, employing a decontextualised leadership development intervention that works for everyone appears to be a difficult act (Kakabadse, et al., 2008). This suggests the importance of interventions that are able to accommodate contextual and subjective elements of development. This is where personalised interventions, such as coaching, for example, appear relevant (Connaughton et al., 2003, p.46). Connaughton and colleagues further argue that "leadership competencies are best developed over time through a programme that fosters personalised intergration of theory and practice that conceives leadership development as a recursive and reflective process". My position on coaching as a one-to-one leadership development tool ackowledges the importance of tailoring the development. This also complies with my stance on leadership (see section 2.5.1).

Research appears to continue to explore better ways of developing leaders (Best, 2010; DeRue and Ashford, 2010; Ely et al., 2010; Kark, 2011; Northouse, 2013; Edwards et al., 2015). Resultantly, diverse interventions are "endlessly being developed" (Edwards et al., 2015, p.280). Some of the techniques employed by these interventions are briefly evaluated below in line with the coaching and adult learning theories discussed above.

Experiential learning as higlighted above appears as an important element of leadership development in the literature (McCall, 2010; McCauley et al., 2014; Dong, et al., 2014; Hezlett, 2016). Stokes and Jolly (2014, p.253) acknowledge the subjective nature of leadership and argue that leadership consists of "values and qualities of courage, self-sacrifice, judgement and character". According to the authors, it is difficult to educate leaders about these components. They consider that linking 'real life work'

into leadership development could be a potentally prolific initiative. This complies with the discussed concepts of adult learning, such as experiential and situated learning, where leaders are given the opportunity to learn and develop through their experience situated in their current context. Coaching is "often used to enhance (…) leaders' opportunities" (Jowett et al., 2012, p.255). In addition, coaching as an intervention that fosters a personalised and intergrated development tool recognises the importance of the context and does not remove the coachee from their working environement (Kilburg, 1996; Drake, 2008; Passmore and Fillery-Travis, 2011). This can also be viewed as an importance of experience in coachee development.

Gurdjian et al., (2014) emphasise the need for closely monitoring the experiential exercise so that amendments can be made with the changing needs of development of the individual. This suggests the importance of designing evolving and dynamic programmes for leadership development rather than pre-designed quick fixes aimed at developing certain skills (Maurer et al., 2008). The concept of assessing for development and the mutual nature of development discussed in adult learning and coaching appears to link with Gurdjian et al's (2014) idea. This further relates to coaching as it appears to have an open curriculum (Garvey, 2011) and coaching also develops development agendas that fit for the individual coachees (Thach, 2002; Gray et al., 2016). There are difficulties of accomodating initiatives that are subjective and tailored. However coaching's popularity hints at the posibility of organisations moving towards such development interventions.

Day and Dragoni (2015) agree with the above arguments of an experiential route but note the importance of these experiences to be challenging ones. They also acknolwedge the prominence of the context in which experiences occur. These authors also argue that the appropiate support to go through these challenging experiences is equally important in ensuring development. In addition, striking the balance between challenge and support appears to help develop leadership potential of individuals and can also help them to be more confident about facing such challenging encounters in the future (DeRue and Wellman, 2009; Day and Dragoni, 2015). Therefore, it is clear that the challenging exercises/experiences are important elements of leadership development but also that appropiate support is vital (Kaiser and Kaplan, 2006; McCauley et al., 2014). Challenging the coachee's predispositions is considered as pivotal in coaching as it is in contemporary adult learning theories such as tranformative learning. Coaching also recognises the impotance of appropiate support (Grant, 2014; Ladegard and Gjerde, 2014) and the right balance of both support and challenge.

Kaiser and Kaplan (2006, p.480) also argue that "some measures need to be taken to provide social support for the individual's ongoing effort to bring about personal transformation" . They suggest that "forming a network of other people to sustain the effort can be most effective" (Kaiser and Kaplan, 2006, p.480). This encourages the development of positive working relationships or to engage in other forms of professional support, such as coaching and mentoring. Coaching is known for establishing positive developmental relationships (Peterson, 1996; Grant, 2006; Taie, 2011; Batson and Yoder, 2012). There can be potential issues with these relationships (discussed earlier). However, it is accepted that these relationships have positive impacts on development (Mezirow, 1991; Brockbank and McGill, 2012). Therefore, learning through challenging experience and having appropiate support appears relevant for leadership development. Coaching, as discused above, seems to incorporate these techniques to help coachees to develop.

The value of relevant experience, as a learning and development tool, is well documented in the literature (Kolb, 1984; Knowles, 1975; Knowles et al., 2015). It is agreed that the challenging experience is a vehicle for learning. They also emphasise that continuous reflection on these experiences is a great source of development. Reflecting on challenging experiences may motivate an individual to develop skills (DeRue and Wellman, 2009). Reynolds (1999, p.598) notes that critical reflection is "a commitment to questioning assumptions and taken-for-granteds embodied in both theory and practice" that helps to deepen the understanding of the leader who constructively questions them. This view is further supported by Souba (2006, p.160) who argues that the journey of leadership begins on the inside by asking several key questions: "Who am I? What do I stand for? Where does my leadership come from? How do I become a more effective leader?". These questions help leaders to emerge from their predispositions by recognising them as assumptions which, at times, hinder their performance (Kaiser and Kaplan, 2006). The reflection for development and result-orientation relates with the concept of reflective learning (Argyris, 1960; Schön, 1987) and coaching (Western, 2012; Du Toit, 2014).

Additionally, some coaching literature (Brockbank and McGill, 2012; and Du Toit, 2014) suggest that reflection develops doubt, complexity and questions which help to develop original thinking and inquiring minds. This influences individuals to more deeply explore their experiences and to understand the significance of reflection in learning and development (Densten and Gray, 2001). Therefore, it appears to facilitate a continuous cycle of learning and development rather than a one-off activity (Brockbank and McGill,

2012; Du Toit, 2014). According to Densten and Gray (2001) absence of reflection can hinder understanding and lead to poor performance.

Moreover, Kegan (1982) argues that one's sense of reality develops over time through qualitative shifts in perception. According to Kegan (1982), making sense of experiences and events differently plays an important part in development and not just skills and knowledge acquisition. This leads to the argument that critical thinking, questioning and sense-making of experience support development (Storey, 2011). Therefore, it seems important to facilitate opportunities for 'sense-making' for leaders by differently questioning their predispositions in order to generate a qualitatively different understanding (Storey, 2011). Coaching, as discussed above, facilitates this sense-making process through a conversational engagement with the coach and also by questioning. The coachee's readiness to accept the questions and the coach's challenges is something that needs attention here. There is also the possibility that this readiness varies from context to context and from person to person. Acknowledging potential issues, if the coaches could facilitate the level of reflection required to make sense of events and experiences differently, it is said to have positive implications for development (Mezirow, 1991; Brockbank and McGill, 2012).

2.5 Summary

The literature is divided into three sections; coaching, adult learning and leadership development. Firstly, the chapter explores executive coaching having a particular focus on how executive coaching works. The next section critically evaluates the adult learning theories and how they link to coaching. Adult learning as a more established discipline and the established link with coaching provides some justification to explore coaching as a leadership development intervention. Then, the chapter positions leadership as a process and highlights the contextual and subjective nature of leadership. It also briefly discusses the relationship between coaching, adult learning and the some of the techniques employed to develop business leaders. This literature review considers discourses running in the current context of coaching and develops a narrative form of a conceptual framework (Miles and Huberman, 1994**)**

The discussions in this chapter identify that understanding 'how executive coaching works' is an under-researched area. Thus, the chapter concludes by establishing a case for the subject study which addresses:

"How do leaders make sense of their dyadic executive coaching experience?"

My interest in human experience and the leaders' sense-making of that experience sets the context for the next chapter. Meaning-making of individual experience of executive coaching is considered as the source of knowing in this study. This is an act of further acknowledging the humanist philosophy of coaching as "it is about individuals having the right to give meaning and shape to their own lives" (Garvey, 2017, p.684). The next chapter, Methodology, explores how I approach the study to address the question, above.

3 Chapter Three - Methodology

This chapter explores how the research question is addressed. First, I develop a brief overview of the chapter and then discuss the ontological, epistemological and methodological choices. The subsequent section explores and justifies the philosophical underpinning of the chosen methodology, Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA). Then I discuss the data collection, analysis, and research ethics. Finally, the challenges faced during the research process are explained and I conclude the chapter by discussing the limitations of my study.

I give a brief overview of the chapter to act as a summary of the research activities employed.

3.1 Overview of the Chapter

This study asks the question "how do leaders make sense of their dyadic executive coaching experience?" I aim to develop a deeper understanding of how executive coaching works in a case study organisation by investigating the executive coaching experience of senior leaders in a financial institute in the United Kingdom. The investigation is conducted in their natural setting and there is no attempt to test any hypothesis or to develop any universal truths. Therefore, my study takes a bottom up approach where theory is generated through data which is inductive (Bryman and Bell, 2015; Gray, 2017).

By closely looking at the research question and its interest, I am able to argue that the research is humanist, subjective and contextual in nature and my research investigates human experience closely linked with qualitative approaches (Moustakas, 1994). I argue that qualitative research helps to identify the issues from the participants' viewpoint in their natural setting (McLeod, 2011) and to "understand the meanings and interpretations that they give to behaviour, events or objectives" (Hennink et al., 2011, p.9). Thus, this study is more closely linked with qualitative approaches.

My study employs Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA), a psychological research methodology (Callary et al., 2015). I justify my choice in sections 3.5, 3.6 and 3.7. My decisions on the method (semi-structured interviews; two interviews with each participant), sampling strategy (purposive sampling), the number of patricians (seven) and the techniques used to analyse data, are informed by the chosen methodology

(see Wagstaff et al., 2014). The research site is a financial services organisation in the United Kingdom.

I analyse the coachees' and coaches' perspectives on the coachees' development following guidance offered by Smith et al., (2009). Prior to the analysis, both interviews are combined into one. The purpose of the second interview is to go deeper and to generate more understanding of the experiential accounts of individuals, in line with Jeong and Othman (2016).

The individual experience of leaders and their sense-making of that experience are central to this study. Empathetic and questioning hermeneutics (Willig, 2014) are employed to make sense of the participants' interpretations but not suspicious hermeneutics. The analysis is a rigorous and iterative process which moves from the specific themes generated by each of the participants' interviews to considering the themes common to all the participants, and from description to interpretation (Smith, et al., 2009).

3.2 Research Philosophy

Qualitative research does not have a unified set of techniques and philosophies but relies on a diverse range of intellectual traditions (Mason, 2002). Furthermore, there are no universal truths in qualitative research. Mason (2002) emphasises that there is a demand for qualitative researchers to define the philosophical assumptions for the research by considering contextual elements of the studies. This helps to explore how executive coaching works in a given context, as creating contextual understanding of a given phenomenon is one of the most frequently cited strengths of qualitative research (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Philosophical "assumptions drive all the arguments that the (…) researcher develops, the language that s/he uses, as well as the data collection and the analysis" (Farquhar, 2012, p.15). According to Farquhar (2012), the credibility of the research ultimately rests on the underpinning philosophical assumptions of the study. Therefore, it is important to justify the philosophical assumptions for this research. The section below discusses this study's ontological and epistemological positions.

3.2.1 Ontology of the Study

I distance myself from the objectivist scheme of Burrell and Morgan (1979) by developing my research interest around executives' coaching experiences and their sense-making of that experience in order to deepen the understanding. Burrell and

Morgan's (1979) 'objectivists' scheme assumes that reality is external to the individual and this contradicts my research question, interest and the subjective humanist nature of my study. I attempt to explore the executive coaching experience of individuals in order to seek the perceived realities in the participants' subjective lived space, time and experience. Therefore, my study discards the objective realities external to the social actors (Hennink, et al., 2011; Flick, 2014).

The reality for the study is socially constructed. It argues that the social properties and meanings are constructed through interactions and interpretations (Robson, 2011). This position does not possess a universal truth (Flick, 2104; Easterby-Smith, et al., 2015). Therefore, it justifies the exploration of individual interpretation of executive coaching experience to deepen the understanding. In other words, this study attempts to understand "how (…) [leaders] attempt to establish (…) a different version of truth" (Easterby-Smith, et al., 2015, p.49), exploring how they give meaning to their executive coaching experience. Robson (2011, p.24) further supports the study's take on the social constructionist view, emphasising that "the focus of social constructionism is on individuals rather than the group, where the interest is how individuals construct and make sense of their world". My interest in the coaching experience of individuals, and how they make sense of that experience, complies with this view. I engage with my participants and facilitate them to create their own interpretations of their experience. These interpretations are the source of knowledge in this study.

I hold the notion that social properties are constructed through the interaction between people rather than having a separate existence (Flick, 2014) and, therefore, my study focuses on how the social world is interpreted by those involved (the coaches and coachees). Furthermore, I admit the view that "meaning does not exist in its own right; it is constructed by human beings as they interact and engage in interpretations" (Robson, 2011, p.24). Thus, the ontological instance of my study is the nominalist ontological scheme of Burrell and Morgan (1979) that "reality is simply a product of our minds - a projection of our consciousness and cognition with no independent status" (Johnson and Duberley, 2000, p.78).

3.2.2 Epistemology of the Study

This section collates the views of social scientists on the theory of knowledge. I aim to understand what should be regarded as acceptable knowledge in executive coaching. My principle concern here is to look at whether the social world can and should be studied according to the same principles and procedures as natural sciences (Bryman and Bell, 2011). The interest here is about the forms of knowledge that can be obtained

and regarded as true and what is regarded as false (Burrell and Morgan, 1979). Therefore, I consider whether the knowledge is hard, tangible and real or if it is soft, subjective and experience-based insight of a unique and essentially personal nature (Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Johnson and Duberley, 2000).

The business leaders' (coaches and coachees) interpretations of their executive coaching experiences are contextual and value laden, so cannot be considered as value-free knowledge that can be objectively measured. I acknowledge the subjective and contextual nature of the leaders' experience and their sense-making. Hence, I argue that "there are no neutral grounds for knowledge since all observations are theory and value-laden" (Johnson and Duberley, 2000, p.78).

I take an anti-positivist epistemology of Burrell and Morgan's (1979) scheme of analysing assumptions about the nature of social sciences. The belief here is that there is no value-free, objective knowledge. The idea complies with interpretivism discussed by authors such as Robson (2011) and Gray (2017). In contrast to positivist epistemology, the emphasis of interpretivism is that objects and people cannot be treated equally. People behave, think and act differently in different contexts (Bryman and Bell, 2011). Therefore, it is important to grasp the subjective meaning of social activities in order to generate knowledge (Burrell and Morgan, 1979).

Informed by this view, and my research interest, I aim to develop a deeper understanding of how coaching works by analysing participants' meaning-making of their executive coaching experience. I therefore, acknowledge that the knowledge for my study is subjective and contextual. This complies with the above-discussed ontological position and my stance on coaching (see Chapter Two). It is acknowledged that epistemology is also concerned with the knower and the known (Gall, et al., 1996); that is, whether the knower is detached from the known. As the researcher, I play an active role in co-constructing knowledge, firstly through semi-structured interviews (first interpretive engagement with the participants, (Smith et al., 2009) and then by analysing participant interpretations.

Considering my ontological and epistemological stances and my study interest, I chose Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) as my research methodology. Prior to finalising my methodology, I considered three alternatives that are discussed below before justifying the IPA's as fit for my study's purpose.

3.3 Considered Research Methodologies prior to IPA

I considered three different methodological approaches before choosing IPA. The first approach to be scrutinised was thematic analysis. My understanding of thematic analysis and its generally common acceptance by researchers as a qualitative tool may have influenced my initial thoughts. It appears to me to be an approach which supports researchers in identifying, analysing and reporting themes within data (Holloway and Todres, 2003; Braun and Clarke, 2006). Identification of themes, according to Holloway and Todres (2003), is one of the few generic skills in qualitative data analysis. There are instances where researchers have seen it as a tool that can be used across various qualitative methods (Boyatzis, 1998). Despite its wide use, some (Boyatziz, 1998; Tuckett, 2005) argue that there is no a clear agreement on what a thematic analysis is, and how to conduct one. Therefore, there is a tendency to view it as a "poorly branded method" (Holloway and Todres, 2003, p.6). Since it also does not appear to guarantee a deeper engagement with the data, which is my purpose; I explore 'Psychoanalysis' as an alternative.

My interest in 'Psychoanalysis' is due to my interest in hermeneutics, which focuses on the interpretation of experience. However, it is not my intention to understand the psychological implications of the coaches' and coachees' sense-making within the coaching experience. Psychoanalysis uses a technique called 'suspicious hermeneutics' to delve deeper into psychological implications of the participant interpretations (Ricoeur, 1970). Therefore, it brings an outsider perspective to create understanding (Landridge, 2007; Willig, 2014). My interest was to analyse what the coaching experience means to the participants in my study (insider perspective) and thus, I discarded 'Psychoanalysis' and explored the possibility of incorporating 'Descriptive Phenomenology' instead. The idea was influenced by my interest in the concept of phenomenology, in my case, the executive coaching experience of individuals. 'Descriptive Phenomenology' aims to identify the essence of the phenomenon by bracketing the pre-conceptions of the researcher (Giorgi and Giorgi, 2008). Thus, it attempts to take the researcher away from the sense-making of a particular experience in order to create understanding (Tuohy et al., 2013). I believe this is an attempt to understand the participants' experience from a perspective which goes beyond the concept of natural human experiences and their sense-making. I take the view expressed by McLeod, (2001) and Landridge, (2007) that understanding comes from the perspective of the interpreter. Therefore, the interpreter is part of the process rather than a separate entity (Smith et al., 2009). Thus, I rejected 'Descriptive

Phenomenology' and consequently choose IPA (Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis) as my research methodology.

The decision is influenced by the IPA's theoretical positions, phenomenology, hermeneutics and ideography. This is a close match with my sense of the ontological, epistemological stances and the research interest. Below, I discuss this match in detail. Firstly, I explore IPA and its philosophical underpinnings, and then I link these into my study interest, the context of the study and the coaching research.

3.4 Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA)

IPA is a psychological research method that has been widely used in health psychology (Smith, et al., 2009; Larkin, et al., 2011; Roberts, 2013; Callary et al., 2015). It offers cross-disciplinary applicability due to its comprehensiveness as a qualitative research methodology (Wagstaff et al., 2014). IPA is introduced by Smith (1996) as a new, qualitative, dynamic research methodology which derives from phenomenological psychology (Smith, et al., 2009).

The aim of IPA is to understand how people make sense of their particular experience (event, relationship, process etc.) in the context of their actual life world. Thus, it explores what it is like for a particular person to experience something in a particular context (Biggerstaff and Thompson 2008; Palmer et al, 2010; Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2012; Wagstaff and Williams, 2014; Callary et al., 2015). The focus on experience drives IPA researchers to explore the phenomenon of interest from the participants' perspective (through their interpretations of a particular experience) (Larkin, et al., 2011).

Therefore, priority is given to the experiential account of the participant. However, it recognises the researcher's role in co-constructing the meaning through interpreting the participant's interpretations of their experiences (Wagstaff and Williams, 2014). Hence, the focus of IPA research is on 'being-in-the-world' and 'lived experience' (Larkin, et al., 2011).

Accordingly, it is clear that IPA engages with the meanings that the experiences hold for individual participants. However, it also recognises that the researcher's conceptions are an important part of making sense of the lived experience of an individual through a process of interpretative activity (Chapman and Smith, 2002; Smith, et al., 2009; Shinebourne, 2011). It holds the view that human beings are not passive perceivers of an objective reality (Brocki and Wearden, 2006). According to

Brocki and Wearden (2006), IPA acknowledges that people come to interpret and understand their world based on their preconceptions, experiences, social and cultural backgrounds. Therefore, the exploration of senior leaders' experience of executive coaching, and understanding the meanings that they incorporate into that experience, closely ties with IPA. My study's fit with the IPA is discussed in detail below (see section 3.5 and 3.6).

IPA draws upon three fundamental philosophical underpinnings, namely phenomenology, hermeneutics and ideography (Smith et al., 2009; Smith, 2011; Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2012; Wagstaff et al., 2014; Jeong and Othman, 2016). These fundamentals are discussed below in relation to the research context, research question and my take on executive coaching and leadership development.

3.5 IPA's take on Phenomenology and Hermeneutics

Phenomenology and hermeneutics are two broad theories; detailed examination of these philosophies does not fall within the scope of my study. However, it is important to discuss IPA's take on them to justify its fit for this study and also to brief the reader on the underpinning theoretical influences of the chosen methodology.

Firstly, IPA's take on phenomenology and hermeneutics in general is discussed, followed by the philosophical evaluation (phenomenology and hermeneutics) and, finally, the focus on justifying IPA's fit for my study.

3.5.1 Phenomenology

Phenomenology is the study of lived experience (Van Manen, 1997; Pernecky and Jamal, 2010; Robson, 2011) which is a powerful tool to examine "how individuals subjectively experience and give meaning to a particular phenomenon" (Gill, 2014, p.131). It arose as a philosophy in Germany prior to World War I and has since occupied a prominent position in modern philosophy (Dowling, 2007). Phenomenology has become increasingly popular as a research perspective to study experience in humanistic and social science disciplines (Pernecky and Jamal, 2010).

The goal of phenomenology is to fully describe a lived experience, arguing that only those who experience a particular phenomenon can communicate it to the outside world. Thus, phenomenology answers questions of meaning in understanding an experience from the subjects that have experienced it (Roberts, 2013). Therefore, phenomenology in general is highly relevant and applicable for this study as it attempts

to explore meanings that participants incorporate into their executive coaching experience.

The two main schools of phenomenology - descriptive and intepretative - stem from two German philosophers, Husserl and Heidegger (Smith et al., 2009; Tuohy et al, 2013). These are considered the bases of the diverse views of phenomenology that have been developed by various researchers over the years (Gill, 2014). The challenge that all these authors face is accepting the subjective nature of attributing meaning to an experience (Willig, 2014).

Therefore, IPA "appreciates the collective contribution of scholars such as Husserl, Merleau-Ponty, Heidegger and Sartre to develop a mature, multi-faceted, holistic phenomenology" (Smith, et al., 2009, p.34). Its interest lies in human lived experience where the attempt is to gain a deeper understanding of that experience, by analysing the meaning that they impart to the experiential account (Smith et al., 2009; Wagstaff et al., 2014; Jeong and Othman, 2016). Thus, IPA takes McLeod's view that "understanding is always from a perspective, always a matter of interpretation" (McLeod, 2001, p. 56).

This is implied by Heidegger, who characterised human beings in terms of 'Dasein' which refers to the aspect of our humanness and nature (McLeod, 2011). Larkin et al., (2011, p.8) clarify this further, saying that our very nature is to be somewhere and involved within a meaningful context. Furthermore, emphasising the importance of perspectival directedness of meaning-making, the authors state that "we are always already 'out there' in a meaningful world of this kind, and indeed, meaningfulness is a fundamental part of its constitution". Larkin et al., (2011) hold the notion that the giving of meaning to an experience is always context-sensitive (situated) and human beings are an inseparable part of the world (Grbich, 2007; Palmer et al., 2010). Thus, the nature of existence must be revealed and understand by involvement in the world (Grbich, 2007; Larkin et al., 2011).

IPA complies with the above notions, considering the researcher as part of the meaning-making process. As the researcher, I am actively involved in the IPA research process and co-create meaning/understanding (double hermeneutics) (Smith, 2011; Jeong and Othman, 2016). Some literature (Heidegger, 1962; Van Manen, 1997; Grbich, 2007; Pernecky and Jamal, 2010; Larkin et al., 2011; Roberts, 2013) supports me in this stance and agrees that the understanding is always from a perspective based on the subjects' interpretations.

This stance of IPA complies with Heidegger's (1962) view of the 'person' as embedded and immersed in a world of objects, relationships, language and culture (Smith et al., 2009). Interpretative phenomenology explores lived experiences from the perspective of individuals who interpret their experience in their natural setting (Pernecky and Jamal, 2010). Thus, the focus of IPA is situated personal experience unique to individuals. The experience belongs to our relationship with the world and to others in the subject phenomenon of inquiry (Smith et al., 2009). This was further evident as "understanding occurs through our socially (…) and historically mediated interpretations and relationships with objects and things, and through social meanings contained in language" (Pernecky and Jamal 2010, p.1064).

Therefore, IPA is essentially interpretative but also has roots in descriptive phenomenology as it facilitates participants to provide a reliable account of the phenomenon of investigation from their perspective (of their experience) (Roberts, 2013). The facilitation that IPA provides to express the experience in its own terms with no predefined categories makes it phenomenological, connecting core ideas of phenomenology from various philosophers (Smith, et al., 2009).

3.5.2 Hermeneutics

Hermeneutics is the second major theoretical influence of IPA. It is the theory of interpretation (Smith, 2011; Roberts, 2013; Rodham, et al., 2015). Interpretation is considered as central to understanding in IPA (Clancy, 2013) and involves "the restoration of meaning" (Ricoeur, 1970, p.8).

IPA acknowledges the role of the researcher in making sense of the research participants' particular experience according to the researcher's frame of reference (Smith, 2004; Vicary, et al., 2016). Furthermore, the researcher in IPA studies is considered an important part of developing a coherent research study (Brooke and Horn 2010, cited in Wagstaff and Williams, 2014). Clancy (2013) also recognises the researcher's active role in the sense-making process, described as double hermeneutics, where the researcher makes sense of participants' interpretation of their experience (Smith, 2004; Smith and Osborn, 2008; Clarke, 2009; Pringle et al., 2011, Smith, 2011; Vicary, et al., 2016). Thus, IPA acknowledges that the participant's experience is seen through the researcher's own experientially informed lens.

According to Ricoeur (1970), hermeneutics is based on two schools of thought:

- Hermeneutics of empathy

- Hermeneutics of suspicion (Ricoeur, 1970; Landridge, 2007; Willig, 2014).

Smith, (2004) and Smith et al., (2009) argue that IPA occupies the centre ground where it combines the hermeneutics of empathy with the hermeneutics of questioning. The questioning hermeneutics helps deeper understanding, so moving from description to interpretation (Smith et al., 2009). As in Ricoeur's (1970) original clarification, the hermeneutics of suspicion brings an outside perspective (e.g. psychoanalysis) to understand the phenomenon (Willig, 2014), thereby contradicting IPA where it does not attempt to draw an outside perspective into the phenomenon of investigation (Smith, et al., 2009). I view the use of questioning and empathetic hermeneutics as another form of double hermeneutics which is not discussed clearly within the current literature.

Therefore, the IPA researcher takes an insider perspective (hermeneutics of empathy) (Smith et al., 2009; Smith, 2011) and also attempts to further the understanding through questioning (questioning hermeneutics). It moves away from the participant but the interpretations are always grounded in the text which represents the participant experience (Osborn and Smith, 1998; Smith, et al., 2009; Wagstaff, et al., 2014).

The section above clarifies IPA's position on phenomenology and hermeneutics. Following this explanation, the section below explores how these theoretical underpinnings of IPA tie in closely tie with my study.

3.6 IPA's Theoretical Underpinnings and the Study

The exploration of the executive coaching experience and the way that the leaders interpret their experience closely ties in with the phenomenological and hermeneutic instances of IPA. I recognise the importance of facilitating participants to express their experiential accounts in order to generate an understanding of the ability of executive coaching to develop them. Therefore, I place high emphasis on the personal perspectives and meaning that the individuals incorporate into their executive coaching experience.

Additionally, interpretative phenomenological analysis agrees with Heidegger's notion that phenomenological inquiry is the start of an interpretative process where participants interpret their situated experience of a given phenomenon (executive coaching) which is interpreted by the researcher (Smith and Osborn, 2008; Smith, 2011; Roberts, 2013; Wagstaff et al., 2014). Thus, IPA requires both phenomenological (as it explores subjective experience of executive coaching) and hermeneutic insights, as it has inevitably become an interpretative exercise for both participant and

researcher. My study complies with the concept of exploring individual experiences and developing an interpretative account of the participant interpretations in order to enhance understanding. Therefore, phenomenology and hermeneutics play a significant role in developing understanding and "without phenomenology, there would be nothing to interpret; without hermeneutics, the phenomenon would not be seen" (Smith, et al., 2009, p.37).

To make the phenomenon visible, the study facilitates leaders to elaborate on their experience through two semi-structured interviews conducted in their natural setting. The study recognises that interpretation is vital to understand how a particular phenomenon has been understood by people who experience it in a given context (Larkin et al., 2011). My exploration of leaders' sense-making, and how they give meaning to their executive coaching experience, ties in well with the theory of interpretation (hermeneutics). Furthermore, accepting my role (as the researcher) in the research and the process of co-constructing knowledge, this enquiry complies with double hermeneutics (Pietkeiwicz and Smith, 2012), where the researcher interprets the participants' interpretations of their experience. Therefore, the study possesses a combination of phenomenological and hermeneutic insights (Smith, 2011).

IPA studies are usually pitched at ideographic level as their main focus is on specifics in a given context, not general or universal truths (Pietkeiwicz and Smith, 2012). This study's exploration of first-hand knowledge of the executive coaching experience of individual leaders links my study with ideography (Smith, 2011). I consider the deep individual case explorations before claiming any general views shared by leaders (Pietkeiwicz and Smith, 2012).

In summary, my study is phenomenological as it explores the executive coaching experience. It stands with Heidegger's notion that the inquiry is an interpretative exercise in which both participants and analyst are involved (Jeong and Othman, 2016). Finally, I take the individual leaders' executive coaching experience as the focal interest of the investigation; therefore it follows my ideographic commitments. Thus, IPA is a good approach to address the research question.

The section above justifies the theoretical fit of IPA for the current study. The following section of the chapter explores IPA's fit for the research context and the subjects under investigation.

3.7 IPA's fit for the Study's context and the Subjects

The critical discussion on coaching in the previous chapter concludes that coaching is a social activity (Garvey, 2011) derived from person-centred humanist philosophy (Garvey, 2017) which is qualitatively different from most approaches to leadership development (Ely et al., 2010). The literature review sets out the contextual nature of executive coaching. It also discusses the importance of defining executive coaching in its social context by considering the research question, its aims and objectives. Consequently, the previous discussion in Chapter Two articulated the grounds for the formation of the following definition:

> *"a formal one-to-one collaborative relationship between a client and a coach that facilitates a client becoming a more effective leader"*.

The nature of executive coaching and my interest in individual experience, further justify IPA's fit for this study. Executive coaching is also categorised as relatively new (Nelson et al., 2011) and under-researched (Kilburg, 1996; Feldman and Lankau, 2005; Joo, 2005; Gray et al., 2016; Myers, 2017). This also rationalises the appropriateness of IPA for my study as it is recognised for new and/or under-researched disciplines (Smith et al., 2009; Passmore and Mortimer, 2011). Moreover, the ontological and epistemological instances for the study and philosophical underpinnings of IPA have close ties and honour one another.

Another influential implication of IPA is its clear guidance on theoretical assumptions incorporating clear data collection, unique analysis techniques and the writing up of guidance (Wagstaff et al., 2014) that have invited researchers from many disciplines such as human, social and health science to employ IPA in their studies (Smith et al., 2009). I was overwhelmed with unconditional support from the wider IPA community around the world and given clear guidance on the research process, ranging from question formation to the write up. Therefore, for me, incorporating IPA for my research gradually became an informed decision.

3.8 Incorporating IPA and realising its fit with the Study

I came across IPA through an internet search on qualitative research methodologies at the very early stages of my research. My first impression was that IPA had great potential for my study. Initially, I did not have a clear research question and also had confusing thoughts on social research philosophies. Therefore, I delayed further exploration into this qualitative methodology. However, my subscription to the IPA

research discussion group on Yahoo, which is a global network of IPA researchers, helped me to develop my understanding.

The continuous group discussions helped me to grasp the basic idea of IPA and the sources to refer to in order to master it. Near to the completion of the first year of the study, I realised that IPA went well with my research interest and the nature of the subjects under investigation. Dr. Michael Larkin, one of the co-authors of the main IPA text available to date, also extended his support for my study which enhanced my confidence. Gradually, I developed a good network with IPA researchers internationally. My continuous exposure to IPA literature, analysis of various published papers and engagement with the London IPA research group were also helpful and further enhanced my knowledge. As discussed, executive coaching is still considered relatively new and under-researched (Myers, 2017) and IPA is popular for such disciplines (Smith et al., 2009). This also influences my decision to incorporate IPA into this study.

The available support, and my improved understanding of IPA, helped me to employ a unique study design and confidently incorporate IPA into my study, thus establishing uniqueness among coaching researchers. Smith et al., (2009) call such designs 'bolder designs in IPA' which I discuss below.

3.9 A Bolder Design

Most IPA studies employ a simplistic design and follow the general guidance published in IPA literature. These studies recruit a small, homogenous sample and collect data on a single occasion (Smith et al., 2009). However, Smith et al., (2009) accept the possibility of being more adventurous with the methodology.

Taking the challenge forward, some authors, for example, Clare (2002) and Larkin and Griffith (2004), explore one phenomenon from multiple perspectives. Others (Barr and McConkey, 2007; Wagstaff and Williams, 2014), conduct two interviews with each participant. One study, Spiers, et al., (2016), undertakes three interviews in a longitudinal study. Furthermore, Clare (2003) explores multiple perspectives and conducts two interviews with each participant. To the best of my knowledge, these represent the extent of the bolder designs thus far in IPA. Therefore, the scarcity of these bolder designs is a clear demonstration that IPA researchers often tend to go with quite simple designs in terms of justification, analysis and write up.

My study is an example of a bolder design which is an innovation for IPA. For example, I explore both coachees' and coaches' perspective of the coachees' development. Moreover, I conducted two semi-structured interviews with each participant intending to collect more details on the responses given to the first interview questions (Clare, 2003; Smith, et al., 2009). My exploration of both coach and coachee perspective is an innovative and good credibility check for the study (Elliot, et al., 1999) and two interviews enabled me to get closer to the individual experience of the participants and act as an important internal reliability check (Jeong and Othman, 2016). For this reason, mine is a unique design which could be considered as the only study of its type in executive coaching.

3.10 Finding the Research Site

The research site was found as the result of a chance meeting during the 3rd International Coaching and Mentoring Research Conference organised by the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC) in Dublin in 2013.

The case study organisation is one of the largest financial conglomerates in the United Kingdom. It appears to have a coaching culture with high commitment and support from the organisation's senior managers. I learned that creating a coaching culture for the organisation is a strategic management imperative. Coaching is embedded into the organisation's leadership development programme and is well received by the employees and the managers. The study participants are insiders of the coaching culture within the case study organisation. Coaching appears to be integral to their day-to-day management and leadership discourses and has priority over other leadership developmental interventions. The whole organisation seems to have a very positive perception of executive coaching as a leadership development intervention. Most senior managers have had, or currently have, an executive coach. The intention of this initiative is developmental rather than remedial. The organisation employs both internal and external coaches for this purpose.

Therefore, I was highly convinced as to the suitability of the research site to gather the required qualitative data for the study. The research site organisation guaranteed that the site had sufficient resources to choose an appropriate sample of people (coachees and coaches) for interpretative phenomenological analysis (discussed below). In addition, there was ease of access, support from the gate keeper and the cost of data collection, being relatively local to me, made the site more feasible for the project.

Gaining a research site and approved ethical clearance for the study facilitated me to move forward. The next few sections of the chapter discuss the characteristics of the sample recruited and then describe the way the sampling is undertaken. These actions are informed by the IPA guidelines (Smith et al., 2009; Wagstaff et al., 2014).

3.11 Sampling in Qualitative Research and the Study

Sample selection is of paramount importance in qualitative research as it profoundly impacts on the quality of research outcomes (Gray, 2014). In qualitative research, non-probability sampling is used predominantly with the aim of generating robust, rich and in-depth qualitative data through selected respondents (Grbich, 2007; Gray, 2016). The validity of qualitative research has more to do with rich information but not with the numbers or the wider representation (Patton, 1999; 2002). In qualitative sampling, more emphasis is placed on representing the phenomenon of the study rather than representing the population (Smith, et al., 2009). Attempting population representation is a misunderstanding of the qualitative research tradition (Marshall, 1996; Marshall et al., 2013).

In this research, I do not aim to generalise the findings to a wider population but rather to present a deeper understanding of how executive coaching works in a case study organisation. Thus, numbers are not a concern but the quality and the depth of the gathered data is crucial. My philosophical assumptions for the study, methodology and the research question also comply with the high emphasis on the quality of qualitative data rather than the quantity. Therefore, I employed a homogeneous, small sample for the study. Homogeneity ensures the representation of the phenomenon of investigation (executive coaching experience) and the small sample size helps the researcher to go deeper into the participants' experiences (Smith, 2004; Roberts, 2013; Wagstaff and Williams, 2014; Gray, 2017). The next section discusses the criteria employed to ensure that the sample is as homogeneous as possible, as required by IPA (Smith, et al., 2009).

3.11.1 Homogeneous Sample for the Study

I consider that the homogeneity of the sample is important in order to understand the phenomenon as it is shared. I was influenced by Gray (2014) in recognising the importance of selecting a sample that shares a common experience of executive coaching for leadership development. Therefore, I give more emphasis to 'perspective representation' than 'population representation' (Gray, 2014) when selecting leaders (participants) for my study.

In addition, various IPA researchers, for example, Smith, et al., (2009); Pietkeiwicz and Smith (2012); Roberts (2013); Wagstaff et al., (2014), Wagstaff and Williams (2014), all emphasise the importance of homogeneous samples for IPA studies in order to realise themes from a specific group of people who have a particular shared experience.

By selecting a case study organisation and also by recruiting the leaders with the highest possible seniority within the organisation, I attempted to recruit the best possible homogeneous sample for the study. It is important to recognise that full and total homogeneity is not practical in this study, but according to Clarke (2009), Smith et al., (2009) and Roberts (2013), this is justifiable. However, I made no compromises on quality. For example, I considered the ethical implications carefully so that all participants were respected equally and treated similarly. I did not consider the levels of education, race, ethnicity, cultural background, religious beliefs, age, sexual orientation, gender or political belief to be important in deciding the homogeneity of the sample.

I made the selection solely because the participants could give me a particular perspective on their experience. This fits with Smith, et al., (2009, p.49) when they note that "they represent a perspective (…) not a population"; thus, by including the most senior leadership, I can bring further homogeneity to the sample because all the study's participants are based in the head office of the case study organisation.

Once the issues with homogeneity were dealt with, my next concern was to determine the number of participants. There is a general tendency to look for population representation and therefore to recruit large samples in line with the dominant positivistic perspectives in research (Marshall, 1996; Gray, 2017). In my view, the idea of large populations among qualitative researchers has historically been mistakenly implanted by positivist researchers (Marshall, 1996).

I struggled with the positivistic dominance in my own mind at the initial stages of this decision-making process. However, due to understanding the concepts behind qualitative research in general, and IPA in particular, I shifted my focus to the quality and the depth of the information rather than the quantity. With that notion in mind, the section below explores the size of the selected sample and its fit with the philosophical and theoretical underpinnings of the research.

3.11.2 Sample Size

"Qualitative researchers often fail to understand the usefulness of studying small samples" (Marshall, 1996, p.523), according to Marshall (1996), which is due to a general misconception that generalisability is the definitive objective of any good research. Marshall (1996) goes on to say that the appropriate size of the sample of a qualitative study is one which adequately answers the research question. That said, he indicates that there are no pre-defined rules for sample sizes to be employed in qualitative studies. This is reiterated by Gray (2014, 2009) saying that unlike quantitative research, qualitative research uses small sample sizes or even a single case (N=1). Easterby-Smith, et al., (2015) supports Gray's notion by suggesting that a small sample should be chosen for specific reasons.

Studies that have a nomothetic aim are quite reliant on the sample size whereas research within an ideographic tradition aims to have a small sample size (Robinson, 2014) because qualitative research does not attempt to develop universal theories or construct objective realities that are value free (Gray, 2017). Thus, "the absence of randomisation, generalisation or large sample is in (…) this research (…) is because they are constructs of a positivist tradition" (Hennink et al., 2011, p.8). In addition, employing sample sizes to generate statistical representation undermines the rationale behind the qualitative research as it decreases the opportunity of in-depth analysis (Yardley, 2000). Furthermore, IPA focuses on giving full appreciation to each participant account, so as to facilitate detailed case-by-case, in-depth analysis; therefore, samples for IPA studies are small (Pietkeiwicz and Smith, 2012; Fox and Diab, 2015).

Therefore, my study employs a relatively small (seven participants) sample which is as homogeneous as possible. My decision is supported by the focus of IPA research on a "detailed account of individual experience" (Smith et al., 2009, p.51). The seven participants comprise five coachees and two coaches.

After evaluating qualitative sampling strategies and the strategies specified for IPA studies (Smith, 2011; Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2012; Roberts, 2013), purposive sampling is selected for the study. Smith, et al., (2009, p.48) justify this decision, saying that "sampling must be theoretically consistent with the qualitative paradigm in general, and with IPA in particular; this means that samples are selected purposefully". Purposive sampling is discussed in the following section.

3.11.3 Justification for Purposive Sampling

A purposive sample is a subset of a larger population which is non-representative (Robinson, 2014; Gray, 2017) and is constructed using *a priori* understanding of the study, and knowing that the selected categories of individuals may have unique, important or different perspectives on the phenomenon under study (Mason, 2002). Purposive samples are employed where researchers explore more complex human issues/experience in their particular contexts; the focus is on improved understanding rather than generalisability (Hennink et al., 2011; McLeod, 2011; Robson, 2011).

In addition, this sampling strategy allows researchers to choose cases that demonstrate unique features or processes that are of interest to the investigation (Silverman, 2013) and relevant to the research question (Bryman and Bell, 2015). Purposive sampling is selected in order to have a "small number of cases chosen for a specific reason" (Easterby-Smith, et al., 2015, p.53). The specific reason behind the decision was to deepen the understanding of how executive coaching works by exploring the experience of individual leaders. Purposive sampling facilitates this need.

Moreover, purposive sampling facilitates access to key informants in a given phenomenon who can provide information-rich, in-depth information related to the area under study (Suri, 2011), so that "patterns and meanings can be identified" (Gray, 2014, p.229). As highlighted above, richness and depth of data are also primary to answering the research question; therefore, purposive sampling is used to select a small homogeneous sample, and the selection is based on the researcher's judgement (Gray, 2017).

The section above on sampling discusses the importance of a small, homogeneous and purposively selected sample for the study. It justifies the appropriateness of sampling technique for the chosen methodology. Therefore, the study complies with IPA's "commitment to understand how a particular experiential phenomenon (an event, process or relationship) has (…) been understood from the perspective of particular people in a particular context" (Smith, et al., 2009, p.29).

Once the decisions related to sampling were made, I went on to recruit my study participants through the process explained below.

3.12 Recruiting Participants and Data Collection

In this phase of the study, I put the devised strategies into practice (Robson, 2011). Here, the process was easier as the decision on the research site, sample universe, provisional number of participants and the sample strategy were finalised.

Participant recruitment was quite straightforward. I explained the research idea to the gate keeper over the telephone and through a formal email. Then, the research idea was communicated to the potential participants by the gate keeper. Consequently, the contact details of the leaders who agreed to voluntarily participate were passed to me.

I contacted participants directly via email. Four coachees and a coach were recruited for the study initially and the dates were agreed for the first interview with each participant. Due to practical considerations, I recruited another coachee and a coach, resulting in seven participants. The idea was to maximise the amount of data as a precaution against the insecurities I felt because of the relatively small number of participants. However, I kept the idea of depth and the quality at the forefront of the study.

At this juncture, I was quite clear about the study's data collection method. The method was influenced by the philosophical stances; methodology and the research question, as highlighted above (Wagstaff and Williams, 2014). Thus, I selected the semi-structured interview format. The section below justifies the use of this technique.

3.12.1 The Method

Semi-structured one-to-one interviews tend to be the most preferred and widely used method to facilitate in-depth data generation (Reid et al., 2005; Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2012). Further to this, Smith et al., (2009, p.4) support the view that "the data collection is usually (but not necessarily) in the form of semi-structured interviews".

My study's explorative nature and interest in the contextual and subjective experience suggests that interviews are one of the best methods to collect the required data (Gray, 2014). Furthermore, I considered the attributes of the data required as the foundation to decide on the data collection method (Richards, 2011). Richards (2011) emphasises 'fluid', 'rich', 'complex', 'naturalistic', and 'in-depth' as the key words accompanying qualitative data that are highly attributable to the data required for this study. Richards (2011) highlights these attributes as the foundation to making the decision on the method; furthermore, he emphasises the importance of making data valuable, relevant

and useful to the research question. These demands place semi-structured interviews as a highly viable method for the study.

Moreover, taking into account the requirements of IPA as the research methodology, the research question itself, and the need to gain a rich, detailed, first-hand executive coaching experience of the participants (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2012), means that the participants must be allowed sufficient space to express their concerns at length (Callary, et al., 2015). Additionally, I conducted two sets of face-to-face interviews for each participant. The first round was approximately 45 minutes to 1 hour and the second round was 25 minutes to 40 minutes in duration. Although, I had some doubts at the beginning as to the depth and amount of data gathered, I realised during transcription that the data were large and rich.

The section below discusses the interview schedule for the data collection and the purpose of having such a schedule.

3.12.2 Interview Schedule

The aim of preparing a schedule (see Appendices 2 and 3) for the interviews is to facilitate a comfortable interaction with the participant (Smith et al., 2009). Such interactions are demanded by the study in order to facilitate participants to bring forward their story. Moreover, Smith and Osborn (2008) argue that producing an interview schedule helps the researcher to think through the issues/difficulties that might be encountered and facilitate space to think how these might be handled. In addition, they emphasise that these prior thoughts about the interview may help to place more emphasis on what the respondents are actually saying.

I considered the overall focus of the discussion, the most logical order in which to address the key areas and the appropriate questions that were important in designing the schedule (Smith and Osborn, 2008). The schedule was developed by reflecting on the feedback given by my supervisors on the initial drafts. I kept my verbal input to a minimum in order to facilitate the participant's story of their executive coaching experience (Smith et al., 2009). I piloted the finalised schedule to familiarise myself with the research context and the interview process. Thus, the section below briefly discusses the pilot run of the developed schedule.

3.12.3 Pilot Study

"Piloting is the practice of trialling your research instrument prior to gathering your data, and is widely recommended in research" (Farquhar, 2012, p.43).

Trialling the research instruments, as Farquhar (2012) states, is considered important due to the nature, depth and the quality of the qualitative data required in addressing the research question. Another objective of the pilot study was for me to learn how to put the participant at the centre of the data collection process, facilitating them to talk through their experience with the minimum possible distraction (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2012). Piloting, as Pietkiewicz and Smith (2011) emphasise, helped me to develop my active listening abilities, to generate open-ended questions and to build a good rapport to gain participants' trust. Hence, I organised three pilot interviews prior to the actual data collection.

Two interviews (coachees) were conducted at York St John University and one was undertaken via Skype with a coach. I informed the participants that the interviews were carried out as a trial and I asked them to provide feedback at the end so that I could learn from them. I also reflected on my experience of conducting interviews to learn and further develop my skills. In addition, I had a few discussions with employee resourcing experts to get their insights into how they facilitate more space for their interviewees to talk freely. The pilot runs helped to generate quality data for the study as they were a great learning experience. My experience in conducting interviews in employee resourcing in two different industries was also helpful to ensure the quality of the gathered data.

The next section discusses the overall data analysis. Firstly, it discusses how the data are transcribed, and then describes the steps followed in the data analysis, ensuring further transparency into the research process.

3.13 Data Analysis

The literature on data analysis in IPA does not recommend any single method of data analysis (Biggerstaff and Thompson, 2008; Smith and Osborn 2008; Smith, et al., 2009; Pringle et al., 2011). Despite the claim by the majority that there is no guidance around this matter, a number of authors have outlined some guidance for novice researchers to familiarise themselves with the IPA data analysis (discussed below). Pietkeiwicz and Smith (2012, p.366) describe these guidelines as a flexible set of instructions which can be adapted according to the research objectives and they are "merely (…) illustrations of one possible way of analysing the qualitative material".

The analysis is bottom up where the researcher generates codes from the raw data (McLeod, 2011), so that the study is inductive (Smith, 2007; Bryman and Bell, 2015; Gray, 2017). There is no testing involved here and the main aim of the analysis is to

give full appreciation to each participant's account, respecting the ideographic commitments of IPA (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2012). The analytical account is built around a "dialogue between the researchers, their coded data, and psychological knowledge, what it might mean for the participants to have these concerns, in (…) the context of the research" (Smith, et al., 2009, p.79).

The analysis comprises a set of common processes that move from particular (account specific commitments) to the shared (common themes generated through the cross analysis) and also from description to interpretation where researchers' interpretations become incorporated into the gathered data (double hermeneutics) (Reid et al., 2005). This is where the above-discussed empathetic and questioning hermeneutics come into play. I adopted the guideline suggested by Smith, et al., (2009) considering the ease, practicality and the wide acceptance of these guidelines within the scholarly IPA community. The data analysis process is discussed below in detail following a brief discussion on data transcriptions.

3.13.1 Transcriptions and Data Analysis

I transcribed the data collected and this helped me to get closer to the participant's experience (Smith, et al., 2009). It was quite challenging and time consuming. However, it was useful to ensure the quality and to help me get to know the individual cases more closely before moving to the detailed analysis. The transcriptions were verbatim records generated through recorded semi-structured interviews. I listened to the recordings several times as part of the transcription process. During this exercise, I quite often paused the audio recording, and went back a few minutes to re-capture what the participants were saying. This helped me to be closer to the individual cases before starting the analysis process.

Following guidance from Dr. Larkin (one of the contributors to the key text on IPA) through the IPA Yahoo group, I collected all data and completed the transcriptions prior to the analysis. This seems to be common practice; literature on this issue is quite obscure and there is little critique on ensuring ideographic commitments through completing a case (interview-transcription-analysis and even write up) before moving to the next. In my view, this would have been an ideal way to ensure ideographic commitments, however the process adopted was more practical.

I completed the data transcriptions before moving to the data analysis; however, as noted above, my decision to do the transcription myself generated a greater familiarity with the cases which helped me immensely in the initial steps of the analysis process.

Having transcribed all the interviews, I moved to the analysis. The process I followed for data analysis is discussed below.

3.13.2 The Process of Data Analysis

I looked at the analytical procedures followed by various authors, for example, Osborn and Smith (1998, p.68); Fade (2004, p.650); Biggerstaff and Thompson (2008, p.218); Smith and Osborn (2008, p.67); Palmer et al., (2010, p.103); Cope (2011, p.611); Pietkiewicz and Smith (2012, p.367); Jeong and Othman (2016, p.562) in their IPA studies. A critical evaluation of these papers helped me to understand the overall data analysis process to a greater extent. In comparison, the approaches followed by these authors were quite similar to the guidelines mentioned above. Therefore, the current literature contains examples of guidelines, despite the claims made by some authors (Biggerstaff and Thompson 2008; Smith and Osborn 2008; Pringle et al, 2011) that no specific guidelines exist. Moreover, Smith et al.'s (2009) text appears as the most recognised text in IPA. I sought guidance as to how to proceed with my analysis from Smith et al., (2009). The section below explains the process outlined by the authors.

Reading and re-reading - The analysis process started with listening to the recorded voices of individuals. This helped me to obtain insights and awareness of the participant's world. The process of continued listening and re-reading helps deeper understanding of the case (Rodham et al., 2015). I then made initial notes (discussed below). I listened for a fourth time while the reading of the transcript and the initial coding were done in parallel. The process helped to make the participant central to the analysis and also to "slow down our habitual propensity for quick and dirty reduction and synopsis" (Smith et al., 2009, p.82).

Initial noting - I divided the transcript into three columns, exploring the options available to ease the analysis process. The final format arose after evaluating Smith, et al.'s (2009) suggestions and exploring how others carried out their analysis, which facilitates the researcher to develop initial notes closely linked to the actual transcripts (see figure 3.1).

1091 **12.07: D: Great ! and again may be, you have the same**	
1092 **answer for that. I feel bit more calmer, less stressed, and I**	
1093 **have more space to think about things, (12.19: IC:** (Absolutely sound highly confident)
1094 Absolutely). **So after coaching, you have this, or you had this,**	
1095 **so again if you could explain in aa…**	
1096 12.27: IC: Ya.. that is you usually go into coaching with the ..	Talk through the challenges
1097 here is some challenges that I want to talk about, the	What executive coaching done, is to help him to
1098 challenges that would be (12.35: not clear) away, mind	have time to think on things. Reflecting, evaluating
1099 somewhere what I am going to do about this, how I am going	and getting into an action plan.
1100 to do this and I think through exploring these challenges in	
1101 the coaching session , I nearly always come out with much	Exploring the challenges, bring clarity and clear
1102 more clarity about the issue and some clear actions to take.	action plans.
1103	
1104 So often, I talked about this really, you have forgoing stuff	
1105 going around your head and no time to really clear it though a	I feel bit calmer, less stressed, have more space to
1106 coaching session, you can clear that and have clear actions	think, - Participants came up with these as results
1107 and as a results feel much more clearer and much more in	of executive coaching. Here is very confident that
1108 control and much calmer about the situations, sort of (13.07,	has got them through executive
1109 not clear) I know what I gonna do about it and understand	
1110 why, I just gonna do it and just that chance to have that step	Participant has always takes things to discuss in
1111 back and have that conversation eem , you can do that and	coaching sessions. Has always come out with much
1112 then that is quite liberating. Sometimes you can get loss (	more clarity on them and some clear action plans.
1113 13.29: Not clear) and the things is issues multiply and can	Executive coaching brings clarity and helps to put
1114 become bigger than that they really are and through a	up a clear action plans

Figure 3.1 Initial Notes

The participants' descriptions of their experience, their use of language and also conceptual comments (Smith, et al., 2009; Jeong and Othman, 2016) are highlighted by Smith et al., (2009) as important to understand and capture the participants' interpretations. By exploring the participants' descriptions, and the language and conceptual comments, I was able to incorporate a more interpretative account into the participant experience of executive coaching. At this juncture, I employed Ricoeur's (1970) empathetic hermeneutics. However, as suggested by Smith et al., (2009), I deviated from Ricoeur's notion of suspicious hermeneutics by employing questioning hermeneutics. This helped me to give priority to the participant experience and to avoid bringing in external perspectives. This rigorous process of analysis, deeper immersion with the original data, and different levels of interpretation generated throughout the analysis process help IPA to go beyond a simple thematic analysis (Brocki and Wearden, 2006).

I also spent considerable time with the Yahoo IPA discussion group, at London IPA group meetings and in individual discussions with IPA experts to generate a better understanding of interpretation in IPA and the analysis process. Most importantly, I was committed to learn and not rush through the cases simply to finish the analysis. Smith et al.'s (2009) notion of 'quick and dirty reduction' alerted me to be aware of that possibility which I believe made a significant contribution to improving the quality of the analysis.

Developing emergent themes – In this phase, I captured the essential features of the initial comments (Jeong and Othman, 2016) to help to transform them into themes. I looked carefully at the comments and continued to use questioning and empathetic hermeneutics to develop themes (Fade, 2004; Smith et al., 2009). Here, the shift discussed above by Reid et al., (2005) from 'description' to 'interpretations' occurred as themes were generated through my interpretation of participants' interpretative accounts. Thus, the double-hermeneutics discussed previously in more theoretical terms were put into practice in this phase. I organised these themes in the fourth column of the transcript (see figure 3.2).

In this phase of the analysis I recognised a move away from the original transcript. At this point, I started working more with the comment I made at the previous step of the analysis process rather than the actual words of the participant (original transcript).

1091	12.07: D: Great ! and again may be, you have the same			1091
1092	answer for that. I feel bit calmer, less stressed, and I have			1092
1093	more space to think about things, (12.19: IC: Absolutely). So	(Absolutely sound highly confident)		1093
1094	after coaching, you have this, or you had this, so again if you			1094
1095	could explain in aa…		Air out challenges	1095
1096	12.27: IC: Ya.. that is you usually go into coaching with the ..	Talk through the challenges	Create space to think	1096
1097	here is some challenges that I want to talk about, the	What executive coaching done, is to help him to	Reflecting	1097
1098	challenges that would be (12.35: not clear) away, mind	have time to think on things. Reflecting, evaluating	Self-evaluation	1098
1099	somewhere what I am going to do about this, how I am going	and getting into an action plan.	Get things into action	1099
1100	to do this and I think through exploring these challenges in			1100
1101	the coaching session , I nearly always come out with much	Exploring the challenges, bring clarity and clear		1101
1102	more clarity about the issue and some clear actions to take.	action plans.		1102
1103			More space to think	1103
1104	So often, I talked about this really, you have forgoing stuff		Less stressed	1104
1105	going around your head and no time to really clear it though a	I feel bit calmer, less stressed, have more space to	Calm	1105
1106	coaching session, you can clear that and have clear actions	think, - Participants came up with these as results	Highly confident	1106
1107	and as a results feel much more clearer and much more in	of executive coaching. Here is very confident that	Get the control	1107
1108	control and much calmer about the situations, sort of (13.07,	has got them through executive		1108
1109	not clear) I know what I gonna do about it and understand		Discussion for clarity	1109
1110	why, I just gonna do it and just that chance to have that step	Participant has always takes things to discuss in	Clear action plans	1110
1111	back and have that conversation eem , you can do that and	coaching sessions. Has always come out with much		1111
1112	then that is quite liberating. Sometimes you can get loss (	more clarity on them and some clear action plans.		1112
1113	13.29: Not clear) and the things is issues multiply and can	Executive coaching brings clarity and helps to put	Conversation brings	1113
1114	become bigger than that they really are and through a	up a clear action plans	confident.	1114

Figure 3.2 Initial Theme Generation and Moving Away from Raw Data

However, there were quite a lot of instances where it was helpful to go back to the source. This is recognised by IPA and is part of the hermeneutic circle where the parts are explored to form the whole (Smith, et al., 2009).

By searching for connections across emergent themes, my involvement and subjective judgement played a significant role at this stage (Smith, et al., 2009) as I mapped themes and explored their close links. The process involves techniques such as abstraction (putting like with like and developing a new name for the cluster),

submission (an emergent theme itself claims to be a superordinate theme), contextualisation (trying to identify contextual and narrative elements) and numeration (the frequency with which a theme is supported). However, considering the research interest and the subjective nature of the study, numeration is not given high prominence (Smith et al., 2009). This is depicted via the superordinate themes 'tackling problems and 'organisational agenda'. The numeration of these themes was comparatively low but they were still relevant to the study (see figure 3.3).

Themes	Page/Line
1. **Development**	
Open for development	1.10
Challenges as development opportunities	1.35/36
Eager to develop and advance	3.71/72
Challenges as development	3.92
Ensuring readiness	3.96
Act on development	3.97
Learning from everything	3.98
Support for new role	9.272
Theories to develop	10.315
Informed choices on training opportunities	16.524/5
Development through greater understanding	33.1058/9
Reflection for development	37.1210
Self-development	38.1245
Push you further to achieve	38.1250
2. **Desire to Learn**	
Learning from everything	3.98
Up-to-date with industry demands and knowledge	4.105/6
Keen to learn	4.109
Ready to absorb knowledge	4.108
3. **Leadership**	

Figure 3.3 Initial Grouping of Themes

I looked at the initial groups of themes and then continued to explore their further convergence (uniformity) and divergence (deviations). Page numbers and line numbers are recorded to ensure their links to the actual experience of the participants. As a result of further exploration of the above-tabulated themes (figure 3.3) in line with my research question, the finalised themes for the first case analysis were developed (see figure 3.4). This exercise of bringing it together pushes "the analysis to a higher level" (Smith et al., 2009, p.99) of interpretation.

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Themes	Page/Line
Motivation for Development	1.10,,3.71/2,3.97,38.1250,3.98,4.105/6,4.109,4.108,1.57,3.85/6,1.10,3.83,3.93,4.100 3.67
Challenging relationship for Development	1.35/66,3.92,16.,12.373/4,15.462,29.938,29.939,5.155,9.277,11.337,12.372,5.158/9
Supportive Relationship for Development	5.142,5.148,6.178,6.196,9.282,10.327,11.336,12.364,12.371,19.615,22.709,17.551,26 .844,5.135,5.141,
Trusting Relationship for Development	5.148,5.154,7.207/8,8.239,8.240,14.450,18.573,18.577,18.581,18.584,21.688,30.982, 5.136,5.140,18.573
Development Through Greater Clarity and Understanding	16.524/5,33.1058/9,21.675/6,22.711,25.812/3,25.814/5,27.869/70,28.904,28.905,31. 993,33.1056/7,33.1080/3,38.1232/3,6.176,10.323,11.333,11.360,12.365,12.369/70,1 7.560,19.597,19.604,19.605/6,20.629,22.703,32.1030,32.1031/2,32.1048/9,33.1084,3 4.1111,36.1159,38.1238,2.65,29.926,33.1078,22.709,22.718,19.618
Developmental Relationship	9.276
Development Through Self-Understanding	34.1117/8,34.1120,36.1170,37.1213/4,4.111,5.138,5.152/3,7.221,7.223,11.351,25.81 0/11,5.150,8.233/4,16.512,17.544,4.114,7.221,8.233/4
Development Through Reflection	37.1210,12.389,4.110,7.230,10.320/1,10.320/1,10.325/6,11.340,11.341,11.342/3,12. 380 13 426 17 550 21 674 27 881 27 883 29 927 31 1004 33 1062 35 1123 37 1196

Figure 3.4 Finalised Themes for the first Case Analysis

Once the first case analysis had been finalised, I moved to the next case. The section below briefly discusses this stage.

Moving to the next case – Once I had generated the superordinate theme table for the first case analysis, I realised the depth of information that had been collected through semi-structured interviews. Considering the importance of giving substantial time for each case analysis, and as my aim is to deepen understanding, my supervisors and I collectively decided to drop two cases (two coachees). I used my subjective judgment and prioritised 'richness' (Smith et al., 2009) in selecting the two cases to drop from the study. Thus, the actual participant numbers came down to five (ten interviews). Then I moved to the next case and followed the same procedure as above. IPA highlights the importance of "treating (…) the next case on its own terms, to do justice to its own individuality" (Smith, et al., 2009, p.100) by bracketing the ideas that emerged from the previous case. I gave priority to the next case and immersed myself in data through continuous listening, reading and re-reading rather than attempting to bracket (see section 3.13.3).

This continuous engagement created more familiarity with the current experiential account than the previous account. A two to three day break from each case analysis also helped to me to distance myself from the previous case analysis. However, IPA accepts that the analyst (the researcher) "will inevitably be influenced by what you have already found" (Smith, et al., 2009, p.100). Conversely, Smith and colleagues argue that following the steps outlined for the analysis facilitates the generation of unique

themes for each case. Therefore, I revised my understanding of the data analysis process after each case analysis, mainly referring to my notes and the main IPA text. I made every possible effort to ensure that each experiential account was treated with due respect.

Looking for patterns across cases – The cross-analysis of cases was undertaken after the individual case analysis. I searched for possible combinations across cases by exploring themes that complement each other, and also for the most powerful themes in terms of representation, and those that answer the research question (see figure 3.5).

```
Master Table of Themes for Coachees

   A.  Motivation for development
       Mark
       Motivation for development
       David
       Motivation to develop self
       Daniel
       Motivation to develop
       All three participants support this super-ordinate themes
   B.  Unique Development Approach
       Mark
       Unique approach for development , Empathetic Approach , Empowering the individual
       David
       Unique Approach to Develop , Coachee led development , Finding solutions within
       Daniel
       Individualised learning and Development , Relevant Development, Non-directive
       intervention
       David and Mark directly supports this theme and 'Individualised learning and Development'
       illuminate this theme

   C.  Development Through Self-Understanding
       Mark
       Improved Self-awareness, self-awareness for development
```

Figure 3.5 Cross Analysis

Reconfiguring and/or re-labelling superordinate themes were part of this exercise. I finalised the coachee analysis including cross cases before moving to the coaches. I tabulated the superordinate themes once the analysis from both coachee and coach analysis were complete. I looked continuously for any connections across the group to produce a set of superordinate themes. It is important to note here that the bases for superordinate themes were original annotations from individual participants (generated through empathetic and questioning hermeneutics). The superordinate themes were then transferred to a narrative account which engages several levels of interpretation (Smith et al., 2009; Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2012). The developed narrative forms the base which addresses the research question.

I selected the first case for analysis by obeying the statement that "It can be helpful to start with the interview that you found to be most detailed, complex and engaging"

(Smith, et al., 2009, p.82). Following this guidance helps to "minimise (…) analyst's [my] anxiety, confusion and reduce the risks of feeling overwhelmed by the process of analysis" (Smith et al., 2009, p.81). In turn, this helped me to keep my attention with the case analysis and to remain focused. I spent a considerable time (average one and a half months) with each case knowing the importance of immersing myself in each individual case. The first case analysis was the most time consuming but provided the greatest learning of all. I was tentative in moving to the next case as I had doubts about the completion of the first case analysis. Nevertheless, continued help from supervisors, IPA researchers and IPA groups (Yahoo and London) enhanced my understanding of subjective judgment and decisions and facilitated me to continue my analysis with confidence.

3.13.3 Ideographic commitments in IPA and Data Analysis

"The analysis must be conducted thoroughly and systematically and with IPA; there must be a sufficient ideographic engagement" (Smith, et al., 2009, p.18). Following this notion, I attempted to incorporate ideography into the analysis process, which is discussed below.

Once the first case analysis was completed, it was quite important that I bracketed the themes which emerged in order to retain the ideographic commitments (Smith, et al., 2009). The idea was to treat the next case on its own terms and safeguard the individuality of each case; I attempted to maintain this restriction to keep in line with the ideographic commitments of IPA.

I accept that it is difficult to eradicate the influences from what I had already discovered. However, Smith, et al., (2009, p.100) argue that "taking off those influences from previous analysis is always an important skill in IPA in allowing new themes to emerge with each case". However, the IPA literature also argues that the analysis is a dialogue between the data and the researcher (Smith, 2004; Larkin et al., 2006; Palmer et al., 2010). Therefore, I took quite a positive perspective on bracketing rather than taking the traditional view of exploring the purest form of the phenomenon of interest and considering the known influences and biases and acknowledging them as a form of bracketing (Finlay, 2009). By taking this view of bracketing, more emphasis was given to the "positive process of engaging with the (…) data than the process of bracketing prior concerns, in the sense that the skilful attention to the former inevitably facilitates the latter" (Smith, et al., 2009, p.35). In turn, this helps the analyst to keep the research within the tenets of the ideographic commitments of IPA. Therefore, the approach I took towards bracketing fits well with my study.

Moreover, I completed the coachee cases, including cross analysis, before moving to consider the coaches. Thus, I gave the perspectives of the coachees and coaches individualised attention. I also considered ideography when writing up. Smith, et al., (2009, p.109) suggest two options, noting that "the most orderly sequence is to take each theme in turn and present evidence from each participant to support each theme (case within theme). Sometimes, however, it could be that one favours an ideographic presentation where the participant is prioritised and themes for each person are presented together (themes within case)". I followed the former approach considering the ease of supporting each theme using the individual accounts. However, by incorporating transcript extracts to the writing up from case to case and completing the study of coachee participants before moving to coaches, I attempted, to the best of my ability, to give individualised attention to the cases and to the two different studies.

3.14 Ethical Considerations of the Study

Qualitative research is inevitably involved with people (human subjects), and thus ethical issues should be given key consideration (Silverman, 2013; Easterby-Smith et al., 2015; Gray, 2017). Associated issues as a result of the Involvement with people have also been highlighted by Gray (2014) in qualitative research to emphasise the importance of ethics. My study is no exception to this rule.

Therefore, I sought to understand the serious ethical considerations for the project from its inception. I took ethical concerns, such as privacy, protection from harm (physical or mental to the researched, the researcher and the wider stakeholders), informed consent and voluntary participation (Gray, 2014; Bryman and Bell, 2015) into consideration.

The present study addresses ethical issues, firstly by seeking ethical approval from the University ethics committee. The committee evaluated the potential risks (mental, physical, social etc.) associated with the project for the participants, researcher, the University and the wider stakeholders in granting ethical approval for the project.

Once ethical approval had been obtained, I initiated the plan for field work. The participant consent form was drafted (Appendix 1) and improved following the University research ethics guidance. Then the consent form was reviewed by both supervisors. Based on the feedback given and following Gray's (2014) advice, I improved the form further prior to the actual use.

The research and its aims were initially fully explained to the gate keeper at the first meeting and then over the phone. Nearer the time of the data collection, the same was done via an email which was shared with the potential participants. I explained the research to the participants who had signalled their voluntary support for the study and re-emphasised their expected commitment. Once both parties were clear, I set up the meetings for the actual data collection.

At the start of each interview, I clearly explained the purpose of the research and offered further explanations if clarification was required, including that participation was voluntary. Participants were aware that they could withdraw at any point during the research with no notice period and there was no obligation to answer questions. The participants were also briefed that there were no risks in participating in the research; the results of the study and/or the gathered data would not be used to harm anybody and the data collected would remain anonymous.

The clarity of this approach helps participants to be open and free from uncertainties that might occur due to lack of trust. I can facilitate them to discuss their stories with comfort and confidence due to the transparency offered throughout the process. Therefore, I argue that the whole process of safeguarding participants and following University ethical guidelines ensures a rich, insightful qualitative data set of their executive coaching experience.

The positive experience of data collection influenced me to follow the same procedure during the second round of interviews but with less information about the research via email. I was careful to draft concise emails considering the busy schedules of most senior leaders who took part in the research (attempting minimum disruption). However, at each interview, the same consent form was signed by each participant and I explained the research again to make sure that they were informed and comfortable to continue. The developed relationships during the first round of the data collection were also helpful to conduct more engaged interviews at the second round.

3.15 Quality and Validity of the Research

Establishing validity and rigour in qualitative research is just as important as in quantitative research (Flick, 2014; Gray, 2017). There is an increasing dissatisfaction with the way the quality and validity of qualitative research is evaluated due to the attempts to evaluate these aspects using criteria more usually applied in quantitative research (Marshall, 1996; Smith, et al., 2009).

I recognise the importance of evaluating the validity and quality of my study. However, employing an appropriate criterion for evaluating them in qualitative research is a very important element (Osborn and Smith, 1998). Smith and Osborn (2008) further argue that having suitable criteria plays a key role in ensuring quality and validity, bringing different epistemological roots compared to quantitative methodologies. In addition, the study is in line with the notion that different people have different, equally valid perspectives on reality shaped by their values, culture, context and activities (Yardley, 2008). This acceptance of different realities and the subjective nature of my research encouraged me to adopt an appropriate quality criterion for the study. Part of the decision was also influenced by my ontological and epistemological positions regarding the study.

Elliott, et al., (1999) and Yardley (2000; 2008) present general guidelines for assessing the quality of qualitative research. Elliot et al., (1999, p.220) call their criteria "publishability guidelines especially pertinent to qualitative research". These criteria are: owning one's perspective; situating the sample; grounding in examples; providing credibility checks; coherence; accomplishing general vs. specific research tasks; and resonating with readers. Further to this, Smith (2011, p.24) goes on to suggest a criterion quite specific to IPA as he brings in "support for themes extracted from each participant's data, sufficient elaboration of each theme, interpretative rather than descriptive, that includes patterns of similarity as well as uniqueness" and some generic terms, such as clarity on focus and also careful writing up of the thesis. However, it is clear that, following the analysis guidance discussed above, most of IPA's specific quality criteria are appropriately dealt with in my study.

Further to this, Flick (2014) and Gray (2017) suggest that selecting an appropriate criterion for quality in qualitative research is a subjective decision. Smith et al., (2009) argue that both Elliot et al.'s (1999) and Yardley's (2000; 2008) criteria are appropriate for IPA and applicable to qualitative research in general, irrespective of the theoretical underpinnings of the studies. They also emphasise that both approaches are quite simple and accessible.

Therefore, explorations of these options led me to take Yardley's (2000) approach to ensuring quality in qualitative research. The decision was influenced by Smith et al.'s (2009) initial recommendations. In addition, exploring IPA literature helped me to realise that Yardley's (2000) criteria for quality of qualitative research are widely used. IPA's wide acceptance of the quality criteria was endorsed by Smith et al., (2009). Therefore, my decision to employ them was informed by their wide acceptance and the

suitability of my ontological and epistemological positions. The section below discusses how the quality and validity of the study is ensured using the chosen criteria.

No	Quality and Validity Criteria for the Study
1	Sensitivity to the context
2	Commitment and Rigour
3	Transparency and Coherence
4	Impact and Importance

Table 3-1 Yardley's Criteria for Quality and Validity in Qualitative Research (Adapted from Yardley, 2008)

3.15.1 Sensitivity to the context

My decision to use IPA for the study itself is a way of demonstrating sensitivity to the context (Smith et al., 2009) as it supports the capture of contextual and subjective meaning that participants incorporate into their executive coaching experience (VanScoy and Evenstad, 2015). Acquiring close awareness of the qualitative interview process through scholarly research and discussions, and also through piloting the interview schedule, I made every possible effort to demonstrate sensitivity to the context. Moreover, through the seeking of ethical approval for the study and following the general ethical guidance (Bryman and Bell, 2011; Gray, 2014), I continued to exhibit sensitivity to ensure the quality of the study (Yardley, 2008).

I maintained a minimum involvement with the gate keeper during the scheduling of interviews and data collection to help the participants to bring their stories forward with as few interruptions as possible. I gave participants and their experiential accounts due place within the study by facilitating their stories through semi-structured interviews and incorporating the direct quotes from the interview transcripts (Flick, 2014). In addition, not employing suspicious hermeneutics can be considered as ensuring sensitivity to the context. All the interviews except one were conducted in the participants' natural setting. These research activities ensure sensitivity to the context throughout the research process.

3.15.2 Commitment and Rigour

My commitment to research is demonstrated in a number of ways during the research, particularly with the attentiveness I give to the interview process overall and to the participants themselves. I explored the literature on conducting semi-structured interviews and in particular interviewing in IPA studies. Additionally, I held detailed

discussions on qualitative interviewing with my supervisors. My informal discussions with human resource practitioners on interviewing techniques helped to develop a deeper understanding of the process of interviewing. Furthermore, the support I gained from the IPA Yahoo group to clarify doubts about data collection and related issues, was phenomenal.

I conducted three pilot studies to explore the fit of the interview schedule. Two of the pilot studies were with coachees and one with a coach practitioner. Thus, it was assured that both coachee and coach schedules were piloted. The experience of conducting these studies, and the feedback from participants and self-reflection, helped me to understand the interview process. This commitment to learn and to develop understanding ensured the quality of the interviews conducted and the data collected. The careful selection of the sample to represent the phenomenon of interest also adds to quality. This commitment to generate quality and relevant data is considered a demonstration of rigour and commitment in qualitative research (Yardley, 2008; Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2012).

I gave the data analysis process careful attention, understanding the importance of "sufficient breadth and/or depth to deliver additional insight in to the topic researched" (Yardley, 2008, p.248). I continued discussions with IPA researchers through the IPA Yahoo group and presented the study at a London IPA group meeting before starting the analysis. These engagements helped me to grasp the principles behind IPA data analysis. In addition, continuous support and validity checks from my supervisors during the analysis also played their part in ensuring rigour and commitment.

Moreover, I carried out an extensive literature search on IPA data analysis and evaluated the approaches taken by various researchers (see the section on the process of data analysis) which helped me to develop my understanding of the analysis and build confidence before moving to the actual scenario. Further to this, Smith, et al.. (2009) argue that following the suggested analytical steps helps the researcher to analyse the collected data in line with the philosophical underpinnings of IPA, ideography, hermeneutics and phenomenology. The simplicity that was incorporated by Smith and colleagues to the data analysis process facilitated me to be stress free during the analysis. Therefore, it ensured that I worked at full strength and with the commitment to ensure quality and rigour.

3.15.3 Transparency and Coherence

Coherence of this research is ensured through clear and consistent arguments across the thesis. According to Yardley (2008, p.249) coherence is determined by clarity and power of arguments that the researcher develops through the study and the way in which the research is carried out. The author goes on to say that there is a high impact on clarity and power of the researcher's arguments with the fit between the "theoretical approach and the research question, the method employed and the interpretation of data". I carefully matched these for my investigation, considering the subjective naturalistic nature of the subjects under investigation (justified in section 3.5 and 3.6).

On the other hand, transparency is where the researcher facilitates the reader to see and understand what was done and why with less effort. Transparency was further ensured by discussing the sampling technique interview schedule, the pilot study and also the steps used in the process of analysis (Yardley, 2008).

The paper trail developed throughout the analysis also demonstrates transparency and coherence as it allows anybody who is interested to go back to the source of interpretations. The study incorporates transcript extracts (raw data) to support the themes generated through the analysis chapter and depicts screen shots of the analysis process from the initial noting to superordinate themes. This ensures that the presented arguments are generated and supported by the data (Smith, 1996) which enhances the internal coherence.

3.15.4 Impact and Importance

The time and effort invested in the above three steps of the criteria ensure the validity of the study (Yardley, 2008) so that it can make an impact. Further to this, (Yardley (2000; 2008; and Smith et al., (2009) argue that impact and importance are validity criteria for qualitative research. Thus, the implications of findings with some potential to make a difference in research, practice, policy making or to the general public are important measures of validity in qualitative research (Smith et al., 2009).

The participants themselves report that interpreting their experience of executive coaching through the interviews was a developmental exercise as it provided a reflective space for retrospective consideration. Moreover, the overall research process enhanced my research skills, academic and professional knowledge in executive coaching, leadership development and qualitative research methods. The learned skills are influential in professional activities ranging from teaching, to training and other

developmental activities in which I engage. The study has also influenced my career development. Therefore, this research has contributed to my development as well as that of the wider stakeholders of the research. This study also encourages further research in the discipline (further research avenues are discussed in the Conclusion).

3.16 Reflexivity

It is important to understand that the researcher and the researched are in the same order, both living and experiencing human beings (Smith, et al., 2009; Shaw, 2010; Rodham et al., 2015). Thus, "the researcher is considered a valid part of the research setting, then the ideas, feelings, and perceptions of the researcher become part of the (…) study" (Gray, 2017, p.189). Therefore, it is important to reflect on how that influences the research, especially when collecting and interpreting data (Shaw, 2010). Shaw (2010) goes on to emphasise that the researcher's job is to listen and engage with people's language, experiences and stories so that sense can be made of them to create deeper understanding.

Many authors fail to provide any detail relating to the interpretative role of the researcher in IPA (Brocki and Wearden, 2006). Even though it is not specifically highlighted, Brocki and Wearden (2006) emphasise that choosing IPA involves a tacit acceptance about the interpretative role of the researcher. Furthermore, Smith, et al., (2009, p.80) argue that "inevitably, the analysis is a joint product of the participant and the analyst" where double hermeneutics is involved. Therefore, "the truth claims of an IPA analysis are always tentative and are subjective" .

However, IPA emphasises the importance of putting the participant experience at the centre of analysis and that the conclusions rely on a credible and transparent interpretation of participants' accounts (VanScoy and Evenstad, 2015). To attain this, researchers should be aware of their position in the research (Clancy, 2013). Clancy believes that it is important to understand a researcher's work experience, belief, culture, ethnicity, gender etc. as s/he shapes the interpretations formed during the analysis (Creswell, 2014).

By "engaging in reflexivity, that is, proactively exploring the researcher's self at the start of (…) inquiry, we can enter into a dialogue with participants and use each participant's presentation of self to help revise our fore-understanding and come to make sense of the phenomenon anew" (Shaw, 2010, p.235). In other words, reflexivity helps to remind me about who I am and to better understand my influences in interpreting data (Iordanou et al., 2017). In turn, this helps me to give priority to the

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participants' experience and to analyse how they incorporate meaning into that experience (see Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, the section below explores myself, as the researcher.

3.16.1 The Researcher

My professional background ranges from higher education to professional practice in human resource management and development and this has led me to have a prior understanding of the related theories and practices in people development, organisational behaviour, leadership coaching and human resource management. My current role, as a lecturer in human resource management and organisational behaviour, continues to bring repeated exposure to the theories of people development, management and organisational behaviour. Snelgrove (2014, p.22) emphasises that this background could lead to "*priori* theorising" that could unintentionally obstruct the subjective meaning that participants give to their experience. These, in turn, obstruct the inductive process of the research where theory is generated through data (Gray, 2017).

Therefore, it is important to understand my theoretical understanding of the subjects in this thesis. This helps to manage my theoretical knowledge in order to gain "relatively unattained insight into participants' experience" (Snelgrove, 2014, p.22). Thus, I reflected on my positive perception of executive coaching, human resource development experience and also current teaching experience. Moreover, understanding my preconceptions, attitudes, and the values that influence my interpretative account, helped to minimise those influences and to put the participants' experiences of executive coaching at the centre of the thesis. I detail my personal and professional background and the values incorporated through the culture where I grew up in the Introduction chapter.

3.17 Limitations

This chapter highlights that this research takes a subjective naturalistic view derived from my ontological and epistemological positions. Therefore, the study does not meet the demands of positivistic researchers who attempt to incorporate concepts drawn from natural sciences to social sciences (Marshall, 1996).

This research explores the executive coaching experience of business leaders in a case study organisation. It also employs a relatively small sample. Accordingly, the generalisations of findings are not attempted. Generalisations are considered as

"assertions of enduring values that are context free" (Lincoln and Guba, 1985, p.110). The concept of generalisation also contradicts with my philosophical underpinnings. My findings are contextual and subjective and the aim is to create a deeper understanding rather than to develop generalisable claims. However, there is a possibility that my findings are transferable to other contexts. IPA (see Smith et al., 2009) and qualitative research in general (Gray, 2017) supports the idea of transferability. However, this needs further investigation before making any such claims.

My thesis creates space for the reader to develop their understanding and to explore transferability of results to other contexts given their interest and the need. It might also develop possibilities of different interpretations of findings which can be equally valuable and relevant to them (Yardley, 2008). This can be viewed as misinterpretation but this study recognises the reader's role in the hermeneutic dialogue. It is argued that the "analysis is of no value unless (…) the reader can make some sense of it too" (Smith, et al., 2009, p.109). By ensuring transparency throughout the research process, I aim to help readers to understand the presented themes, the way they are constructed and the preconceptions behind both the participants' and the researcher's interpretations.

Moreover, in line with IPA demands, semi-structured interviews were the only data collection technique employed. Therefore, the study was reliant on the participants' ability to interpret their experience in English. However, their ability to communicate in English, or any disabilities that may hinder their colloquial abilities, is not explored. Furthermore, English is not my first language. The implications for the developed interpretative experiential accounts were not taken into account.

The analysis is conducted by exploring the audio recordings and also the developed verbatim transcriptions and thus most non-verbal expressions related to the participants' experience have inevitability been lost. This has gone largely unnoticed in IPA literature and/or ignored. The high emphasis given to reading and re-reading transcripts can also restrict the actual voices and the language being heard by the analyst. Therefore, reflecting on my personal experience of the analysis, I argue that listening to the recordings is equally as important as reading and re-reading. This dependency on written language (transcriptions) in particular, and also language in general, to understand an experience can be considered as a limitation of IPA. However, communicating experiences through language is natural life world. Therefore, this shows IPA's fit for naturalistic inquiry. Moreover, IPA accepts that

interpretations of experience are inevitably "shaped, limited and enabled by language" (Smith, et al., 2009, p.194) and culture.

In addition, the case study organisation has a coaching culture developed over the years. Thus, executive coaching is viewed as a highly positive developmental intervention assigned to develop potential executives. All participants were aware that the researcher is a contact of the gate keeper. Considering the gate keeper's role as head of organisational development, it can be argued that the participants may want to show they appreciate the executive coaching experience and benefit from it. Therefore, there can be self-reported bias in the collected data set (Solansky, 2010; Berg and Karlsen, 2012). However, the interests of the research to explore how participants give meaning to their experience in their natural setting means that I consider that self-reported bias is part of a lived world. I further confirm this acceptance of natural lived world by not employing suspicious hermeneutics in my data analysis.

3.18 Challenges during the Research Process

Understanding philosophical underpinnings of research in general is a challenge for me. Having selected a methodology informed by three philosophical underpinnings made the process more complicated at the initial stages of this study. In my explorations of business and some psychological research texts and other academic publications, I realised that the literature on research philosophies is unclear and complex (Crotty, 1998).

Employing the right method of analysis correctly is also a very challenging exercise (Roulston, 2014), due to IPA's open and innovative nature in its approach to data analysis (Smith, et al., 2009). Some challenges were present in the interpretative engagement with the data and I continued to doubt if the developed themes would produce an interpretative account of the participant experience. Furthermore, it is accepted that there are descriptive and interpretative elements within an IPA analysis. In addition, there is a risk of misinterpretation which could be considered as an ethical challenge due to the power implanted within me (Willig, 2014). These challenges link to interpretation in qualitative studies and are "particularly acute where researchers are seeking to generate suspicious interpretation" (Willig, 2014, p.142). However, this is not relevant to my study as it involves empathetic and questioning hermeneutics.

Bracketing is also a contradictory concept to understand within IPA as it openly accepts double hermeneutics (Larkin et al., 2011; Jeong and Othman, 2016). Scholarly discussions, engagement with the IPA Yahoo group as well as exploration of IPA

literature helped me to grasp the concepts behind the bracketing in IPA where the motive is to give priority to the individual experience.

Finally, understanding quality and validity was also a challenging exercise in this study as my initial thinking was driven by quality and validity of quantitative research. This is highlighted as a common mistake where criteria for quantitative studies are employed for the purpose (Smith, et al., 2009). The continuous engagement with the qualitative researchers, the literature, and supervision meetings helped me to develop an understanding of the quality and validity of qualitative studies.

3.19 Summary

This chapter discusses the philosophical instances of the study and places the research in the subjectivist paradigm of Burrell and Morgan (1979). Thus, the reality for the study is socially constructed and the knowledge is value-laden. The adopted methodology is introduced and I discuss its fit for the study by critically evaluating the theoretical underpinnings of IPA.

The next section of the chapter justifies the sample size, attributes of the sample and the data collection technique. I then discuss the research site and the interview schedule to enhance readers' contextual understanding of the study. Here, I explain the importance of the pilot studies and the actual data collection process. The chapter then discusses the steps followed in data analysis and justifies how the ideographic commitments are met.

I explain the study's ethical considerations and the process of ensuring them during the research project, followed by a discussion about the analysis. Then, the importance of quality and validity of the qualitative research is discussed and Yardley's (2008) criteria of quality are employed to justify how I ensure the study's quality and validity.

Finally, my role in the research, limitations of the study and the challenges faced are presented to conclude the chapter.

4 Chapter Four – Findings

This chapter reflects the interpretations of my study participants' executive coaching experiences. By exploring their sense-making of those experiences, I aim to address the research question:

"How do leaders make sense of their dyadic executive coaching experience?"

In this chapter, I organise the themes to help support addressing the question. I attempt to "present (…) findings in a manner that is engaging, coherent and accessible" (Gray, 2014, p.632) to make the study meaningful to a wider audience. The IPA literature (Smith et al., 2009, p.109) supports this notion by saying that the analysis "is of no value unless your reader can make some sense of it too". Therefore, I place emphasis on writing and organising the themes to support you, the reader, in playing a role in the hermeneutic dialogue as you engage with the text.

I first provide a brief overview of the participants. Then, I offer a succinct overview of the themes which sets the context for the chapter. Finally, prior to moving to the detailed representation of themes, I briefly explain how the themes are generated.

4.1 Characteristics of Participants

IPA situates personal meaning in context (Larkin et al., 2006). Therefore, the understanding of the culture of the context of my research is important. This does not mean that the researcher must be a cultural insider (see Smith et al., 2009). However, cultures appear to influence the framework of sense-making (Clancy, 2013). The awareness of the culture then helps the analyst to make sense of the participant interpretations whilst positioning the individual experience at the heart of the analysis. Therefore, the developed understanding of the organisational culture (see section 3.10) is important when readers are attempting to make sense of the findings of my study. It is also acknowledged that the findings are positioned in the participants' "experience, their culture, language and locale" (Smith et al., 2009, p.195). Thus, my findings are contextual, subjective and informed by my ontological and epistemological positions (see section 3.2). To develop further contextual understanding and the participants' "terms of reference" (Smith et al., 2009, p.195), the section below discusses the characteristics of my study's participants.

The participants recruited for the study represent a perspective and not a population. The executive coaching experience towards their development is the main criterion

employed for the selection of participants, followed by their willingness to provide an interpretative account of their executive coaching experience.

All coachee participants are senior leaders within the case study organisation. The coach participants, who are also senior figureheads within the same organisation, interpret their experience of developing leaders through executive coaching. However, the coaches selected for the study do not coach the coachee participants. Thus, the coach participants are recruited to further the understanding of the coachees' sense-making. Therefore, the study of coaches is conducted as a separate study (see methodology chapter); the coaches' interpretations of how they attempt to develop coachees are explored to develop further understanding of how executive coaching facilitates coachees' development. All names have been changed to protect the participants' identities.

Daniel is an executive committee member and leads the commercial area of the business (Commercial Director). The case study organisation employs David as its head of products and Mark is currently the director of their branch network. All these participants are positive about executive coaching and their executive coaching experience. They are also firm believers in its use as a development intervention.

Daniel and David both worked for a few different business organisations prior to joining the case study organisation. Most of their previous assignments were in senior leadership roles and they consider themselves to be success stories in those organisations and in their current roles. Mark started his career in a subsidiary of the current organisation and worked for over 25 years holding various leadership roles across the group.

One coach participant (John) is the head of organisational development for the organisation where he acts as an advocate for executive coaching for leadership development. The other coach participant (Sarah) is a senior manager in organisational development. Her main role is to promote leadership development through executive coaching. Both these participants are also positive and optimistic about executive coaching as a leadership development intervention. They are experienced coaches who have been coaching senior, middle and first line managers within and outside the organisation over a number of years.

The discussions with the participants also revealed that the organisation as a whole is positive about the intervention. Executive coaching is promoted as a leadership development throughout the organisation; furthermore, the head of organisational

development claims that they have worked over the years to develop a coaching culture. Thus, executive coaching is promoted within the organisation as a positive leadership development activity. Therefore, it is acknowledged that the findings below are informed by the culture of the organisation. The findings may not be applicable to other organisations even within the financial industry (see Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Robson, 2011). However, as argued in the methodology chapter, there is no intention to generalise my findings but rather to develop a deeper understanding within the context of this study.

4.2 Overview

Each participant provides a unique descriptive account of their executive coaching experience and what it means to them. Two semi-structured interviews conducted with each participant facilitate deeper understanding of participants' sense-making. In line with the ideographic commitments of IPA, I analyse the gathered data by using a case-by-case approach before moving to the cross analysis.

I consider the coachee and the coach perspectives as two distinct studies to protect the homogeneity of each sample. This helps to avoid cross-contamination of data which could create issues around the coach perspective dominance identified in the literature review. However, as noted in the methodology chapter, my aim in conducting the coach study is to support further understanding of the coachees' experience of executive coaching. Therefore, I follow the structure below (see 'presentations of themes' section) to present findings which facilitate the understanding of convergence and divergence within these two different perspectives. I conduct the analysis using empathetic and questioning hermeneutics, as discussed in the methodology chapter. The results are tabulated below:

No	Superordinate Themes	Sub-Ordinates Themes
1	Create understanding	Questioning to support, Improve self-awareness, Develop understanding, Generate clarity
2	Develop Opportunity	Challenge to develop, A tailored approach, Coachee-led agenda, Organisational agenda
3	Generate Motivation	Non-judgmental relationship, Focus on development, Positive attitude towards EC
4	Encourage Action	Encourage to act, Facilitate reflection, Informal evaluation
5	Support Throughout	Employ theories to support, Help to improve, Conversation to develop
6	Ensure Continuity	Develop an independent learner, Coachee becomes a Coach
7	Tackle Problems	Help dealing with problems

Table 4-1 Superordinate Themes

My findings are briefly discussed below in order to provide an overview to the readers. However, I explore themes and give detailed attention to the individual sub-themes later in this chapter.

Create Understanding

The study confirms that executive coaching enhances the coachees' understanding of the discussion topics. The findings reveal that this is mainly achieved through constructive questioning. The improved understanding also includes understanding themselves better where they become more aware of their strengths and weaknesses. This also helps participants to understand the barriers that hinder their performance. Further to this, the findings show that the participants develop a wider understanding around both contextual and relational elements of their development that influences their subsequent actions. It also reveals that the participants acknowledge that they develop a deeper level of understanding due to the executive coaching engagements, which they claim as 'clarity'. In turn, the generated clarity helps them to develop the rationale behind their actions which encourages them to act upon their development. This is linked to the other themes.

Develop Opportunity

The participants claim that executive coaching creates opportunities for them. It is evident that the positive and balanced challenges brought in through the executive

coaching engagement are supportive and provide a great opportunity for development. Furthermore, the tailored and individual approach of coaching facilitates an enhanced opportunity for the study participants. Executive coaching is also considered highly relevant for coachees due to its personalised nature. The authority implanted within coachees also offers a great opportunity for them to craft their plans and evaluate their abilities and preferences. However, IPA's appreciation of divergence helped me to realise that the notion in the literature that executive coaching has a coachee-led agenda is challenged in the findings. My findings suggest that there is an organisational agenda within executive coaching intervention and this develops a contradictory notion to the literature.

Generate Motivation

Another emerging theme that is well represented by coachee participants suggests that executive coaching motivates individuals to act upon things. The non-judgmental approach that coaches take appears to be influential in generating motivation. It helps the coachees to discuss things openly and to take a 'trial and error' approach when necessary. Thus, executive coaching is an excellent platform to test things out and openly discuss and explore options. Additionally, the findings reveal that the positive attitude that coachees possess towards executive coaching is motivational and so is the developmental discourse of coaching within the case study organisation. This positive perception and the developmental focus helps them to be more positive about their strengths and abilities. In turn, this helps them to act according to their plans.

Encourage Action

My findings suggest that executive coaching goes beyond the generation of understanding, by creating opportunities and motivating participants. It also encourages coachees to act upon their agreed plan. It is clear that all the themes presented relate to this notion but, in this instance, the reflective exercise implanted within the executive coaching process is considered relevant and supportive for generating action. The participants highlight the reflective space as a great source of learning. The findings also reveal that the informal evaluations are highly influential in generating action. The coach-generated 'centre-check' or 'natural check' (informal evaluation) is regarded as highly useful in action generation. Moreover, these informal evaluations facilitate coachees to conduct prior self-evaluations which help them to act in a timely manner.

Support Throughout

The support generated through executive coaching is also highlighted as highly relevant and appropriate. The findings also show the importance of the right balance of challenge and support during the coaching engagement. The coachee participants consider the theories presented by the coaches as a great support in understanding the rationale behind their actions and to improve their overall theoretical understanding. Furthermore, participants agree that support is available throughout the process and is positively influential in enhancing their engagement with the coach. The conversations with the coaches are also rated as highly supportive. My study highlights 'conversation' as a powerful tool that supports coachees to understand themselves better and improve their practice. Executive coaching therefore ensures that coachees are supported throughout the coaching process.

Ensure Continuity

Another finding from this study is that executive coaching ensures continuous improvements. Thus, it could be claimed that executive coaching is a sustainable mode of learning and development. The findings reveal that the confidence that executive coaching generates within the coachee participants, the development of self-responsibility and commitment to their development and reflective exercises, all help the coachees to become independent learners. Additionally, the positive experience of executive coaching also influences the coachees to become coaches themselves. My study's participants (coachees) agree that they have also become self-coaches (coaching themselves) and have started coaching their colleagues. Executive coaching, therefore, creates continuity in learning and development in the context of this study.

Tackle Problems

It is evident throughout the discussions of themes that the findings are all related to the developmental discourse. However, the study also reveals that executive coaching helps to tackle performance and relationship problems. The participants appear reluctant to accept that executive coaching helps to resolve specific issues, such as work performance and relationships. Nevertheless, there is sufficient evidence to support this finding, which is contrary to the literature. Thus, in the context of my study, executive coaching appears to tackle problems (work performance and relationship issues, struggles in settling into new leadership positions) that executives encounter on a daily basis.

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4.3   The Process of Theme Generation

Through the rigorous data analysis process (discussed in the methodology chapter), I generated initial superordinate themes. The results are presented as themes within a process heuristic which demonstrates how executive coaching works (see figure 4.1). My initial thought was that the process shown below would provide an overview of how executive coaching works within the context of this study.

```
Generate          Ensure            Tackle
Understanding  ←  Continuity    ←   Problems

Generate                            Support
Clarity        Organisational      Throughout
               Agenda

Develop        Generate            Encourage
Opportunity →  Motivation    →     Actions
```
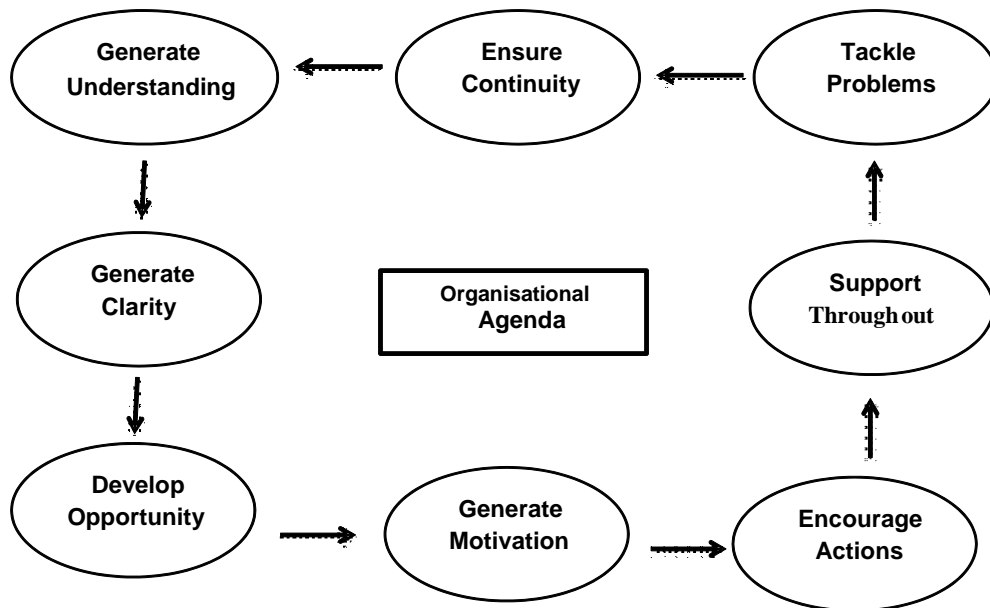
Figure 4.1 The Process Heuristic - Initial Findings

However, following the hermeneutics cycle (Smith et al., 2009), returning to the sources (participants), I reflected that the first iteration of my analysis did not create an heuristic with concrete steps, as shown in the figure above. This fresh individual case exploration and a holistic view of the themes helped me to find a story that is developed through double hermeneutics (interpretations of both the analyst and the participants).

Whilst attempting to communicate the story through writing up I reduced the original nine themes to seven. I continued the analysis until I completed the writing up of the results in accordance with the method suggested by Smith, et al., (2009) and Jeong and Othman (2016). During the writing up I made some changes to the sub-themes due to finding overlaps and also because I realised that some fit well with different superordinate themes than the one in which I had originally placed them. This appears

to be the development of a more interpretative account of the findings in the IPA literature (see Smith et al., 2009).

The reduction from nine to seven themes connects the theme 'Generate Clarity' to 'Create Understanding' as a sub-theme. I use the 'Organisational Agenda' theme to develop the theme 'Coachee-led Agenda'. This helps to demonstrate how I appreciate the divergence of themes. Therefore, the 'Organisational Agenda' theme becomes a subtheme of the 'Develop Opportunity' theme. These changes relate to Smith and Osborn's (2008, p.76) notion that "the division between analysis and writing up is, to a certain extent, a false one in that the analysis will be expanded during the writing up phase". Thus, the analysis is only complete when it is written up (Smith et al., 2009, 108). I experienced this phenomenon within my study as; "it (…) continued (…) into the writing up phase". Furthermore, Smith et al., (2009, p.108) acknowledge the idea that during write up of themes "one's interpretation of them (…) can develop".

The section below briefly discusses how the themes are presented.

4.4 Presentation of Themes

To restate, in respecting the homogeneity of each sample, the coachees' perspectives were written up before moving to the coaches' perspectives. Moreover, I ensured the ideographic commitments were also thought through to explore the best possible way to present the findings. Smith et al., (2009) suggest two approaches to the presentation of findings. One is to present the themes "in turn and present evidence from each participant to support each theme" (Smith, et al., 2009, p.109). The other method ensures a stronger ideographic commitment where "the participant is prioritised and themes for each person are presented together". The former is considered the norm. I also found that following the former approach eases the process of developing arguments and writing up. Therefore, I consider that presenting the evidence from each participant to support each theme is quite practical for my study.

Firstly, the finalised themes with their subordinate themes are tabulated above along with their sub-themes. This provides a holistic view of each theme before moving into the detail. Then, each theme is discussed below, starting with a table representing the overview of the theme (the superordinate themes and the coachee and the coach representation). I do not consider numeration to be particularly important as the uniqueness of each participant is highly appreciated and considered relevant (Pietkiewicz and Smith, 2012). Therefore, some of the included themes are not highly representative but are relevant to the research question.

The interview quotes are directly linked to the discussion and presented in *italic* form. For these quotes, the line number range (e.g. *12-13*) is also presented, thereby ensuring transparency and traceability. This also helps to justify that the themes are generated through empathetic and questioning hermeneutics rather than suspicious hermeneutics (Smith et al., 2009). In addition, this process facilitates a space for participants' voices in the findings (Larkin et al., 2011; Smith, 2011; Pietkiewicz and Smith 2012). I omit some quotes in order to honour my promise of confidentiality and to mitigate any risk of recognition of the participant through their quotes by a reader close to the subject organisation. All names presented are pseudonyms.

4.4.1 Theme One: Create Understanding

All participants agree that executive coaching has generated their overall understanding of themselves and the wider relational context. The theme is presented with four sub-themes tabulated below:

	Coachees			Coaches	
Sub Themes	**Daniel**	**Mark**	**David**	**Sarah**	**John**
Questioning to support	**x**	**x**	**x**	**x**	**x**
Improve Self-awareness	**x**	**x**	**x**	**x**	**x**
Develop Understanding	**x**	**x**	**x**	**x**	**x**
Generate Clarity	**x**	**x**	**x**	**x**	**-**

Table 4-2 Creating Understanding

4.4.1.1 Questioning to Support

Perspectives of the Coachees

All coachee participants agree that 'continuous questioning' is the main source of generating understanding. The coachees are also quite positive about the above questions that come from their coaches, recognising them as valuable tools for their development. The coachees consider that questioning is thought provoking. Daniel interprets his experience of receiving these questions, saying:

"What I find with the coaching is with the right coaching, asking you the right question (not clear) step back, you reflect a bit more about you, what you are doing and how are doing it and you know how you interact with people" (216-219).

This quote illustrates that Daniel considers that 'asking the right question' is a great source of understanding. He agrees that it generates understanding around his actions

which influences his effectiveness. He acknowledges that he has previous awareness of some of the areas that require attention. However, the absence of questioning allows him to shy away from thinking more deeply about these areas. Thus, Daniel notes that 'questioning' is the backbone of executive coaching engagement and demonstrates how it helps him to develop his understanding, saying:

"It forces you to think about answers and actually I think that questions can be quite probing and you know usually multi-layered, and you know very rarely a good coach accept the first answer" (754-757).

Therefore, the multi-layered questions from his coach have helps him not to settle for the easy answers, but encourages him to deepen his understanding as this approach generates continuous thinking.

David also links 'good coach and questioning' as he emphasises "*the coach, the good coach there listening, asking probing questions and really good questions" (131-132).*

Further to this, David reports that questions from his coach also generate a self-discussion which facilitates further understanding of his current ways of doing things as well as his lapses. He acknowledges that the questions help him to talk to himself. This leads to the understanding that coaching generates self-discussion. He expresses this by saying:

"Because, in effect, you [are] only talking to yourself; because good coaches there, asking good questions and listening" (349-351)

Mark holds similar views and is quite positive about the impact of questioning. He argues that it generates his overall understanding which is helpful in his development. Mark firmly believes that picking up from what he says (to the coach), and asking question after question, constructively generates thinking and consequent actions. He ranks questioning highly as it plays a pivotal role in developing his understanding. In his terms:

"Particularly pick up on specific words that I would use and thinking about trying to, I am considering, I might, and really been quite forceful about you gonna do it or you gonna think about it" (952-955).

He also believes that the coach getting him to think through things is quite a forceful process. However, he is constructive about this forcefulness, relating it to good coaching. He notes that coaches know the level of criticality and the force that they should bring in to generate understanding and to encourage development.

In addition, all coachee participants accept that it is quite challenging to keep up with the questions, especially during the initial stages of the process. David is quite straight-forward in his view about the intensity of questioning and the overall process of executive coaching experience, saying:

"It is not an easy kind of cosy ride for me, it was a bit more delving deeper and I would say it was quite intense. Therefore, quite some energy to put into it" (602-605)

Nevertheless, it is clear that all three coachee participants consider good questions as a great source of understanding as a result of generated thinking, critical perspectives into what they currently do, and how they think things through. Thus, all agree that executive coaching enables them to understand things better.

Furthermore, questioning has become a common practice in their personal and professional engagements due to this positive experience. Thus, questioning has become a habit. As a result, they question themselves on their actions, attitudes and perceptions. Mark notes that his coach encourages him to question his practice and to think things through:

"*Spend a bit time on you and think what you really want to do in two years' time, what do you think the gaps are, how do you think we should address the gaps and where do you think you get the support from" (351-355*).

This notion is acknowledged by the other participants. All agree that self-questioning helps them to understand their own patterns of thinking and the preconceptions which shape their actions. Therefore, they have become strong believers of questioning (self and from the coach) in generating understanding.

Daniel says that:

"Actually someone can really pin you down to so what was it [that] happened there and why did you do that and what was the … what happen[s] to them? There is a constant probing questioning that ultimately gets you to the point (882-886)". He argues that the questioning process encourages him to understand his priorities and supports him to act on them.

Another consensus is that the coachees do not encounter these probing and challenging questions in their work engagements. The coachees are deprived of opportunities to be challenged as they are senior leaders in the organisation. Even where questioning does take place, it is unlikely to be as thought-provoking or as challenging as the coaches' questions.

Daniel emphasises that these questions help him to find answers, and to reject responses that he has been taking for granted.

"She would just ask questions, uum you know uum you know, gently challenge me and uum J (the coach). As always…Always that I got the answers, questions of helping to use them out and helping me to think. Think it clearly though issues, situations, helping me re-prioritise" (227-231).

This helps him to act to get his priorities right with the enhanced understanding created through the questioning approach.

Thus, the participants demonstrate that questioning helps in generating a critical perspective into their predispositions and their way of doing things in that it generates understanding. This notion of generating action is also echoed in both Mark's and David's interpretations. Hence, it is clear that all participants develop an enhanced understanding of their development needs and the barriers that hinder their performance, thus acting on their development.

Perspectives of Coaches

The coach participants also clearly articulate that they have been employing questions to support coachees in generating understanding and to create challenge. Coachees' interpretations of questioning are also reflected from the coach participants as they consider questioning to be highly relevant to coachee development.

For example, Sarah notes that:

"Challenge might be around if they think about something, it could be a frame of reference of something. So, questions like 'how do you know that, what assumptions you are making about that'" (989-991).

She acknowledges the use of questions to generate challenges. Questions also encourage the coachees to question their predispositions and their ways of doing things and why. This results in understanding within the wider context of the coachee's development. Sarah argues that questions also help the coachee to make sense of the feedback they receive from the coaches. The attempts to sense-make differently create different internal realities and open mindsets. She presents the idea, saying that:

"When they get feedback, help them to process it. So what do they notice what themes, what patterns, what surprise about, umm what conversations that they want to go have with people" (728-730).

This statement shows that she continues the practice of questioning, often even during feedback sessions. She emphasises that the idea behind questioning is to help clients to enhance their understanding and make the right choices.

John supports the argument that Sarah makes about questioning. He is certain that the process starts with questions. He claims that his coachees enjoy diverse benefits from it, saying that:

"There is getting to the goals, what do you want to get out of this relationship, what do you want to work on over the coming three to six weeks. So I guess, that is the development process in terms of goal setting" (824-827)

Thus, the questions he poses help his clients to reach the goals that they are aiming to achieve though executive coaching. The coaches agree that the questions are a mechanism that they employ to create understanding with clients. It is also clear that questions are a useful mode to facilitate clients to find answers and to emphasise that the answers come from the coachees themselves.

4.4.1.2 Improve Self-Awareness

Perspectives of Coachees

All participants agree that executive coaching has helped them to develop their self-awareness. They consider that awareness of self is of high importance and relevance to their development. The study reveals that knowing oneself in-depth has many benefits in terms of learning and development. The participants acknowledge that they did not have that deeper level of self-awareness before engaging with their executive coach.

Daniel, for example, considers that the first step in coaching engagement is to develop self-understanding which facilitates self-control and independence. He also links it to his self-confidence that generates actions. He claims that:

"*First thing actually is developing awareness of you and your style, your techniques, your impact (373-374).*

Mark accepts that self-awareness helps him to put things into perspective and act. He emphasises this point, saying:

"It is only as one matures and one become more self-aware that you can look back and say, actually that is what I was doing" (294-296).

Therefore, if someone lets self-awareness happen only through experience, it is costly and delays reaching one's own potential. Executive coaching has the ability to develop self-awareness without waiting for it to happen through experience. Mark emphasises that:

"Now I am much more aware of what I am doing, why I am doing and what we work on" *(297-298)*

According to Mark's claims, it can also be argued that executive coaching fast tracks self-understanding without going through the experiential route. He considers that it is important to have that understanding early so that executive coaching becomes more valuable and developmental. He notes this aspect, saying:

"What we did is that we went kind of backward to start up with, to understand lot more about what in life or what in career has helped shaped kind of a person you are now" *(701-703).*

Therefore, these interpretations of the coachee participants show that the coaches prioritise developing their self-awareness at the early stages of the executive coaching engagement through encouraging participants to look back and evaluate what has been done and why. Thus, it shows how questioning and reflection (discussed later) can influence the individual understanding of selves. Mark directly references self-awareness as a great source of support and development:

"I think it take quite a bit of self-awareness, say actually I think, I would like to go and talk to somebody about whether or not how much better I can really be or really want to achieve, take some guts to want to do that actually" (586-589).

Thus, he links 'action generation' and his performance into self-awareness. Mark is also confident in emphasising that self-awareness helps him to realise his potential and to meet his development gaps. Moreover, he believes that coaching develops his self-confidence which results in action.

David also refers to questioning as a source of generating understanding. He believes that the questions facilitate deeper analysis and also help him to question his actions. David says that:

"They can ask you probe questions, that kind of really good questions that get you bit deeper and into it" (351-354).

Hence, he believes that questioning helps him to explore things deeper, to generate ideas which facilitate broader understanding.

He expresses the view that *"It kind of draws things out from you" (71)*. However, unlike the others, David does not highlight this as a priority within the process. Nevertheless, he agrees with the above claims related to self-awareness.

Perspectives of Coaches

The importance of generating self-awareness in the coachees is acknowledged by the coaches. For example, Sarah highlights it as a source of clear decision making. She also emphasises that self-awareness facilitates the understanding of wider contextual elements of coachee development and performance. She says:

"If they more self-aware, more aware of their impact on others and what is happening with others, they can make choices about what they can do differently" (52-54), thus, she hints that self-awareness also influences changes of action within clients. The coachees' interpretations also comply with this notion. Another emphasis made by Sarah is that:

"Leaders who are self-aware, they do not always realise how valuable that awareness and interpersonal awareness…how valuable that interpersonal awareness" (745-747).

Thus, generating self-awareness and creating attentiveness to generated self-awareness are considered important for coachee development. Further to this, Sarah recognises that generating self-awareness is an agenda of executive coaching.

John also acknowledges that 'result generation' is an outcome of self-awareness. He considers the creation of self-awareness to be a primary act of coachee development. He notes as much, saying:

"So, there is kind of raising awareness and then going away and doing something as a result of that awareness" (1143-1144), and also emphasises that coaching supports the development of self-awareness, helping coachees to realise that there can be different realities and perspectives.

"In terms of self-awareness, you know coaching can help with that in terms of umm kind of open, less directive questioning approach and exploring someone's reality from their perspective, form their view of the world" (600-604).

This shows that coaches and coachees are in agreement that self-awareness is an important component of coachee development. However, the coachees discuss the importance of this aspect in more detail compared with the coaches. The reasons are unclear but there is enough evidence to indicate that the coach participants also support this notion.

4.4.1.3 Develop Understanding

Perspectives of Coachees

All participants agree that executive coaching develops an overall understanding of situations and issues, and also provides possible solutions. They argue that this overall understanding not only helps them to explore solutions for development but also wider job and life-related challenges. The holistic understanding developed beyond the context helps them to be critical in their approach. The changes of perception and the facilitated critical thinking help them to explore different options and to be more open to development opportunities. Daniel emphasises that coaching does not take the issues away but generates new understanding about things:

"It helps you to be clear umm, you know so it does not take the problem away. It does not take the solution away. Umm it is clear that you know, you got to and you can manage that" (545-548)

Furthermore, he emphasises the importance of developing understanding so that he can explore required adjustments by evaluating options. Daniel expresses this:

"Actually, you should understand the fundamental things to be able to do things differently and change things" (906-909)

He also believes that executive coaching helps him to not only understand things better but also his feelings and preconceptions. This connects back to the above-discussed self-awareness. Daniel highlights that his understanding of the cause of predispositions facilitates a perceptual change. He believes that it directs him to explore the ways forward for his development.

"Understand [a] bit more about why I may be feeling the way about things, it is getting the below of what of what is going on and really understanding the sort of how and why" (1057-1061).

This opinion is also reflected by Mark, although there are slight differences compared with Daniel's view. Mark mostly talks about outcomes generated through the developed understanding. For example, he notes:

"I think [a] bit more, much calmer, much more appreciative at what we will go through in order to make those decisions and have those more open conversations and not to have to rush and do anything tomorrow, lot more of these take time" (316-321).

Therefore, the developed understanding helps him to act differently and to be open to opportunities. He considers it a great source of development which has helped him to become more effective. Executive coaching has also facilitated him to be calmer due to the allocated self-time which he calls 'spiritual time'. Thus, he believes that it generates work-life balance which results in effectiveness. Mark also claims that the understanding helps him to explore gaps in terms of skills, exposure and experiences. It facilitates him to explore opportunities to bridge those gaps. He notes this by saying:

"*What became more aware is I have had a very limited external exposure to actually in the 20 years I worked in the group" (225-227*).

Mark believes that the developed understanding influences his decision making. This helps him to be clearer about the choices available. He notes that:

"*She [his coach] can help me to get to a point where I am clearer about choices and decisions I want to make" (402-403);* hence, the results show that understanding not only opens up diverse options but has facilitated him to explore suitable actions to accomplish his career goals. Mark is quite passionate about the developed understanding, as it makes him listen more, explore opportunities to change, and be challenged.

However, he also highlights the time taken to understand each other (coachee and coach) as a negative of executive coaching. Equally, Mark acknowledges the importance of the coach understanding him well, and vice versa. He commends executive coaching for the individual attention that he receives, thus broadening this understanding:

"*Negative, takes a bit time to understand the person, person's drivers and motivations, because each of us is different, so part of that coaching time is talking that with, establishing who you are and what you really what to do, want to be" (431-436).*

Thus, Mark thinks that the coach's and coachee's ability to understand themselves and each other play a key role in his progress. David has similar views about the enhanced

understanding achieved though executive coaching. He notes that it helps him to stay focused and to prioritise. He also agrees with Mark in that he accepts that he has become calmer and less stressed. Mark also believes that being less stressed helps him to be more open to the available opportunities.

"Working on things that are most important, not trying to do too much which helps, you kind of bit calmer and bit less stress, so that has been helpful for me" (582-586).

He is aware that it is challenging to attain that level of understanding but regards it as very important for his personal growth. Agreeing with the other participants, David acknowledges that perceptual changes engendered through coaching help him to see things differently. Consequently, he is working on his priorities and has started moving towards what he really wants to achieve. However, he continues to acknowledge that it is not easy to reach this level of understanding.

"It is very good to get out of things out of your chest and get some perspective uum and get some perspective uum and it is good, that that it is difficult" (89-91).

It is clear that all the coachee participants admit that creating understanding is difficult but they all rate it as an imperative component of their development.

Perspectives of Coaches

The coaches also consider that creating understanding is important throughout the process. Thus, it appears to be a vital element for supporting coachees as it helps them to explore different options and act accordingly. Sarah notes this, saying:

"So how can leaders understand, if they [are] more self-aware, more aware of their impact on others and what is happening with others, they can make choices about what they can do differently"(50-55).

She considers that generating understanding is important and helpful for coachees in many ways. It is also clear that Sarah is trying to understand her coachees. This shows that Sarah puts high emphasis on creating overall understanding.

"So, if you think reality, uum if it was you tell me about the world of work, tell me how things work at the moment, tell me what is working well and tell me what you are enjoying most, where are the biggest challenges"(122-125).

This illustration shows her attempt to get to know her coachees better by encouraging conversation. Sarah also employs questions to support coachees to develop their wider

contextual understanding. She emphasises the importance of coachees' enhanced understanding of the reasons 'why they want to be coached, what their aims are, what does coaching mean to them'. She emphasises that this understanding ultimately helps their individual development and growth.

John, too, agrees on the importance of creating awareness and reiterates Sarah's notion of conversation as a mode of creating awareness. John acknowledges that he also employs conversation for that purpose. Moreover, he explains the influence of the conversation in order to generate understanding and actions. He emphasises this view by saying:

"In terms of space to understand where they are and what they are and what they are trying to achieve and to challenge in a positive way, what they might do to build confidence and they review it within their coach" (1137- 1143).

Thus, the conversation facilitates space for coachees to review their options, enabling them to understand things better which, in turn, generates action.

Here, it also shows that John, like Sarah, is attempting to understand his coaches whilst simultaneously attempting to develop the understanding of his coachees. Hence, it is clear that John also fully acknowledges the importance of raised awareness. Therefore, both coachee and coach participants acknowledge the importance of creating understanding.

4.4.1.4 Generate Clarity

Perspectives of Coachees

My findings also reveal that executive coaching generates clarity. This finding is quite similar to the above-discussed theme and they are closely linked. Moreover, there are difficulties in determining what clarity actually means to the participants at the initial stages. However, all three participants are quite certain that executive coaching develops clarity around things. 'Clarity' in their interpretation appears to equate to a 'deeper level of understanding'.

The clarity they develop through their engagement with the coach helps them to see things clearly and deepens their understanding. The clarity developed within coachees directly results from the questioning and challenging they receive from their coaches. Thus, it appears similar to the way in which their understanding is developed.

"So, ok, how you [are] approaching that, what are you going to do about that and generally force me about me getting clarity on my own thinking"(307-309).

Daniel continues to talk about the impulsions he receives from the coach and emphasises that it often happens through challenging questions which generate clarity within. In Daniel's experience, it is a gradual process facilitated through challenging questions, which goes deeper once mutual understanding is generated. He also believes that it is important to generate understanding before moving to deeper levels. Further to this, Daniel thinks that it is important to have a fair level of knowledge about the extensive nature of the process before seeking clarity, which he feels helps to avoid confusion.

"It is forcing the person being coached to think things through clearly uuum to get the clarity" (508-510), thus clarifying that the generated thinking acts as the source of clarity. He also quite confidently articulates that the support he receives from the coach helps him to be clearer about things. Daniel voices the opinion that coaching has not only given him clarity around the things to work on in his development, but has also facilitated him to develop an action plan. Therefore, in his view, coaching ensures result-orientation. He believes that the clarity developed with the help of his coach helps him to have more control over things. He says:

"What it [has] is done is, it made me you going with a problem or challenge, you come out with a much clearer solution and action plan and as a result feel better, calmer, feel more control" (614-617).

It is not clear if Daniel expects this clarity to be generated from executive coaching. However, the discussions with Mark reveal that he expects clarity from the process which he highlights directly, saying:

"*I expected bit more clarity about what directions to next looked at developing, basically" (166-167),* Mark is quite convinced that the coach is capable of developing the clarity he wants and considers gaining that clarity to be a collective exercise.

"She (coach) make my mind up for me, she can help me look, she can help me to get to a point where we… we are clearer about what opportunities and options are" (385-388).

He is also convinced that the clarity developed is not just on his developmental needs and the required actions but also about the wider external implications of his

performance. Therefore, Mark agrees with Daniel's view that developing clarity helps him to be more effective. This is further noted by Mark, saying:

"it is uum I think it is important from my point of view that I have a sense of that it is, what it is I want to do and why I do what I want to do" (684-687).

He continues to represent the theme throughout the discussions and acts as an advocate of this notion. Mark firmly believes that generated clarity plays a major role in his development. In addition, the clarity generated helps him to understand his strengths and what inspires him.

Similarly, David regards clarity as highly relevant and supportive for his development and acknowledges that it helps him to determine his developmental and other priorities. This deeper understanding, as others claim, is fundamental for David; however, he argues that developing clarity is a gradual process which does not happen overnight. Emphasising this, he agrees with Daniel's notion of gradual development of deeper understanding. He says that it:

"Keep[s] building on different themes that we developed and over time started to get a bit more into what I wanted to work on" (215-217).

He agrees with others that generated clarity helps to determine actions with confidence and he realises that understanding things becomes easier from which ensues the actions and the result orientation. It is clear from all participants that the problems related to their development and performance are due to lack of understanding and inaction. Daniel acknowledges that executive coaching helps him to deal with these problems by developing clarity. Daniel says:

"I think I know them before, but you kind of draws them out and it makes it more likely that you tackle them, work on them and talk about things where it is quite easy to just sort of park them" (236-240).

In a similar vein, David considers the lack of clarity as a developmental barrier. He believes that he had some previous awareness of the obstacles but acknowledges that there was insufficient thinking around them to precipitate action. Thus, his actions are held back until he develops clarity around them.

"But I think I knew that what those were, I got more clarity of them and got bit deeper into them so bit less superficial because you talked about it more and thought about them more"(248-251).

This shows that the surface level understanding which the coachees already own does not always guarantee their action. Participants acknowledge that the deeper understanding plays a role in generating actions towards their development. Therefore, my study evidences that developing greater clarity helps coachees to take informed decisions and act upon them.

Perspectives of Coaches

Sarah believes that having greater clarity leads to leadership and organisational effectiveness. She argues that the clarity developed helps to foster better engagement with her coachees which ultimately results in effective outcomes. Thus, she agrees with the coachee participants that enhanced clarity plays a role in coachee effectiveness and development.

"As the leader has the great clarities, and if the leader provides greater clarity for people, reporting to that structure will feel engaged and more connected so there is number of different ways"(232-234).

The clarity appears to play an holistic role here as having a leader with developed clarity helps to generate clarity among others. Clarity also appears to help the leaders (coachees) to understand their priorities and become clearer about their expectations of the organisation. Sarah emphasises that:

"They are clear about the expectations of the organisation has from their leaders, clear what the expectation is, what the success looks like, how they internalise those reference points, do they know what good looks like" (795-798).

Thus, it is clear that the deeper understanding helps coachees to recognise their contribution to the organisation and how they contribute. Thus, the created understanding generates action to reach those expectations and continue working on them.

Sarah highlights this aspect, saying:

"It depends on what it is greater clarity about; if it is clarity about who they are as leaders or those things that I just describe you, the clarity of purpose, helping them work out what their purpose is" (791-794).

Further, Sarah argues that this generated clarity helps leaders to secure opportunities and to work on them. Saying this, she continues to acknowledge the importance of facilitating clarity through executive coaching. She articulates this by saying:

"Coaching helps to make the difference and sometimes for leaders, coaching helps some make the best opportunities of those other interventions we just talk about" (250-252).

Sarah clearly endorses the developed notion of clarity by all the coachee participants. It is also clear that she employs reflective exercises, questioning, challenging and some theoretical frameworks to generate clarity within her coachees.

However, unlike the others, John does not highlight clarity. There is evidence that he also employs theories, reflection and questioning-like techniques to generate coachee understanding and openness. Yet, this evidence does not represent the 'clarity' claimed by the other coaches.

4.4.2 Theme Two: Develop Opportunity

	Coachees			Coaches	
Sub Themes	Daniel	Mark	David	Sarah	John
Challenge to develop	x	x	x	x	x
A tailored approach	x	x	x	x	x
Coachee-led agenda	x	x	x	x	x

Table 4-3 Develop Opportunity though Executive Coaching

4.4.2.1 Challenge to develop

Perspectives of Coachee

The participants recognise that the challenges that executive coaching brings are positive and developmental. Everyone agrees that being at the top deprives them of opportunities for such challenges at work. Here, the questions that appeared earlier as a source of generating understanding and clarity, surface again as the mode of challenging conversations. Additionally, participants claim that the level of challenge presented by their coaches helps them to question their predispositions, the patterns and frames of reference, thus encouraging them to look for new realities. Daniel emphasises this aspect, saying:

"*A good coach will ask the right questions, be appropriately challenging" (514),* as a result he is *"clear what you going to do about it, you really have thought it through and that is power of coaching" (517-518).*

Thus, the challenges which come his way develop some uncertainties within him which encourage him to explore possible improvements and options. Furthermore, he

considers that the level of the challenges is as important as the challenges themselves. Daniel believes that an appropriate level of challenge generates results. He argues that the executive coach picks up from his language and continues to challenge until he settles with an action plan to move forward. He further underlines the importance of challenge, saying:

"*I think actually not letting you to have a nice conversation; they go nowhere*" (811-812).

Mark also agrees that challenging is a part of executive coaching that encourages him to explore deeper into the root causes that hinder his progress. He appears to be a firm believer that the challenges come from the coach and he considers them as opportunities. Thus, he positively accepts the challenges that come his way. However, he emphasises the importance of agreeing the level of challenge that the coach brings in at the contracting stage.

"Use of executive coaching … good executive coaching, I think really helps to cascade some of those, those thoughts, some of that stimulation of thoughts and that challenge of thoughts down through levels" (367-371).

Saying this, he agrees with Daniel's notion that there is no such level of challenge on the job that stimulates and challenges deeply enough. Moreover, he notes that the training sessions attended over the years did not provide him with challenges sufficient to question his predispositions. He also believes that the challenges make him open to the world of realities and develop his inquiring mind.

Mark articulates that deeper challenge is a source that helps him to bring out his real development needs. In turn, this helps him to act on them. He notes that:

"*As long as they are challenging enough uumm, to really kind, getting to what is you trying to get out*" (429-430); Mark also argues in Daniel's favour about the level of challenge and the importance of having the right balance. The right level of challenge encourages his development which stimulates him to think constructively about his current practices, beliefs and values. He explicitly highlights this aspect, saying:

"Very extremely heated, quite personal, you do not like to be, sometimes, you do not like (not clear) to that degree" (964-966).

Despite being a little uncomfortable, he admits the value of challenge. Mark claims that challenges direct him to different development avenues and help him to understand his predispositions. These heated discussions also act as a source of developing critical

perspectives which, in turn, ensures his resourcefulness. He realises that his thinking, behaviour and assumptions will be questioned and challenged by his executive coach. It has encouraged him to explore new ways of doing things and to seek new versions of truths.

David also appreciates the challenges that his executive coach brings about and considers them to be developmental. However, his views are slightly different compared to the other two participants. In David's view, it was he who embeds the challenges, rather than the coach.

David cites his experience, saying:

"I mean he is certainly challenging. So I guess you kind of challenge yourself, because as a coach, as being a coach, the coach is kind of listening more than talking" (64-67).

As David notes, the silence or the space that is created by listening to the coach facilitates an atmosphere for him to challenge himself, his current propensity, actions and behaviours. This helps him to understand there are different realities which encourage him to think and act differently in terms of his personal development and beyond. Additionally, the challenges make David more open and inspire him to act differently.

David also observes that coaching equips people to challenge each other and be more constructive. He acknowledges that coaching can help anyone to improve their thinking and performance.

"People are bit more equipped to challenge each other in a better…. In more constructive way, more positive questioning or open way than in a sort of more destructive challenging way" (553-558).

Thus, David also complements the notion that the right balance of challenge is an important component of executive coaching. Moreover, he believes that the genuine purpose of the challenge is also essential to facilitate development.

Perspectives of Coaches

The coaches also believe that the right level of challenge is an important element of executive coaching. They agree that, in practice, they attempt to create challenges in terms of coachees' thinking, actions and their preconceptions. For example, Sarah notes that:

"I talk about something hypothetically so it is limiting belief around something. So challenge might be if you did not hold that belief, so doing that sort of hypothesis uuum and sense of that, that was your lens that you look at through the world, how would you deal with this situation differently" (1001-1006).

This illustrates that Sarah attempts to encourage her coachees to explore different options and new ways of doing by posing some challenges. She considers that:

"Checking out and challenging assumptions and superstitions that they have distorted thinking that they may have" (800-801) is important. She acknowledges that knowing each other well and contracting at the beginning facilitates results. Sarah also emphasises that leaders do not have challenges to the level that she offers through executive coaching. She emphasises that:

"Sometimes for leaders it is the first time in a working environment that they had that, they have been able to have that kind of conversation and still be valued and still feel they are valued and not judge" (1043-1047).

This shows the importance of the level of challenge and the right understanding so that coachees' still feel valued and encouraged to reach their potential. John also highlights the significance and agrees that the level of challenge is vital. He believes that the initial created awareness helps as his coachees are informed as to why this level of challenge is presented. He notes that:

"You know the level of challenge that you might want and one of those things on there is … is getting to the goals" (817-819).

Thus, he believes that the right level of challenge facilitates goal attainment. John, like the other participants, feels that the right level of challenge helps coachees to learn, develop and achieve their goals. To John, it is all about development and forward progress. He emphasises this aspect, saying:

"It is kind of taking them to the next level, stretching and challenging them" (659-660). He believes that creating challenges in a positive way helps them to go forward and be motivated to reach their goals. Thus, he considers that challenges make a significant contribution to coachees' progress. Furthermore, John emphasises that the challenges also generate understanding which, in turn, influences informed decision-making but he also agrees that the level of challenge is as important as the challenge itself.

He notes that the "greater *levels of support and challenge in terms of conversations" (998),* are vital to make the executive coaching intervention developmental. Therefore,

all the coach and the coachee participants agree that challenges are developmental if they manage to strike the right balance between challenge and support.

4.4.2.2. A Tailored Approach

Perspective of Coachees

The coachee participants appreciate the opportunity to design the development programme for themselves. They emphasise that the feeling that they crafted the plan is a good start. All agree that the other developmental interventions have also helped their development. Nevertheless, they view these as less relevant to the current context. All participants agree that the executive coaching is more relevant when considering their level of experience, seniority, and knowledge. Daniel emphasises the point by saying that:

"Stuff becomes less relevant to you because more of you heard before, more of you learning through just interaction, so I think they become less relevant, the longer they in your career further up you got, the more these thing you have done uum whereas executive coaching is always highly relevant" (434-438).

Therefore, the individualised attention he gets through executive coaching, and the opportunity to evaluate the options and strategies to act, are much valued. He says:

"It does not give you answers, you know you come up with answers, it does not give you solutions, it does not give you solutions, it does not do the action for you, and you got to do the action, it actually points it back to you" (539-542).

He acknowledges that executive coaching is tailored to his needs and around his skills and abilities. The individualised nature of the intervention also develops ownership and responsibility as he knows it is only about him, his plan and there is nobody else to act upon it. It enhances his self-belief which is evident as he believes that the:

"Answer is always with me" (304); he reiterates that having a tailored programme is helpful rather than a general developmental intervention designed for a broader cohort. Daniel is a strong advocate of the view that an individualised, tailored approach helps him to develop effectively. He lays special emphasis on the tailored nature of executive coaching, saying:

"Being targeted, being more specific to you, those make sense when more experienced you are, sort of probably the more senior you are" (457-459).

Mark shares the theme with Daniel and claims that:

"*It is about self, and time to think, and free time to allow your mind to get bit more space*" *(985-987).*

He also appreciates that it is about him and the unique approach which helps him to explore and plan things. Mark notes that the uniqueness within executive coaching facilitates space to think and change his predispositions so that it generates results. He also acknowledges that he has the opportunity to develop his own developmental plan (discussed in next section). He says that:

"*Clearly from the personal … coaching point of view is for me is more about my behaviour, how I interact and how I think through and how I establish what I want to do*" *(248-250).*

Thus, Mark accepts that executive coaching is unique and tailored around him to support his personal development. He further considers its relevance, saying that:

"*Coaching piece is more about personal*" *(243-244);* this further demonstrates the tailored nature of executive coaching compared to traditional development programmes. Mark appreciates the uniqueness of executive coaching and its tailored approach and considers it as highly relevant to his development.

David agrees with the other participants and affirms the importance of having something tailored around his needs. This view is intensified in his attempt to differentiate traditional training interventions from executive coaching:

"*Kind of exhausted of the lots of training that are available, kind of done that, and needed something different and bit more bespoke and tailored and individual uum rather than kind of group training sessions*" *(437-441).*

Additionally, he highlights the uniqueness of executive coaching and hints that it fits well with his developmental needs. He also talks about the enhanced self-responsibility that the tailored nature of executive coaching develops within him. David, too, likes the idea of developing his own development plan (discussed further in the next section), which he believes is an opportunity to tailor a programme considering his skills and abilities. He takes this positively, saying:

"*Coaching is much more personal and it is more private and different pace and it has got some sort of pressures, objectives and things like that I think it is completely different in a good way*" *(293-295).*

David continues to stress that executive coaching is a focused and intensive approach. He demonstrates the control he has within the process by saying that: *"you make it intense as you want to do it" (894)*. Thus, he has the authority within the process to decide things. He further articulates the importance of the tailored nature of the invention to ensure sustainable improvements by saying:

"It is more intensive and focused, you more likely to make long term behavioural changes by doing that than going to a course" (319-324).

It is clear that all the participants share the idea of the individualised nature of the intervention which helps them to develop a tailored programme considering their own skills and needs. They acknowledge the role of executive coaching in doing so and appreciate the authority they have within the coaching process.

Perspectives of Coaches

The valued individualised nature of executive coaching identified by the coachee participants is also reflected in the interpretations of the coach participants. They agree on and discuss the importance of tailoring programmes to individuals as an acknowledgement of the diversity of individuals and their needs. Sarah shares her experience, saying that:

"*I recognised doing lots of group facilitated work uum individuals are very different, and whilst you can work with individuals needs in group developments, for many individuals to work at the depth where real change can happen, there needs to be specific focus"* *(14-19).*

The uniqueness of executive coaching has also influenced her to change her practice as a developmental expert where she demonstrates her preference for individualised rather than group development. Sarah is a firm believer in the unique and tailored nature of executive coaching and its relevance for executive development. She further highlights the uniqueness of executive coaching, saying that:

 "Sometimes the challenge comes in my experience, of being with them" (1031-1032); thus, the relationship that coach and coachee develop becomes a developmental exercise for them both. Therefore, executive coaching is differentiated from other traditional modes of development. Sarah believes that the trusting relationship helps both parties to explore opportunities. She also emphasises that creating space for an individual to craft their plans, and encouraging and being around for them, makes executive coaching further unique.

She emphasises this point, saying:

"Uum trusting one to one relationship where individual can explore some of the challenges and blockages they are experiencing in order to become more effective in their role" (21-24).

John is also in line with this view. He acts as a strong believer of these unique features of executive coaching and acknowledges that he facilitates individuals to design their development by exploring their values, skills and abilities. He notes that the coachee (learner) has a more active role in his/her own development, saying that:

"*It is partnership but actually in terms of an individual being self-directive in their learning; it is much more active process than traditional training process" (1331-1333).*

Thus, John agrees with the coachee participants and the coach that the tailored nature of executive coaching positively contributes to the coachees' development. Furthermore, he concurs that it develops commitment and self-responsibility due to the ownership and the authority given to coachees within the process. The idea is further emphasised, saying:

"It is directed by the individual, what they want to work on, what do, they want" (528-529)

As noted above, he argues that the tailored nature of executive coaching "*is much more active process" (1332).*

However, deviating from the strong presence that executive coaching facilitates a tailored development that considers coachees skills, abilities and their development needs, the coach participants accept that some of the techniques are chosen as they closely match with their (coaches') values and beliefs.

When John is asked the reasons behind the approach he adopts, he expresses it thus:

"It was one that I felt more natural, more suited to my style and my skills and umm my values, really so it was the one that I just felt I want to" (1232-1235); however, he states that it is not the only approach he uses. This appears to be an attempt to justify the highlighted focus tailored around coachees' skills and abilities. Nevertheless, there is sufficient evidence of him attempting to seek approaches that he finds comfortable. For example, he attempts to justify the approach taken, saying:

"Why I took that, probably because, it sort of resonate with me from a sort of value perspective, but also that I tried a number of different approaches" (1228-1231).

Similarly, Sarah emphasises that *"my frames of reference come from transactional analysis" (38-39).* Moreover, like John, she emphasises that the approach taken is helpful for her to work with coachees.

She notes this aspect, saying:

"*I found that particularly helpful with working with leaders at all levels in organisations"* *(28-29);* thus, there is a clear divergence here from the coaches' earlier claims around tailoring their approach to individual coachees. This does not discard the idea that they help their coachees to develop their own agenda and ensure that coachees have sufficient space to develop their own development plans. However, coach preferences, skills, values and beliefs are also taken into account.

4.4.2.3   Coachee-led Agenda

Perspective of Coachees

This theme is linked to the above-discussed 'tailored approach' as it surfaces that coachees are tailoring their own development plans with the coaches' help. My study shows that executive coaching helps coachees to develop their own agenda. The above-discussed questioning, challenging, and generated thinking through executive coaching is supportive of coachees crafting their own development plans.

My conversations with the coachee and coach participants demonstrate that almost all decisions come from the coachees where responsibility and ownership are generated for development. All agree that the authority, responsibility and ownership that coachees have in the process directs them to draft effective action plans for their personal development. Daniel highlights that the challenges and questions which come from his coach help him to find solutions; however, these solutions and the actions are generated within. He notes that the:

"*Answer is always with me, it is actually teasing them out uum. It is really J (coach) as the coach asks me questions, challenge me" (304-306).*

Throughout the discussion, it appears that the coach helps him to not only search for answers within but also to develop an action plan. The needs analysis, the development decisions and the action plans are all owned by the coachee. This leads Daniel to believe that it is his responsibility to execute them. Thus, the facilitated

opportunity to develop his own agenda makes him responsible for initiating action and delivering results. He is sufficiently enthusiastic to mention that:

"I got an action plan, specific things that I am going to do uuum and then it is up to me to go and do those following coaching session"(318-320).

The statement exhibits that the primary decision maker throughout the process is the coachee. Daniel also acknowledges that having an external coach is very supportive in crafting his own agenda for development. He makes this clear, saying:

"She knew very little about the organisation [13.41, not clear] which is external but was able to you know, what we normally [13.45, not clear] with her, I have a little agenda of things that I wanted to talk about or thing that I wanted some help with" (220-226).

The idea of going with a short agenda for discussion strengthens the notion that the development agenda for Daniel is developed by him, and so are the actions. Therefore, both the agenda and the action plans belong to the coachee.

Like Daniel, Mark also expresses the idea of having an external coach but does not highlight it as an influential factor for developing his own agenda. Conversely, he states that it is important for him to have someone who does not have an agenda. In turn, he shows that he values the opportunity to produce his own developmental agenda. Mark stresses that his coach is:

"Somebody did not know me, somebody did not know my history around the group, somebody who did not really, did not have an agenda" (133-136).

Both interviews with Mark helped me to realise that he holds the primary decision making role within the executive coaching process. In addition, as mentioned above, it helps him to be more responsible and to develop a personal drive to achieve the set goals. The statement below further confirms that the agenda is set by Mark himself:

"I suppose, I went into this programme, this particular programme thinking my two challenges are" (468- 469).

This demonstrates that the choices and the options are within, but the coach helps him to figure things out through the engaged discussion. David acknowledges others and points out the authority he has within the executive coaching process. He notes that even the initial decision to have a coach was taken by him. This confirms that the authority within the executive coaching process to develop his own plans existed at the very beginning of the intervention. He articulates this, saying:

"You kind of commit to going and having the coaching and you need to, and it is for you to decide what you want to talk about" (240-243); he also agrees with others that actions and commitments to achieve set goals are also generated within. He speaks about this at length, saying:

"It is only intense as you made it, in terms of how much energy you put in and you thinking you putting in and what you want to work on" (355-357).

David continues his thoughts on making his own decisions and having authority on developing his own plan for development. He argues that the level of commitment and enthusiasm are also decided by the coachee. Thus, he clearly notes that everything lies within:

"I think it is down to what you want to get out of it" (130-131) and *"it depends on what you put into it" (136).*

All the coachees agree that they develop the development agenda with the help of their coach. This enhances their commitment, helps them to be responsible for their own development and to act upon the developed agenda.

Perspectives of Coaches

The above-developed arguments by coachee participants are acknowledged by the coach participants. Sarah emphasises that coachees are given freedom to choose what and how they work on their development. She also acknowledges David's notion that the decision to engage with a coach should come from the coachee. Her job is to facilitate understanding so that coachees can take informed decisions from the beginning of the intervention. She clearly articulates the idea, saying that:

"Why coaching now, so what is it you are looking to do differently, what you looking for as a result" (1073-1074).

Sarah, in her executive coaching practice, creates some space for her coachees to think, question and decide their expectations from coaching which helps them to work willingly. This shows her attempt to generate development within the coachees. She clarifies this point, saying:

"I said to the leaders themselves and what difference to you want to see and what values do you think that would bring, and it might be quantitative or it might be qualitative" (214-216).

Like Sarah, John also agrees that his practice is coachee-led and argues that this situation is natural in executive coaching. He believes that it is a fundamental principle of executive coaching to make the coachee responsible and to create a leader within. He emphasises this aspect saying that:

 "*The underlying principles of coaching that I really believing which is things like you know helping individual to find their own way, and acting as an enabler, so it is more kind of less directive end of that coaching spectrum*" (73-76).

He notes that conversation is the mode that he uses to facilitate a coachee-led agenda and emphasises that the conversations his coachees engage in helps them to find their way to being resourceful and confident.

"Conversations in order to work on an agenda of their choosing or to develop and identify what the goals and agenda might look like uuum in order to help them to achieve their goal" (1297-1299).

John highlights that it generates responsibility due to ownership created within, thereby helping coachees to reach their goals. He also acknowledges Sarah's view that this process starts at the very beginning of the intervention.

"I think it kind of generate responsibility which is where the kind of confidence come from. Because it is almost taking responsibility and find it out that it is either work or it did not go wrong the way that you thought it would do. So it is kind of self-generating from that point of view" (193-198).

Therefore, there is clear agreement here that coaching helps to develop a coachee-led agenda. The coach participants demonstrate their efforts in facilitating the coachee to create their own agenda.

4.4.2.4 Organisational Agenda in Executive Coaching

Perspectives of Coachees

The findings also reveal a divergence from the above-discussed 'coachee-led agenda' according to the interpretations of all the coachee participants; there is an organisational agenda in executive coaching with which they are engaged. There is also evidence to suggest that all coachee participants are quite reluctant to accept this fact. The study is unclear on the rationale for this evident reluctance. Nevertheless, it is clear that there is an attempt to involve the bosses of the coachees in the process. It is notable that the participants, who claim the importance of an agenda of their own, see

this involvement positively. They believe their bosses can also help them to determine what they should be working on. Thus, the involvement of the boss (organisation) is seen as positive support.

However, with all three participants, the coach (each participant has a different coach) attempts to develop a three-way contract. The boss, the coach and the coachee are involved in developing a development plan for the coachee, or at least the coach meets the coachee's immediate boss to discuss the way forward. This directs me to understand that the claim the participants make about having their own agenda seems not entirely plausible.

Daniel mentions that his coach suggested to him that his boss should be involved in the process. This diverts the initial argument that the coach facilitates the process but the coachee develops the agenda. It is clear from Daniel's statement that:

"J (Coach) suggested that we sort of set up three way coaching contract with me, my boss and her" (645-646).

Daniel, being a senior leader of the organisation, believes that his boss's point of view would have been helpful. However, in his case, the boss was uninterested but Daniel has a previous positive experience of engaging in a tripartite relationship within one of his subordinates' coaching process. This might also have an impact on Daniel's positive perceptions of three-way contracting. He mentions that:

"I think if you got that three way perspective that can be more valuable. I think you know your manager who was somebody working closely with you, will have a valuable perspective of that can help inform that coaching relationship and can help identify areas that worth working on" (656 -661).

However, when asked about the decision to have a coach for him, Daniel confidently articulates that the idea came from him and thus he also has a say in the process. It is not his boss or the organisation making all the decisions. Nevertheless, there is apparent involvement. It is not clear through the interviews the extent or the duration of this support, but Daniel believes his boss could have engaged more within the process and this would have been helpful.

Mark slightly deviates from the above when discussing his choice to have an internal coach. He believes that the internal coaches bring more influence on organisational strategy and direction into coaching engagement. Mark says that: *"I guess internally, if*

it is an internal coach, they could coach me in line with the direction of the organisation and if you are more junior level that works" (404-407).

Therefore, he seems to prefer little organisational involvement in his executive coaching engagement but does not emphasise its omission within the process. In Mark's case, there is no evidence to suggest an attempt to enter into a tripartite contract. However, his coach had a 'back table discussion' with his boss before meeting him. His boss provided an overview of Mark to the coach but there is little clarity about the content of this boss-coach discussion. Mark acknowledges that his boss and the coach met beforehand:

"M (participant's boss) met her (the coach) first and introduced me for through his eyes and gave her some insight into this the kind of person he is" (554-556).

Thus, he acknowledges that there is some involvement of the boss at the start of the process. However, this is the only occasion on which Mark mentions this matter.

Deviating from Mark and Daniel, David did not mention three-way contracting or any initial meeting with his boss and the coach. However, it is clear that the head of HR suggested that he should have a coach. He claims that he is identified as a high potential leader by the organisation so the opportunity to have an executive coach is given. On two occasions, David discusses organisational involvement in his executive coaching engagement. He mentions this aspect, saying:

"I was offered that [executive coaching] uum Via K[Head of Human Resources] uum opportunity to do that have a coach to work with um it is a good opportunity" (27-28).

Thus, the initial decision to have a coach is an organisational decision. The full authority of the executive coaching process that he claims throughout the study contradicts this statement. David confirms this further, saying that the head of HR wanted him to have a coach arguing that this was for his development.

"He (head of HR) wants [to] (…) give me opportunity to develop, so this is really good" (45-46)

It is clear that all three coachee participants do not discuss the involvement of a boss or HR in the process in detail. They are more supportive of the notion that there is a coachee-led agenda in executive coaching. Despite the frequency, their interpretations suggest that executive coaching is influenced by the organisational agenda. Therefore, this is a divergence from the above-discussed 'coachee-led agenda'. None of the

participants view the organisational involvement as a negative influence for their development.

Perspectives of Coaches

The discussed organisational agenda demonstrates a strong presence within coach perspectives. Three-way contracting, as highlighted by Daniel, back table discussions as mentioned by Mark, and the involvement of HR referred to by David, all represent that there is organisational involvement. Thus, the organisation itself is also playing a role in defining directions. This can be considered as a way of ensuring that executive coaching delivers results for the organisation, something which also appears in coach interpretations.

The coach participants' representation is significant compared to the coachee for this notion. Moreover, the discussed reluctance to accept that there is an agenda behind the intervention is also clearer. For example, Sarah highlights that:

"Many times there will be a three way contracting. So there is a rooted conversation with the line manager" (894-896); however, the extent of the involvement of the organisation (or the boss), which was is unclear in the interviews with coachee participants, appears quite clear here. It is quite clear from Sarah's argument that the goal setting for executive coaching has been done with organisational involvement. The confidentiality of what coachees do with the coach began after those initial decisions had been made. Building up from the above, she notes that:

"But in terms of content, how we get to that, is absolutely confidential" (902-903).

This demonstrates that the direction is set with the involvement of the boss. However, how the coachee reaches the set goals, and what is involved in the process, remain confidential. Sarah makes it clearer, saying that *"they (organisation or the boss) do not need to know about the content of what we talk about" (109-110).*

Therefore, according to Sarah, goal setting is done through three-way contracting but the coach and the coachee are given an opportunity to explore ways of achieving these goals. Therefore, in this instance, there is clear acknowledgement of organisational involvement in executive coaching. She continues accepting the organisational involvement as she notes that being an external coach helps to avoid interference. This view is in line with Mark's opinion, as he highlights that being external helps to avoid different agendas. Sarah notes this point, saying:

"When you come external to an organisation, it is much easier I think in many respect to be able to do that, you are not attached to anything else, you have no interferences to yourself"(843-45).

This idea is further strengthened as Sarah emphasises that there are two different realities within individuals and the organisation. She notes that contracting with a line manager helps with getting into *"really clear reality"*. This emphasises the organisational involvement and the diverse interests that lie within executive coaching. She highlights this factor, saying that *"contract[ing] the conversation with [the] line manager to get a really clear reality that is different from leader's own reality"* (165-166).

John also accepts the involvement of the organisation but states that there can be exceptions to three-way contracting. Sarah also agrees with this notion. The exception she highlights is that of the coachee being a very senior figurehead in the organisation. In John's case the exemption appears as a contextual consideration rather than reflecting the seniority of the coachee. He notes this, saying:

"Contracting at the start and sometimes but not always, three-way contracting at the start of the relationship" (55-57).

John agrees that, once agreement is reached, it becomes individual-led intervention where more responsibility and authority are assigned to coachees. He emphasises that, even with three-way contracting, there is a coachee-directed initiative where coachees choose what they want to work on.

Therefore, it is clear the authority within the process comes later than actually highlighted by the coachee participants (see coachee-led agenda). Moreover, there is a struggle when John attempts to explain three-way contracting. He starts by saying, *"that is an interesting one" (1063)*; however, he does not appear interested and continues by saying:

"Uumm… it is umm… I have mixed feeling about it. In some way I think the purpose of it is to you know… choose the person who can support the individual in their performance. Choose the person in their day-in-day out. It is the line manager. So bring them into the conversation. Contracts out what are their roles, the coachees' roles, what is individual trying to achieve, agreement and clarity around that among three of you" (1063-1070).

At the start of the statement, there is a very clear struggle with the phrasing. He also says that he has mixed feelings about the situation. This creates doubts as to whether John gets coachees into three-way contracting due to organisational pressures but there is no evidence to support this position. However, it is quite clear that organisational involvement runs throughout his interpretations. At times, he very clearly acknowledges both organisational and coachee involvement within the process. He says:

"Giving people a more of a voice, more involvement, more autonomy, more contribution within the work place, so it is kind of an emancipatory almost angle there but with a business performance angle too" (1102-1105).

Therefore, there is clearer evidence within coach participants to support the views raised by coachees. Furthermore, the level of involvement highlighted by the coach participants is significant compared to the coaches. However, the evident reluctance to discuss organisational involvement exists within the coaches too, especially with John.

4.4.3 Theme Three: Generate Motivation

	Coachees			Coaches	
Sub Themes	**Daniel**	**Mark**	**David**	**Sarah**	**John**
Non-judgmental, confidential relationship	x	x	x	x	x
Focusing on development	x	x	x	-	-
Positive attitudes towards EC	x	x	x	-	-

Table 4-4 Generate Motivation

4.4.3.1 Non-Judgmental, Confidential relationship

Perspectives of Coachees

Non-judgmental, confidential relationships form another highly represented theme which appears throughout the analysis. There is a substantial amount of evidence within the study to note that all participants are seeking a safe-space in which to have an open discussion. All the participants highlight the significance of having somebody with no agenda behind them. Thus, all coachee participants prefer having an external coach.

They note that it is important to have a space where 'nothing is wrong or bad and nothing looks stupid'. Thus, they are seeking a non-judgmental space. Daniel highlights the notion, saying:

"*Did I clearly identify people internally who could play that role (talking about executive coach) no… not really because I did not really know them well enough and actually there are some stuff I might be unwilling to share because they gonna be my peers or they gonna be my juniors*" (488-493).

He is quite direct in expressing that *"there is actually stuff that I feel uncomfortable to sharing with them"* (494-495).

This demonstrates how much he values the confidentiality in his coaching relationship. It supports him to overcome communication barriers, which in turn, help him to be open and discuss the available options. It also enhances his confidence in sharing his values, beliefs and thoughts with no hesitation. Daniel realises that there are no judgments made on what he is discussing but that more questions may emerge from the discussions which help him in many ways. He reports this aspect by saying that the coach:

"*Stay[s] impartial and push you and make sure that you really have got to the root of the issue*" (515- 516).

The idea is fully represented by Mark when discussing the importance of an impartial person with whom to liberally discuss his developmental goals, barriers and options. He expresses this by saying that he wants:

"Somebody who did not really … did not have an agenda or a stake in necessarily what happen next" (138-139)

Thus, he values having a safe and confidential relationship in his executive coaching engagement. In a similar vein to Daniel, he argues the importance of the opportunity to openly discuss without worrying about confidentiality, safety and judgement. Therefore, he can explore options without being seen as ignorant or silly. He is also convinced that the discussion is just for his development and has no hidden agendas within. Daniel considers having such a relationship as:

"*Having the other voice on your shoulder*" (730) which encourages him to see things differently and to explore options. He also notes that it gives him a common feeling as the coach empathises with him (the coachee). The language he uses *"…we were*

working..." and "*...the way we have approached it...*" exhibits the idea further. Daniel highlights the way he works with his coach, saying:

"We talked about some of the objectives and plans I had and how umm I was gonna deliver those, I was gonna make sure they had real impact" (263-266).

David brings a very different perspective into the above argument. He stresses that formal relationships and discussions, like annual reviews, are barriers to his development. He says:

"You also got annual reviews and appraisals and things and that is always kind of a barrier, that is always going to be there in a work space"(97-99). However, "*when you get someone ex... coach who is external, unbiased and I think there is bit more freedom to discuss" (98-100).*

Thus, not having enough freedom to hold open discussion is considered to be a barrier. Therefore, he agrees with the other participants on this notion. He also believes that having an external, unbiased relationship helps him to discuss things openly and to explore possible development options. David interprets how this confidential and non-judgmental relationship helps him, saying that:

"It draws them out I mean it is safe place to with...some time to work on those things and not just kind of park them, hide them away" (244-247).

Hence, executive coaching discussions provide a safe and confidential atmosphere to evaluate his development options. He argues that the depth of executive coaching conversations is not present within the conversations he engages in with his boss due to predefined barriers. David emphasises that he would not talk about weaknesses or gaps with his boss, saying that:

"Particularly, areas those are weaknesses because people being people, you know I am not comfortable of talking about what my weaknesses are with my boss" (102-104).

This concurs with the view that Mark and Daniel bring forward. Therefore, all coachee participants agree that the impartial, non-judgmental approach followed is highly beneficial for their development.

Perspectives of Coaches

The above notion of a non-judgmental, confidential relationship is also highly represented by coach participants. They emphasise the importance of a comfortable

space to talk through things without worrying about anything. Sarah highlights that confidentiality and non-judgement are part of trust. Thus, the coachee engages well with the coach and explores things deeper. She says that, *"trust is not just about confidentiality, trust is not being judge uum and I do not have an organisational hat on, there"* (889-891).

It is clear that *"they will talk about things that they would not ordinarily talk about"* (907-908) when trust is ensured.

Sarah highlights that people are reluctant to talk things through in their social space. Resultantly, their understanding and ability to explore solutions are hindered. She emphasises that this is partly due to the insecurity felt by coachees. She notes that these blocks go away when someone is engaged in an honest conversation aimed at further understanding and development. She highlights this element, saying:

"Whatever those blocks are, I often think that people either do not see you recognise [them] or [They feel] they [those] are silly to talk about, if you are in a confidential space where there is nothing silly, it is all ok" (913-914).

She regards the confidential and non-judgmental space as valuable and relevant for the coachee's development. John agrees with the notion and claims that he is non-judgmental. Equally, he notes that he is continuously trying to be non-judgmental as he knows its importance for coachee development.

"I have been non-judgmental, I think I …woo… I tended to try and be non-judgmental; we are all judgmental at time are we? Are not we?" (1236-1237).

John continues to emphasise the importance of being aware that people are judgmental so that it can be avoided. Thus, he agrees with Sarah on this point but also highlights the difficulty of being non-judgmental. Additionally, he thinks that being non-judgmental fits well with his values. John emphasises the idea, saying:

"Non-directive, you know relying on genuineness, non-judgmental and unconditional positive regards and acceptance and I think it kind of fits with me and who I am" (216-218).

Here, he talks more about the approach that fits well with him but does not discard the importance of being non-judgmental in the coaching relationship. He says that:

"P*eople can confidentially engage with me over a number of conversations"* (1295) and he believes that it is *"just this idea that there is a safe space in which to walk through*

something through someone else who will not judge you and who will be with you" *(1261-1263)* which is important in his engagement with his coachees.

This signifies the ultimate goal of a non-judgmental relationship which is to support coachee development and goal achievement. Therefore, the coach participants agree with the coachees on the importance of confidential, non-judgmental relationships.

4.4.3.2 Focusing on Development

Perspectives of Coachees

All participants are very positive and enthusiastic knowing that they are given executive coaching to support their development. The coachees consider the opportunity to have a coach as a privilege. All the coachees believe that engaging with an executive coach helps them to develop. These perspectives also support them to be more positive about the intervention. Therefore, they are motivated to work on their development.

Daniel expresses the view that coaching engagement makes him effective. He believes that executive coaching makes him better at things. Thus, he is a firm believer in executive coaching and stresses that it is for his development. He notes that:

"I am clear what I am doing and I am clear why I am doing it and uum nearly always as a results get better end results with whatever I am doing" (1238-1240).

He continues admiring executive coaching as a performance development intervention and discusses the power of it. Daniel thinks it is developmental in many ways. He reports that executive coaching *"can impact on relationships, impacts on your effectiveness, your performance, I think that is …that is a power of good coaching, you can do all of those things"(1173-1175).*

Furthermore, executive coaching develops his forward thinking and ability to act upon agreed goals which, in turn, inspires him to deliver results. He continues to emphasise the action-oriented nature of executive coaching, saying that *"I come to my bottom, I can do here, I know where am I, had an issue and did not know what to do with it but now I got something, I got a clearer action plan to deal with" (618-620).*

This demonstrates that the executive (coachee) is not just thinking forward but acting forward to accomplish his developmental goals due to the executive coaching he receives. This forward thinking also surfaces during the discussions with Mark.

Mark emphasises that executive coaching encourages him to learn from his past experiences. Nevertheless, the focus is on the future and his development rather than the past and any previous issues. He notes this, saying:

"Without any of the baggage of why I have done this and why I have done that in the past and who has done this and who has done that in the past and say actually ok let's tease out what you really interested in, what you really wanted to do" (198-201).

Thus, the attempted exploration of the past is undertaken in order to learn and develop without worrying about previous mistakes. Mark believes that exploring the past and generating forward thinking helps him to develop and be more successful. He clarifies this, saying:

"Having some positive challenge around, what do you really want to do, what do you really inspire to do, I think more people would be more successful" (637-638).

Additionally, he is fully convinced that the executive coaching he engages in is for his own development and there are no hidden agendas within it. In turn, this motivates him to participate fully with coaching conversations as he is recognised as a potential leader who is looking for further development on his career ladder. He highlights this aspect, saying:

"One thing when I went into coaching one of the thing I felt that I need to was to further my personal development" (844-845).

Like his colleagues, David also has a developmental perspective towards coaching. He picks up on the word 'executive' in the term 'executive coaching' and says the term itself denotes that it refers to executives. He attempts to justify executive coaching as an intervention for high performers within an organisation. The developmental perspective he holds is further confirmed as:

"(He) I knew that some other people on escort who the next level up from me they are kind of board level have executive coaches, Kristy is a chief exes has one" (479-481).

Thus, for David, the term itself hints at development and the positives within it. When he is asked during the interview to pick reasons that he might assign coaching for his subordinates, development is chosen as his priority over addressing work performance or relationship issues. He reports this factor, saying:

"It will be more likely to be done on positives as if investing in someone that it would someone is under performing, that will be slightly harder to justify" (416-419) and he labels *"executive coaching as a completely different way of developing yourself" (298).*

All coachee participants agree that the main focus of executive coaching is their development. They are focusing on their strengths to explore ways of development rather than focusing on issues. Therefore, all participants consider executive coaching as a positive intervention and as an investment for their development. Resultantly, the participants are motivated to act upon, and to achieve, set goals. The discussion depicts that the positive nature of the intervention is also embedded in organisational culture which appears to be developmental for coachee participants (discussed later).

Perspectives of Coaches

The evidence from coach interpretations suggests that their main aim is to develop their coachees. However, this development focus does not mean that the coaches attempt to harness developmental thinking within coaches. Therefore, even though coachees are taking developmental focus as an influential factor for their development, it is not being used by coaches or, indeed, considered particularly important. Thus, it appears that coaches do not realise its value. Therefore, this aspect surfaces as an area that coaches could explore further to keep their coachees motivated and to support them to act upon their development goals.

4.4.3.3 Positive Attitude towards Executive Coaching

Perspectives of Coachees

The study reveals that the positive attitudes possessed by coachee participants have implications for their development. The positive nature of the intervention gives them some energy to act upon the devised plans. It is also clear through the interviews that the case study organisation believes in executive coaching and brands it as a leadership development intervention. All coachee participants take a positive standpoint in this matter. The positive attitudes of participants are also connected to their past positive experiences of coaching. Daniel, for example, mentions that:

"I think, I realised that [30.30 not clear] done some coaching and I have been coached but through peer coaching and I have seen the power of that" (484-487).

The above statement demonstrates that he is quite positive about the abilities of executive coaching towards leadership development. Daniel confidently says that he has seen the power of executive coaching in supporting leadership development. This

establishes the further rationale for his decision to take up executive coaching, perceiving it as a developmental intervention. Thus, it can be argued that his previous positive experience influences his decisions and actions. He reports this, saying:

"*Because I have seen it has worked elsewhere and it has worked for me not from executive coaching but peer coaching, so I was pretty clear that if I could do that… that would … that would be useful…ya go and give it a go and I was giving it a go and it worked*" (497-502).

He is quite positive about the result-orientation of the intervention which helps him to actively engage with it for his development and to keep his motivations high. Similarly, Mark also demonstrates his positive attitude towards executive coaching and appears to be a firm believer that it is developmental. Like Daniel, this positive perception by Mark is also due to his positive experience. He believes that executive coaching is usually offered for the performers of the organisation. Therefore, he approaches it by considering himself as a performer. My study reveals that this positive attitude helps him to be better at what he does.

"*I wanted to do some personal development, I did not know what to focus, and why, and we gonna come through that and I wanted to know what my next direction is in terms of my personal career development*" (934-938).

Therefore, Mark went into the process seeking development. He reflects his positive attitude further saying that "*I am very positive about it if it is not damn expensive*" (436).

The time taken to bring results and the cost are the only negatives that he points out. He emphasises that executive coaching explores the positives to build up from them, thereby encouraging him to continue to work on improvement. Mark articulates this positive focus of the intervention, saying:

"*Part of the process is about, you know, congratulating them and celebrating what you are good at but also helping them some of the weaknesses, some of the areas that they need to develop*" (344-346).

This encouragement to work on his strengths and abilities is considered highly supportive for his development. It has helped him to build up from what he already has, rather than struggling with things that he does not have. Moreover, focusing on strengths helps him to be positive, and this positive focus helps him to be more positive about things. This has resulted in him acting in a timely manner on his development needs. He mentions that:

"Working more with what you believe, somewhat you truly believe and using those to shape your action and the activity that you do as a result of that, ya really powerful" (648- 650).

This exhibits that the positive focus has helped Mark to generate results. Therefore, he considers that the positive attitude generated through executive coaching and the encouragement to focus on positives are highly beneficial for his development.

David has similar views to the others when he asserts that coaching was assigned to him due to his performance and identified potential for further development. Therefore, he stepped into it with a positive attitude towards the intervention. David considers that this positive perception helps his development. He stresses the point by saying:

"I am uuum in terms of talent matrix in a good place, in terms of potential uum, so he wants me to give me opportunity to develop, so this is really good" (43-46).

The way he presents the idea demonstrates considerable courage, enthusiasm and happiness and he believes executive coaching to be a great opportunity for his development. He articulates the above-cited positive state of executive coaching within the organisation. David believes it helps him to perceive executive coaching as a positive intervention. The positive perspectives encourage him to stay focused and act. When encouraged to talk about negatives, he mentions that:

"It is perceived being a very positive thing that you being given an executive coach and it did not really it did not really cross my mind I had never feel or heard or spoke to them in a way it is negative" (458-463).

Moreover, as mentioned above, David looks at the term 'executive coaching' to inject positive energy into what he is doing. He articulates that:

"I think it is because it is called executive coaching, it sort of implies that you only have to be at certain grade to get it, to get that investment" (471-473).

The discussions above clearly show that all participants acknowledge the positive nature of executive coaching. Furthermore, they argue that a positive attitude and focusing on the positive have helped them to make their developmental exercises more effective. Thus, this study suggests that focusing on the positive generates results.

Perspectives of Coaches

The coaches are also very positive about the intervention and they are firm believers in executive coaching, as highlighted earlier in this chapter. However, there is no evidence to suggest that they employ this positive attitude about coaching in order to help coachee development. John mentions the term *"unconditional positive regards" (218)* but this is when he discusses his coaching style. Thus, there is no clear evidence for this phenomenon, and whether he employs it to create coachee development. Therefore, my study suggests that coaches do not employ positive perception of coaching to generate results.

4.4.4 Theme Four: Encourage Action

	Coachees			Coaches	
Sub Themes	Daniel	Mark	David	Sarah	John
Encourage to act	x	x	x	-	x
Facilitate reflection	x	x	x	x	x
Informal evaluation	x	x	-	x	x

Table 4-5 Encourage Action through Executive Coaching

4.4.4.1 Encourage to Act

Perspectives of Coachees

This theme is also one of the highly representative themes from all the coachee participants. My findings suggest that executive coaching encourages them to explore the options available for development. Furthermore, the findings suggest that executive coaching also facilitates the development of action plans and helps in carrying out those plans. Daniel articulates this by saying that:

"It helps you [to] be clear about what you got to do. What the issue is what you got to do, and gives you a plan to do it" (538-544).

This statement exhibits that the encouragement to act comes with the better understanding that Daniel developed through executive coaching (discussed earlier) which in turn facilitated him to devise a plan. Daniel is highly stimulated when talking about the support he receives from his coach which also helps him to action the agreed tasks.

"Greater clarity in terms what some of the issues and challenges are…umm it helps me to develop solutions and some clear action plans to actually going and deliver them" (611-614)

This further confirms the link that he creates within the action plans and the clarity he develops. It also demonstrates that he has developed his knowledge of how to carry out the discussed actions in terms of his development. Another view raised is the quality of the outcome resulting from the devised clear action plan. The effectiveness of these actions is also enhanced due to Daniel's thorough understanding of what he does and the implications for his development.

"So that I can understand all those, you have to clear some of that and actually create tangible actions which means actually more effective and I am clearer what I am doing and why I am doing it, nearly always as a result get better end results" (1061-1066).

In addition, he claims that the improved results through clear actions encourage him to continue to act on his priorities. The actions facilitated through executive coaching consolidate further actions due to the positives generated (this is discussed in the 'ensure continuity' section).

Mark agrees with Daniel in this regard. He states that he dedicates his time to acting upon things while exploring priorities. He also acknowledges that he would not do the same without the support he receives from his coach. Mark emphasises this, saying *"taking bit more time, working harder with some relationships, historically I might not spend too much time trying to be able to sort out them"* (524-526).

He upholds the view that the actions generated are not the most comfortable ones, but knowing their importance helps him to continue to act upon his development. He describes the effort he makes to improve, saying that:

"You really do have to make more effort, more time little bit and think about how you gonna spend time so on and so forth, that is being quite significant piece of development" (545-548).

He also emphasises the way forward to progress by stating:

"Only by saying, I will, I can and I am, setting very specific targets and challenges and dates around that kind of stuff, will you progress" (961-964).

Thus, actions are generated through a perceptual change as well. Moreover, Mark believes that executive coaching removes the day-to-day weight of his job. This helps

him to focus more on value-added tasks, therefore motivation to act continues. He says it, *"take[s] your weight out of the day-to-day activities and how to create space to think about things differently and make some decisions differently" (676-681).*

This demonstrates that Mark agrees with Daniel's view that executive coaching encourages him to act and he emphasises that he is also better prepared to act:

"*It enables me to prepare better, best prepared to do that" (897-898)* demonstrating his firm belief in the ability of executive coaching to generate action within.

David agrees with the above notion, supported by the other two participants, that executive coaching generates action. He also differentiates coaching from other developmental interventions highlighting that coaching plays an active role in encouraging actions.

"I have done lots of training courses, you get some good ones and you need some variety, but to really kind of breakthrough on this, that you want to work on that, might be holding you back, coaching route much more likely to get you in that space, make progress than it is going to a course on that issue" (309-315).

Therefore, David concurs with the others that it is hard to act on things and acknowledges that he has a natural tendency not to act promptly. However, he confirms that executive coaching facilitates him to overcome this difficulty due to the generated awareness. Thus, the execution is facilitated through coaching. He agrees with others that being conscious of what is important helps him to act:

"Then also things that I could not more of… uuum start getting to that I would not naturally do but want to make work on doing a little bit more, be more conscious of those things" (77-80).

Therefore, all three participants believe that executive coaching not only helps them to come up with action plans but also encourages them to act on them.

Perspectives of Coaches

It is clear that Sarah encourages her coachees to reflect on things, question their predispositions and explore new ways of doing things (as discussed earlier). However, the encouragement to act on the developed plan is not clearly evident through Sarah's discussions.

John also does not talk much about encouraging actions directly. Nevertheless, he notes once during discussions that:

"Who will not judge you and who will be with you, be sounding board and listen uum encourage forward movement and some action so that is the kind of enabling bit" (1263-1265).

This shows that he acts as an enabler or an action generator for his coachees. Therefore, John complies with the notion highlighted by the coachee participants that executive coaching encourages action. However, John's representation of the theme is minor compared to that of the coachees.

4.4.4.2 Facilitate Reflection

Perspectives of Coachee

This is another highly represented theme which emerges from my study. For example, Daniel notes that taking a step back to think things through helps him to learn and develop. He admits that his busy schedules hinder him looking at things and going back to explore options to improve. Consequently, he unintentionally postpones his development.

However, having an executive coach has given him much needed space to look back to explore improvements. Daniel highlights this aspect, saying:

"It is about for me taking a step back from you know, I certainly find myself do stuff very busy and you get up to the day-to-day and you working very hard, lots to do actually you cannot see the wood for the trees, sometimes you missing some other… some other obvious things" (211-215).

He continues to stress the importance of taking a step back as it makes the participant clearer on things and helps to be open to learning and development. Daniel links the question here as he did with clarity and understanding. He highlights questioning as the source that encourages him to think back to explore opportunities and consider new ways of doing things. Thus, he believes that:

"Coaching is valuable in me thinking about I did I do that and Why did somebody else do what they did uum what might be going on here, which you do not have much time to do in a busy day today work environment" (902-905).

'Thinking back' is considered fundamental to understanding by Daniel and it helps him to change the way he does things. The space created for him to step back and explore things is something of which he is highly appreciative. He notes that it helps him to further his understanding and also to develop realistic action plans. Therefore, stepping back also helps him to act on his development. He articulates this point, saying:

"Most importantly is that time to take step back and reflect really understand why and agree tangible actions on the back of it" (1067-1069).

There is a high convergence between Daniel and Mark on this subject. Mark promotes the necessity of looking back to explore, to see things differently and to evaluate options for development. Like Daniel, he accepts that he is not fully engaged with his development due to his work schedule which demands considerable time and effort. He believes that executive coaching offers him a space to go back to see things differently and act upon them. Mark ascribes a similar ability to executive coaching. He notes this, saying:

"So what executive coaching or the ranges of topic that I have been discussing with my executive coaches to how to make to remember to take a step back, so do not get involved with particular branch's problem on day-to-day basis, do not let them consume to everything that you want to try and achieve, take a step back" (666-671).

He also argues that the forward thinking generated as a result of backward exploration helps him to understand his development gaps and to realise the means of addressing them. Mark explains how he approaches exploring self, his experiences and performance, and how all these support him to be future-oriented, saying:

"Then start to look at themes of what makes you tick, what makes you perform well and why and what make you happy instant, kind of start to identify those similarities and then start to look at forecasting them into the future" (712-715).

David supports this notion, directly accepting the opportunity and space he receives through coaching to reflect upon things. However, compared to other participants, his representation of this is low but complies with the idea of having a busy schedule which deprives him of time, effort and energy for developmental thinking. He verbalises this, saying:

"When you got a busy job, it is very easy to just staying that mood and just park the development side so going off site to going and having few hours outside of that was good just for that change of pace, change of perspective" (117-120).

Executive coaching has also facilitated David to change the pace, which again links to his busy working life and to have extra time for reflection which has resulted in his personal development.

"What I did do was have a slight change of pace, bit more time for reflection and personal development" (115-117).

He also confirms that the reflection, and the opportunity to think through his personal development, is a great opportunity. It has encouraged him to critically explore options which help him to improve.

Perspectives of coaches

The high representation and interest demonstrated by the coachee participants are highly evident with the coach participants. Sarah agrees that she facilitates reflections in her practice through the use of questions. She also argues that reflection is embedded into executive coaching and acknowledges that it is not only the coachees but she, herself, who has also become more reflective. She expresses this by saying:

"So they all be able to reflect (18.24, Not clear) kind of questions that help them to shift, is these kind of questions, noticing these kind of words, that I use uum and I notice myself doing that so many times I come back after a session" (947-950).

She claims that the generated reflection helps her clients to explore different realities. Moreover, the created safe environment also plays a role in generating reflection for development. Sarah highlights that:

"So allowing them to hypothesise in a safe environment, to consider that different reality would look like, this is some of the ways, uum and the benefits, what differences that makes them, it gives a much broader range of options" (1008-1012).

She goes on to discuss the importance of *"playback" (833)* which helps the coachee to analyse things and to explore continuous development. Engaging with these reflective exercises helps coachees to understand where they can learn from different approaches. Therefore, Sarah has no doubt about the role of reflection in coachee development. However, she acknowledges that some are naturally reflective leaders and that when this is not the case, her responsibility becomes vital. She notes this factor, saying:

"And if a leader is not naturally reflective, holding them in that space to reflect is really helpful" (833-835) and she has no doubt how that reflective space helps coachees to become better leaders. She emphasises this point by saying:

"Just by giving someone a space to think through, more objectively, more openly, is massively beneficial and sometimes you need as a coach, you do not need to say a lot" (429-433).

John also acknowledges the value of reflection for coachee development and regards it as a tool for creating awareness. He "*encourage[d] them to reflect on who they are, what they are, what they are trying to achieve uum why that is important to them and then how they might get there" (1303-1307).*

This statement illustrates that reflection not only attempts to create awareness but also helps coachees to explore strategies to achieve what they aim for. In his practice, John attempts several different techniques to facilitate reflection knowing that it helps. He explains some of the techniques that he employs by saying:

"We will ask people to do a time line, a life line of their life which sort of you know things above the line positive experiences, things below the line, negative experiences. So you get kind of a roller coaster effect" (568-572).

This comment exhibits that the coach encourages the coachees to conduct self-analysis, and develop action plans exploring their strengths. Thus, the study shows that there is clear agreement regarding the importance of reflection for coachee development. It influences them to understand the wider contextual element of their development and the barriers. Then, reflective exercises help them to generate action plans to identify their development needs.

4.4.4.3 Informal Evaluation Focuses Development

Perspectives of Coachee

Two participants highlight that having an informal evaluation leads them to be more committed to the plans they laid out for their development. The questioning from the coaches appears as the mode of evaluation. Daniel interprets this as:

"J (coach) will (Not clear, 20.08) what you said you gonna do, did you do it how did you do find it, what happened. So there is a natural uum check and again she will force you, if you did not, why you did not do it, so it is a bit of disciplining there as well" (320-324).

As a result of this informal evaluation, Daniel develops the self-discipline to act on things that he agrees with his coach as a direct consequence of the 'natural check' conducted by the coach. Thus, the informal evaluation that comes Daniel's way encourages him to look forward and to engage in self-evaluation.

He continues to express that he has become more disciplined as he commits to somebody (the coach) and to himself. Daniel believes that this commitment is generated through the informal evaluation, so it helps him to work more on the set goals. He highlights the discipline and commitment and says that, "t*he discipline of committing to somebody that you going to do something and committing to yourself that you going to do that*" (836-839).

He also emphasises that he does a self-evaluation to check if he has acted upon the set goals before the next meeting with his coach. This informal check prior to meeting the coach for another discussion helps him to act on things in advance. Thus, the barriers that hinder his actions, for example due to his busy schedule, are removed by the informal evaluation. He reports this outcome, saying:

"I know that I have a coaching session next week. Let's just go back to the actions that I have said I take, have I done these things? Ooh I have not (laugh) ooh better do something about them because I know I said I would so I should" (841-845).

As noted above, Daniel refers back to questioning from the coach and states that every coaching session starts with some forward thinking and evaluative questions. Thus, there is continuous evaluation within the executive coaching process which helps him to develop as he acts on set goals in a timely fashion. He describes this point, saying:

"Usually start the next one, saying so how did you do and those actions you committed to take at the end of our last one [05.05, not clear] held to be account" (822-824).

It is also clear that he is held accountable despite the intervention and the evaluations being more informal. He firmly believes that the developed accountability and commitment help him to act. Mark brands Daniel's notion of a 'natural check' as an 'external centre check'. According to him, the external centre check is highly beneficial in his development. He is very positive that it has changed the way he does things. He notes that:

"That was a good external centre check, in terms of yes... Some of the things that I have done, right and done some sound theory and sound... Sound process but some of

the things I might choose to do differently in future, based on ability to centre check and challenge, it externally with different views and different inputs and opinions" (758-765).

However, it is clear that Mark's 'external centre check' is broader than the 'natural check' discussed by Daniel. In Daniel's case, it is more of a goal-oriented (individual goal) evaluation but Mark develops a broader perspective concerning his own evaluation. He says:

"Just have the centre check, which is have you considered everything you should consider, you believe driving decision making, are you allowing external interferences to shape of your thought process" (733-737).

There is no evidence to suggest that Daniel has no opportunity to consider broader options and to evaluate them as part of the informal evaluation. However, it is clear that Mark's thoughts on this topic are much broader. The convergence within their arguments is that the evaluation (the centre check or the natural check) encourage them to develop.

Mark emphasises that, at times, it is uncomfortable and not pleasant as he acts upon things that are important, some of which are not unfamiliar to him. He expresses this feeling by saying:

"Uum you expected to feel uncomfortable, expected to feel not very good about yourself and part of that reflection and review activity" (1029-1030).

Thus, he clearly acknowledges the importance of the informal evaluations he has been through as part of executive coaching.

David discusses issues around questioning and challenging (considered above) with some weaker links to informal evaluation. However, there is no clear evidence within the discussion that he interprets these issues as evaluative exercises although the other participants feel differently.

Perspectives of Coaches

The discussion above highlights that the informal evaluation which encourages coachees' development is also evident with the coaches. They emphasise the importance of an evaluation to understand where they are and also to identify options and choices available. Sarah supports the notion, saying that *"we would do a re-visit at the end and sometime you would a mid-way with the line manager just to see how it is going and agree expectations" (1104-1106).*

She notes that they go back at different points of the coaching engagement to analyse the progress. Thus, while an evaluation is undertaken, it appears to be very informal. There are no tests, exams or assignments as part of the evaluation. Sarah's re-visit is in the form of a discussion with some constructive questions. She emphasises that it helps coachees to revise some of their decisions and actions noting that, *"they make some different choices, and through the number of sessions, we have, we re-visit the progress"* (176-177).

Thus, these evaluations appear as formative and developmental. John is very clear about the assessment that he conducts in his coaching engagements and how he goes about them. He clarifies this, saying that:

"It is another… it is another 20 minutes conversation and a real conversation" (420-421).

In addition, it is quite clear from John's arguments that the assessment starts at the very beginning of the intervention and continues throughout. In his discussion, he comments that:

"There is a reflection on the relationship in terms of how we working together, is anything that you want differently from me in terms of why and which we work on" (801-805).

The evaluation here appears to be in the nature of a reflection and that this happens from the outset of the relationship.

John is more engaged with discussions when it comes to informal evaluations. He has much to discuss regarding the evaluations he undertook with his coachees. As the relationship move on, the evaluations become more goal-oriented but the conversations remain as the basis of them. Further to his discussion, John adds that:

"Usually what that is…is kind of an evaluation process in terms of what was your learning agenda at the start of this process, what were your goals, how you progressed against this, where you are now and have made the progress that you expect to make" (795-801).

Therefore, it is clear that both coachee and coach participants, with one exception (David), agree that informal evaluation helps coachee development. Both coachee and coach participants have seen the value of informal evaluation.

4.4.5 Theme Five: Support Throughout

Sub Themes	Coachees			Coaches	
	Daniel	Mark	David	Sarah	John
Employ theories to support	x	x	x	x	x
Help improve	x	x	x	x	x
Conversation to develop	x	x	x	x	x

Table 4-6 Support throughout the process

4.4.5.1 Employ Theories to support development

Perspectives of Coachee

I did not consider numeration to incorporate this theme into the superordinate theme (see Smith, et al., 2009). All participants agree that coaches employ numerous theories to support coachees in their development engagement. They appreciate the theories and models that coaches employ to support them and believe that they are helpful in taking informed decisions and actions. This reference to theories enhances their understanding of executive coaching which also appears to be useful in coachees' development. Daniel, for example, states that the coach:

"Refer me to different books or references that I thought (39.24, not clear) quite relevant, useful for me that is something I found quite useful" (634-636).

The theories that Daniel comes across during the coaching engagement are useful for him to understand the concepts behind what he does and why. This, as noted above, helps him to understand the rationale behind his actions. Resultantly, he approaches things with confidence and enhanced understanding.

"It (theories) provides some frameworks for thing to help understand on what is going around and help organise your thoughts" (986 – 988)

He also acknowledges that the theories he learns help him to simplify things which appear complicated when putting them into practice. Thus, he considers that developed theoretical understanding through executive coaching is highly relevant and supportive for his development. He emphasises this by saying:

"Around you so much going around your head, a large amount of information and that is something (theories) helps you simplify and still explain just that clarity to you to organise and move on" (994-996).

Thus, the clarity generated through theoretical understanding helps him to deal with things effectively. Moreover, it supports him to set clear directions for his development and help to avoid those which are not fit for purpose.

Mark does not discuss the theoretical understanding developed through executive coaching in detail. However, he agrees that it helps him to develop. Deviating marginally from Daniel, he highlights the importance of a competent coach to make sure that theories are used to their best advantage. Here, he emphasises the importance of exploring individual differences before exploring static theories. He notes this, saying:

"Well each of us is different and coaching and the theory are (is) always the same. There are loads of them so it takes bit of time, I think, for it can take different amount of time to understand what it is, how it is going to work with them and how it is going to, how they can use it. But I guess that is down to the coach, if the coach is good enough to be able to adapt and adopt a slightly different approach, the theory will make sounds behind it" (488-494).

Moreover, Mark considers the time taken to understand things as a disadvantage of executive coaching. Thus, he emphasises the importance of having a competent coach to avoid potential issues and to benefit from theories that they bring into the discussion.

David also agrees that theories help him in terms of his development. He firmly believes in theories compared to the other participants. According to him, theoretical understanding supports him to delve deeper into things. David describes it as being in his nature to explore the theoretical underpinnings behind his actions. His coach supports him in doing so, which also demonstrates the coach letting coachees make their own decisions (coachee-led agenda) and build up from strengths/positives (focus on positives). He reports this saying:

"I quite like as I said, little bit of theory so we had as we as coaching conversations and the questions and that sort of things" (164-166).

Additionally, Mark's notion that it takes a considerable amount of time to go through these theories to learn the applicable ones, is also acknowledged by David. He notes this saying:

"We would have time to say that kind of we are not really coaching here, let's talk about some of the theories behind this and uum and some models and things which I..,I kind

of enjoyed that in terms of that is how like think about things and understand the drivers behind it as well" (167-171).

To understand things deeper, David believes that theories are of the utmost importance. He stresses that theories are really helpful to decide what needs changing. Furthermore, he argues that it develops his self-discipline which helps him to continue to work on his development. According to him, seeing a rationale for his actions is influential in enhancing self-discipline.

He represents his argument saying:

"*if understand the theories behind the topic area helps me to decide if that is something I want perceive or change something and could do something differently. I think I got more chances to persuading myself if understand some of the theories why would you do that way" (663-668).*

Hence, it is clear that the executive coaches of all participants use theories to support coachee development. Coachees appreciate the developed theoretical understanding which facilitates them to apply a rationale for their actions. Thus, there are evidences that suggest that the theoretical understanding helps them to explore their development opportunities and to act upon them.

Perspectives of Coaches

There is evidence to suggest that coaches employ different theories and models to generate thinking and understanding. However, the representation is quite low compared to coachee participants. Sarah notes that the theories she employs help in generating understanding of the reason behind what the coachees are doing in executive coaching engagement and beyond. She claims that it has an impact on their development, saying:

"*May be use psychometric tools. So I may use emotional intelligence questionnaires which I have done recently in this organisation and help leaders to understand actually the reason that I struggling this area seems like to be something around how I approach people who are more senior … than myself or fact that I do not value the contribution I bring in" (152-160).*

Thus, understanding reason behind what they do is regarded as very important for action generation. Moreover, she claims that there is no point providing different models and theories for coachees if the coach does not help them to make sense of those theories. She emphasises this by saying:

"I would not give somebody something and say go and make sense of it. There will always be a conversation, because it is always important to understand what sense they make of it and challenge" (772-774).

John's interpretations also demonstrate the importance of theoretical support. He claims that employing various tools and techniques to generate understanding to inform coachees' decisions in coaching engagement and beyond (professional life of the coachee) helps in coachee development. In addition, he emphasises that there is an evaluation around principles of leadership development. This factor does not directly appear with any of the coachee participants or, indeed, with Sarah. John expresses it by saying that *"right from the discussion around the principles of leadership development and we have those conversations around" (492-495).*

Therefore, it is clear that both coachee and coach participants agree that theoretical understanding plays a role in coachee development.

4.4.5.2 Help to Improve

Perspectives of Coachees

All coachee participants agree that executive coaching is a great support in improving their practice. The level of help does not mean that the executive coaches bring solutions for the matters that the participants want to discuss. The coachees are aware that the coaches are not there to provide solutions. However, the support extended by coaches is considered vital for their development. Furthermore, the numeration is low compared to some of the other themes.

For example, Daniel holds the view that the questioning plays an important role in generating the necessary support for him. Thus, questioning continues to appear as a vital tool in executive coaching engagement. He is a firm believer that he receives the answers from within. However, Daniel is highly appreciative of the support he receives through the engagement. It is not clear whether the confidence that he demonstrates at the interview in saying that the answers are within is solely due to executive coaching, but it has helped in many ways, as discussed throughout the chapter. He interprets the help he receives, saying:

"As always that I got answers, questions of helping to use them out and helping me think. Think it clearly through issues, solutions. Helping me to re-prioritise something, helping me to get things to perspective" (229-233).

Thus, the help Daniel receives develops his understanding, offers clarity on issues and solutions (themes already discussed) and improves identification of priority. He outlines these as sources that support his development. He also mentions that the help he receives fits well with what he expects from the coach, saying:

"I am not looking for directions, looking for someone to help me, just think through the answers or think through the issues" (529-531).

This clearly shows that the support extended by the coach is not by doing the coachee's work or taking decisions on behalf of the coachee, but through helping to find answers within, to improve confidence and to encourage actions. Daniel also highlights the contextual nature of the support he gets from executive coaching and argues that it does not fit with everyone or everything. However, he ratifies the idea that it is helpful for him to develop his skills and abilities. He emphasises this point saying that, *"you know it does not solve all your problems or issues or your challenges but is helpful and it is not right for everybody and every incident" (730-732).*

Mark also complies with Daniel, stressing the importance of having the right coach to get the right support. He signifies the importance of having the right coach in his discussions around theoretical support, which he repeats:

"If you get the right coach, if you got the right person to help you, then it is my experience is it has been extremely positive" (426-428).

Agreeing with Daniel, Mark also argues that the questioning from his executive coaching is a great help. He especially mentions 'why' questions are important. He believes that the support he receives helps him to take informed decisions. Mark interprets how executive coaching helps him to perform better, saying that:

"I think coaching is more about you and helping you to understand why you think the way you think, how your thinking influences in your decision making and your decision making impacts the people you work with" (777-789).

This exhibits further agreement with Daniel's notion that coaching extends support for his development. However, there are no signs of interpretative and/or descriptive evidence to denote that they are exploring contextual elements, as Daniel previously highlights.

David directs the 'support' to a distinct direction, developing a slight divergence from the other two participants. He values the impartial support he obtains, and the space that coaching creates, so that he can discuss things openly.

"I am not comfortable of talking about what my weaknesses are with my boss. We do to a certain extent, but not to the same extent I would do with executive coach. So it breaks down that sort of barrier" (103-106).

The support he receives has broken the barriers he previously felt towards an open conversation. He highly values the impartial support he gets. Thus, he considers executive coaching as an investment. He notes this by saying:

"I think it is seen as an investment and support in people" (484).

Therefore, it is clear that David considers the impartial nature of coaching as support for his growth.

Perspectives of Coaches

The development support that coachees highlight is also reflected through coach participants. The support is crafted throughout the process, as Sarah suggests.

"I never leave people with it. I always have a conversation, and help them referencing into the world that they are living, and working in" (780-782).

There are evidences that questioning, conversation and informal evaluation techniques have an impact on coachee development. However, the support that the coach extends as they go through the process also appears to be very important. It is clear, as Sarah stresses, that she never leaves her coachees alone. Hence, this confirms the coachees' notion that being available and supportive has significant value in coachee development. She goes on to emphasise the support, saying that:

"Very senior leaders can share so many anxieties about their own performances, about what people think of the, about whether they are good enough, people that they would perceive or people that are perceived by us as very confident, very often are not" (452-454).

This illustrates that even the people who are assumed to be very confident and performing still need support. In addition, she claims that it is her role to support anyone who requires support in terms of their development and growth.

John is also quite direct in accepting that his role involves supporting individual leaders in various ways. The idea of the help extended by the coach is to make them the best leaders that they can be. He notes as much, saying:

"So whether that is around performance or around their wellbeing, their interaction with their team, development of their interaction with their team, development of their team so helping them to be best leader they can be" (1301-1304).

Like Sarah, he argues that it is not just one-off help but that it continues within the process. Thus, as emphasised above, challenging, conversation and informal evaluation all matter but nothing replaces the support that the coach extends.

4.4.5.3 Conversation to Develop

Perspectives of Coachees

A key theme which emerges through the study is that the coaches' conversations are developmental. The conversations that individuals engage in with their coaches are valued as sources of generating clarity, developing understanding and challenging coachees that, in turn, help them to develop. Accordingly, the conversations that coachees engage in with their coaches appear to be a great source of support.

Daniel is highly motivated and enthusiastic in discussing the influences that he has obtained from coaching conversations. In both interviews, he links the results of the conversations to tangible actions, saying:

"Actually you can come out from a simple conversation, you can come out the other side of it with an awful loads of clarity, some clear action that you are going to take and feeling much better about the world and about yourself" (472-475).

Daniel exhibits his belief in coaching conversation saying that talking to somebody who is impartial is such a powerful act:

"So I thought to have somebody external, who is impartial, who is removed from the business just to talk something through I know that is powerful" (495-497) and he believes that every single conversation that he engages in brings results. Thus, he has become an advocate of having conversations to assist his development. Daniel interprets that the result orientation of coaching is due to the conversations he has had, saying that:

"There were always concrete actions that I was going to take, on the back of that coaching session as a result of the conversation we had" (819-821).

Mark supports Daniel by acknowledging that conversation is also helpful for his development. He differentiates coaching conversation from conversations that he has

with his boss. The coaching conversations, according to him, are more results oriented. He explains that the conversations with the coach are purposeful and reflective, saying:

"What you really interested in, what you really wanted to do., she is… helped facilitate some of these reflective conversations that are bit deeper than having one-to-one conversation with my boss" (192-196).

He considers that talking to somebody skilled in facilitating his development is highly influential. Furthermore, he highlights that there is a natural progression as people learn through experience over time. However, Mark believes that coaching conversations develop his mental maturity without him having to wait for natural progression. He notes this point, saying:

"It certainly helps with them (talking about his action plans) kind of mental maturity I do not think that I would get it, I will get by working on a natural organic progression without spending some time and talking to some people who obviously very skilled at it" (1055-1059).

Thus, Mark also agrees that having a conversation with a skilled coach has helped him to develop. Both Daniel and Mark claim that the conversations are deeper, more supportive and develop their mental maturity and ability to learn though reflection.

David also holds similar views about coaching conversations. He feels that the conversations were helpful from the beginning as they facilitated him to explore and understand priorities. He illustrates this by saying:

"I did not really have any huge pre-conceived ideas about what and how would it go, uum it is very much exploratory in the first few sessions" (57-59).

The conversations are not always pleasant or easy but challenging and objectively driven. Thus, they are developmental. The exhaustive nature of the conversation is highlighted by all participants. David supports the idea, saying:

"It was not just a cosy chat or you know went about things or just you know conversation and was much more kind of I would say draining and intensive physical remark for me" (359-362).

This challenging nature of the conversation is taken very positively by all participants as they are all aware that its purpose is to further their development.

Perspectives of coaches

The conversation for development appears relevant for coach participants. For example, Sarah notes that:

"Just by allowing someone to say something out loud, the thought have gone round and round and round in their head, just get them out and someone to hear themselves saying what they have been thinking" (435-438).

This demonstrates that conversations help coachees to bring out their thinking and be more critical about their actions. Sarah does not highlight the depth of conversations as much as the coachee participants but agrees that trust is an important element. Trust, as she notes, is fundamental to having a productive conversation. It makes the coachee more open so they bring forward their own ideas. She highlights this, saying:

"And your preparedness to open and disclose things grow as the trust grows, Uum I think because I have never broken a trust ever, I have a reputation for being trusted and so now people more likely to come and ask for these conversations" (880-883).

Furthermore, conversations help the coachee to believe that his/her opinions are recognised and valued which helps them to be more confident. Resultantly, they focus on their priorities. Sarah says:

"People feel more listened to and they feel their work is more structured, bit more organised and focus is on the right priorities" (230-231).

She agrees that conversation plays a pivotal role in coachee development. John also does not show any hesitation on this notion. He mentions that conversation helps coachees to be action-oriented, saying:

"Uuum so sitting with someone, helping relationship uum, having someone to talk something with, might otherwise be going around your head and sort of skewing, uuum and through doing that enabling someone to take actions" (1269-1272).

However, John also expresses the consequences of having a conversation. He believes that every conversation that he holds with coachees carries a risk (he does not mention these in detail) but that the benefits outweigh the disadvantages.

"You know for me benefit outweighs the risk. There is a risk with every conversation" (623-625).

Hence, the evidence shows that all agree that the conversations are helpful for the coachee. The purpose of such a conversation is to help coachee development by generating challenges and questioning predispositions.

4.4.6 Theme Six: Ensure Continuity

	Coachees			Coaches	
Sub Themes	Daniel	Mark	David	Sarah	John
Develop an independent learner	x	x	x	x	x
Coachee becomes a coach	x	x	x	x	x

Table 4-7 Ensure Continuity

4.4.6.1 Develop an Independent Learner

Perspectives of Coachees

All participants suggest that, thanks to executive coaching, they develop their abilities to learn independently. In turn, this helps them to take more informed decisions and actions in terms of their development. The independence gained by the coachees is also attributed to self-awareness generated through executive coaching. Daniel highlights this, saying:

"*changing the way you approach situations and better understanding yourself and why do things and having greater self-awareness and being and taking more informed choices*" (1002-1005).

He continues to explain about the developed awareness and accountability, and how that helps him to be an independent learner. Once the awareness is developed, the accountability follows. Daniel explains it thus:

"Y*ou got a choice around how you respond to different events and different things and you know ultimately you are accountable for that*" (374-377).

Moreover, Daniel knew from the beginning that actions should come from him. He is also aware that it is his responsibility to act on the plans.

"*It is being challenged and pushed through questioning and it is usually quite unthreatening way but you end up challenging, pushing yourself*" (1072-1074).

Thus, throughout the process, he acquires the necessary skills to be an independent learner and to start acting on his development goals as he realises that executive

coaching does not give him solutions and nobody acts on his behalf. Gradually, as he develops this understanding, he acknowledges the importance of being self-responsible, action-oriented and motivated to realise his goals. This outcome results in the understanding that he is the only person responsible for his development.

Mark agrees with the idea that the developed understanding of things helps him to enhance his abilities to self-learn. He believes the sources of becoming an independent learner to be self-questioning, evaluation and action orientation developed through executive coaching. He makes this clear, saying:

"Think about time when you are at your best, and you perform at your best and you thought really good, and what was going on your life then (8.30, not clear) what were you doing and how you were doing it, and then think about time when you get frustration" (770-774).

This comment demonstrates that executive coaching encourages Mark to self-evaluate and ask himself questions. These initiatives by the coachee (Mark) help him to be independent. Mark also accepts that he does not get answers from the coach and continued self-questions encourage him to develop his abilities to reduce his dependency on others. He appreciates that his coach is not sympathetic to providing answers, saying:

"*Not sympathetic, to some of the challenges we work through but empathetic in the way they have approached it" (985-987).*

Mark indicates that the choices and decisions are his own which also demonstrates the independence that encourages him to continue with the coaching process. He claims that the coaching itself promotes independent learning. Mark also emphasises that becoming independent is part of executive coaching as he is given the authority of decisions. He notes this factor, saying:

"You choose whether to listen or whether to act and you have a choice you got to want to do it. You got to want to be challenge yourself" (1022-1023).

David argues that developed understanding acts as the source of independence. Engaging in the process encourages him to explore himself better (discussed in self-awareness section) which in turn generates actions. Consequently, he developed his confidence as an individual and continues to apply learned techniques and theories, as he has become more independent, saying:

"You start to understand what sort of things is it you to get trigger you to get frustrated be more aware of it and what is the response I actually wanted to not get frustrated by it to be more aware, understanding what is triggering it and then adapting and becoming more natural so just not let that trigger cause frustration" (705-709).

Moreover, not receiving answers from the coach, as others note, has been helpful in forcing independence. David believes that it has also supported him to realise his potential. He emphasises this point, saying:

"Well I, there is a kind of pure school of thought of coaching that the all the answers are within the coachee and just about teasing them out and I think there is a big, a lots of that is true"(729-731).

The awareness and the opportunity facilitated through executive coaching have developed the self-confidence of all three participants. In addition, all claim that executive coaching develops their ability to analyse things, and to be accountable for their decisions and actions. Resultantly, they have become independent learners. This helps them to continue to learn.

Perspectives of Coaches

Sarah strongly supports the idea of creating independent learners through executive coaching. She regards making coachees independent as part of her role. Sarah emphasises that if the results are otherwise, the coaching has gone wrong:

"I have seen coaches who are in and out of some relationships, same organisation, same people, because they do not make people… they do not help people be resourceful, they build the dependency, that is a bit down side, if it is not well contracted for" (1052-1056).

Therefore, it is clear that she considers creating capable, confident self-learners as part of coaching and failure to do so is regarded as a fundamental error. She embeds the development of individual learners into her practice. However, Sarah acknowledges that it takes time, saying:

"I will still unfamiliar and new then more likely to hearing me asking it, then it becomes theirs. And that is just the way that they do. So that …that is that they integrate it from something being familiar with something I would ask [those] them more, they do it, something they ask themselves. So they…they just wanted to, they integrate that resource is now part of the way that they do it which is how you wanted it to be" (976-983).

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Thus, the result is that coachees believe in themselves and she notes a shift of responsibilities from coach to coachees. First, it appears as *"I (coach) would ask them more they do it" (980)* and then it becomes *"something that they ask themselves" (981)*. The study reveals that Sarah plans to facilitate the independence within her coachees. Therefore, creating individual learners is a planned act within the process. Sarah believes that, due to executive coaching, coachees continue to create space, value and resources for themselves. However, she has exited from the process and is no longer part of this value creation. She highlights this point by saying:

"What is about the time and space they value and how they create more effect, resources for themselves, I am no longer aware of; because you do not want build the dependency" (944-947).

Therefore, it is clear that she appears to be a strong advocate of creating independent learners through executive coaching. John also acknowledges the benefit of shifting roles. He firmly believes that the focus of executive coaching should be to create self-sustaining individuals. However, he notes the importance of supporting them through this gradual process saying that the:

"Support through the process of getting through the ups and downs experimentations, and with the view towards the end of the relationship working out ways in which they can self-sustained" (1309-1313)

Therefore, it is clear that he concurs with Sarah's view that creating independent learners is a gradual process. He is also self-assured that he attempts to create sustainable learners, saying that:

"You know we want to develop leaders as learners so it to be sustainable" (495-96).

John not only talks about sustainability, he attempts to implement it. He confidently expresses that it works well and that learners become independent during the process.

"Kind of continue their learning beyond that coaching intervention and have no reliance elsewhere" (1314-1315).

Therefore, it is clear that the coaches acknowledge that it is important not to create inter-dependency but rather a sustainable model of learning through executive coaching.

4.4.6.2 Coachee Becomes a Coach

Perspectives of Coachees

My study reveals that executive coaching helps coachees to become more coaching in style in their professional and personal dealings. Thus, the evidence suggests that coaching becomes a habit of coachees due to their positive experience of the process.

Daniel is quite direct in acknowledging that coaching develops the opportunity within to support him. He also claims that understanding the power of coaching makes him continuously engage with it. He notes as much, saying:

"I think probably one thing it does do, it helps you, it helps you re-enforce value and power of coaching so it encourages me to coach more, I think that is really helpful" (56-59).

This statement also shows that he is quite enthusiastic about coaching others. There is evidence to suggest that the positive experiences of executive coaching have influenced his thinking and actions. Furthermore, Daniel claims that he started coaching himself as a result of executive coaching, becoming more self-evaluative and self-questioning. Daniel expresses his positive experiences, saying:

"*Actually we did not spend enough time, look for help and support and understanding, why something is happening and it is getting that [11.23, not clear] depth which you got to be really disciplined person to sit and really do that sort of one hour or so" (919-923).*

These positive experiences help him to continue his development. Additionally, they demonstrate that executive coaching facilitates sustainable development as Daniel continues coaching himself and others. He directly accepts the view that he has become a self-coach.

"Ultimately you learned to self-coach to an extent" (1076); the evidence also suggests that he has become more reflective and open to change. This denotes that he continues to look back and improve/change; therefore the readiness is ensured.

Mark is also quite clear that the techniques he learns and the concepts that he puts into action are invaluable in his professional practice. He has started employing them within his team and believes that they work effectively. Mark emphasises this point, saying:

"These are proportions of what I discussed with F (coach) or some of the styles, some of the concepts I have used with my guys" (371- 374).

My study also reveals that he continues talking to, and asking questions of, himself. Thus, 'self-coaching', the idea that Daniel introduces, is evident within the discussion. Additionally, this study suggests that Mark has developed his self-critique, self-questioning and is being reflective. This evidences that executive coaching generates forward thinking and actions for development. During interviews, he role plays with himself:

"Why do you enjoy what you do, how do you get better at it but also what do you want to do in future" (686-689) and continues to suggest to self "*take a bit more time, take a bit more uum be more reflective, but also take time out for yourself" (674-675).*

These reflections are considered primary for development. His continuous focus on them shows that executive coaching imparts skills within to be a coach for himself and others.

David also agrees that executive coaching makes him more coaching in style. He emphasises this point, saying that:

"I think it encourages you to be bit more coaching in style" (372).

Thus, he supports the above notion of a coachee becoming a coach. David describes the changes in his practice, saying that:

"In terms of being more coaching style, made me to think about delegation, things like that, more giving, letting people make their own choices and discussion and take more responsibility, so it gets some kind of links to that" (373-378).

David believes that his positive experience of executive coaching helps him to be coaching in style. The above note from David also demonstrates that he has started believing more in his colleagues and also lets them take their own decisions and responsibility. Thus, he harnesses trust through the learned techniques. Therefore, all participants support the view that they have become coaches for themselves and others.

Perspectives of Coaches

The above-highlighted notion by the coachee participants that they become coaches due to executive coaching is also reflected within the interpretations of the coaches. They acknowledge that there is a plan to develop independent learners (discussed above); however, coachees becoming coaches is something that they observe during the process. Sarah describes her experiences of seeing this phenomenon occur:

"Sometimes they will say they imagine the questions that I would be asking. So the certain questions that if they resonate they we end up asking number of times, so what about that, what assumptions did you have and they find themselves asking themselves that questions but hearing me" (967-971).

Thus, as noted above (individual learners), coachee participants starting to coach is also a gradual process. At the beginning of becoming self-coaches, coachees ask questions from themselves but hear the coach. However, Sarah notices that coachees are taking up her role with complete control as they gain confidence and independence. She mentions that:

"Some of them noticing how they are being uuum and noticing how they are being, almost playing, taking my roles" (965-967)

She confirms that coachees not only coach themselves but others. She mentions that the leaders who have experienced the process have taken executive coaching a step forward:

"I hear sometimes from leaders who experience coaching is they use those techniques with their own people and with their stakeholders, so they sort of learn" (610-612).

John also agrees with Sarah, expressing that when coachees have a coach for a period of time, they themselves develop the ability to ask the right questions. He is quite direct in his emphasis that they self-coach.

"I do find that when people work with someone for a while they must do not need the coach for a while. Because they think, they think about questions themselves, they coach, self-coach. It is kind of developing the habit of asking the right question" (1335-1339).

Diverging from Sarah, John thinks that a coachee becoming a coach is temporary. He notes that coachees do not need a coach for a while. Thus, it is unclear for how long they become self-coaches, according to John's interpretation. This view is not expressed by any of the coachee participants or Sarah. Nevertheless, John does not raise any objection to the notion that coachees become coaches. This evidences that all participants agree that, as part of executive coaching, coachees became coaches themselves, which also ensures continuous development.

4.4.7 Theme Seven: Tackle Problems

	Coachees			Coaches	
Sub Themes	Daniel	Mark	David	Sarah	John
Helping to deal with problems	x	-	x	x	x

Table 4-8 Tackle Problems

4.4.7.1 Helping to deal with problems

Perspectives of Coachees

It is quite clear throughout this chapter that all participants are very positive about, and appreciative of, executive coaching as a developmental intervention. This study also suggests that executive coaching helps coachees to focus on positives which help them to be both confident and motivated. These positive norms are evident throughout conversations with both coachees and coaches. Engaging with study participants helps me to understand that the case study organisation is also quite positive about executive coaching and its contribution towards leadership development.

However, the study also reveals that executive coaching focuses on problems that coachees face. Daniel and David hint that executive coaching helps to tackle issues, such as work performance and relationship issues. They emphasise that executive coaching is not just about focusing on positives but also explores the possibility of helping with issues that they are facing. Conversely, Mark does not discuss addressing work performance, relationships or related issues through the medium of executive coaching. However, he fully advocates the development notion and continues it throughout.

Discussions with Daniel reveal some evidence that suggests executive coaching has helped him to sort out relationship issues at work. He discusses the issue of developing a good relationship and obtaining some support from his boss.

"He is got…he he is very busy and he is not he is he is great… great… guuu…y and very supportive but he is not a natural coach. He does not … you know our relationship is quite transactional relationship, I get on with him very well but I was not getting sort of coaching support bouncing off relationships" (191-196).

When he discusses the above, he is quite uncomfortable and does not sound like the usual Daniel as he considers the issue. For example, he finds it difficult to continue the conversation and is searching for words when he says, *"he… he is very busy and he is*

not he is he is great...great... guuu...y" and the same is the case when he says, *"I get on with him very well but…"*

Daniel sounds very different at this stage and there is an evident struggle here. This also demonstrates some issues he has with his boss and that he seeks some support through executive coaching in order to address them. The issues which surface are related to his relationship with the boss. Daniel describes their (coach and his) attempts to get the involvement of his boss in executive coaching, saying that:

"I think it did not really work very well, because D, my boss, uum… I think, I do not know whether he is big believer in coaching, I do not know, he basically did not really have time to do that. Was not really engaged in doing that, we did manage to get him to come and sit down with us for a period of time but he basically said, ooh everything is right and fine, so he did not add a lot insight to and he was quite happy to leave that relationship to me and me to get on with J uuum I …which was ok" (745-753).

Here, for example, when he says, *"uuum I… which was ok",* he does not really sound the same and this is quite similar to the above instance of struggle. However, he has managed to address these issues through executive coaching and wants to have someone that he:

"Can share some of (his) my challenges (He) I got with them and uuum use that as some support and guidance, you know am (11.59, not clear) new in the role, new in organisation, you building relationships, trying to work your way through" (194-197).

This also depicts that Daniel struggles a little to settle in his new role and expects some support to overcome the problems he encounters from being new. These evidences suggest that Daniel is expecting some support for the problems he encounters in his role. Thus, as with the 'organisational agenda', this is seen as support for development and to enhance performance rather than being about fixing issues. Daniel acknowledges that executive coaching helped him to settle in his new role after he demonstrated that he expected some help. It is clear as he mentions that:

"Probably about six months into the role here (10.38, not clear) I thought (10.41, not clear) this is my first board position so I am one of the four executive directors here uum you know I also got a bigger agenda on (10.50, not clear) change, it is limited, when you are top of the organisation, there is limited amount of support or places you can go to, for support so you know tradition in organisations" (174-181).

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Daniel's struggle to find words is also clear here and it is hard to determine what he is saying at times. This shows that he is not comfortable talking about them as they are related to issues that he is currently facing. In addition, if he acknowledges that he expects to resolve those issues through executive coaching, it contradicts what he says throughout the interview. Therefore, it is possible he is very careful in interpreting his experience around the problems for which he seeks support.

David raises a different insight into this aspect saying that, at times, leaders do not highlight the fact that they are addressing issues through executive coaching. He terms it that they do not want *"to rock the boat" (540).* He notes that this is partly due to the belief of the organisation that executive coaching is for development. He articulates this idea, saying that:

"I think, uuum from what I have seen that teased out lots of, where people have been underperforming but managers have just been saying performing, not wanting to rock the boat, they have been able to more or better equipped to tease out issues and be prepared tackle it so actually this underperforming and helping people improve, I have seen that" (538-544).

He is quite certain that executive coaching has also been used to tackle problems that executives face. David also points out that executive coaching prepares individuals to be better at tackling problems. He raises his experience of addressing the performance issues of one of his associates through coaching:

"I have seen that I and I have done some of that with somebody in my team whose got falling and we start to tackle that, just kind of better management conversations between managers and their reports, coaching style" (544-548).

This suggests that executive coaching is used to tackle problems. In addition, David believes that, with executive coaching, there is a positive atmosphere to do so. The positives highlighted above appear supportive for resolving issues. Moreover, he argues that people are reluctant to highlight his weaknesses due to his position within the organisation. Therefore, coaching is an immense help to understand these issues and to address them. He emphasises this by saying that:

"*It tackles personal development issues and things that probably others see but won't tell you about" (919-920).*

Even though he brings these ideas forward, David remains a firm believer that executive coaching is mainly for development rather than for addressing issues. He

argues that executive coaching is *"more likely to done on positives as if investing in someone than it would someone is under performing" (417-418).* Therefore, there is an evident reluctance to accept that executive coaching tackles problems. This could be as a result of positive attitudes that have been harnessed within individuals. However, it is clear that executive coaching is used to tackle problems but this appears a relatively hidden argument and does not surface as a negative initiative within executive coaching.

Perspectives of coaches

The notion that executive coaching is used to tackle problems as highlighted by the coachee participants is reflected through coach interpretations. The reluctance highlighted above also appears with coach participants.

For example, Sarah accepts that, at the time of the interview, she has a coachee who struggles. She is very careful choosing her words here; the one she uses is 'struggled'. She notes it, saying:

"I have at the moment who struggled may be they have had some challenge in the roles, they have a coach at the moment, had number of challenges, struggled in the role and being moved into a new role" (361-363).

This denotes that executive coaching is employed to support individuals to emerge from their struggles. Sarah mostly highlights these as challenges rather than issues. She also acknowledges that, given the circumstances and the urgency of addressing the issues, she changes the usual process of executive coaching to accommodate those needs.

"We learnt urgency of the situation so sometimes I have done it in a much more calculated time frame, if it is being a pressing issue for somebody" (1092-1094)

This clearly evidences that executive coaching is used to address issues and also continues to demonstrate that 'organisational agenda' plays a role within it. When asked if the above statement means addressing issues, after a long pause, Sarah says:

"I think the reality is possibly" (382). This comment shows the reluctance to accept the idea and she struggles to continue the discussion at this point. Then she attempts to bring a justification by saying that the person is not under-performing. There is an obvious attempt to bring it up as a support for development which is clearly evident, as she says that:

"This is an individual who is vulnerable if you like but it is not…. This is not somebody who has been identified underperforming but because he had really challenging time, we do not want him to dip into underperforming" (388-392).

It is quite clear that there is an attempt to avoid the discussion about addressing issues, perhaps considering it as a negative application of executive coaching. However, as discussed above, the coachee participants actually view it as positive support.

John emphasises that executive coaching is for development and is business related but he accepts that it is hard to avoid the issues that coachees bring into the coaching conversations, saying:

"I think it is dangerous to say well you know we just talk business, we do not talk personal" (640-641).

He thinks that it is part of life that you deal with problems and acknowledge that executive coaching helps coachees to work through the issues that they encounter. He also believes that it helps coachees to perform in the long run. John emphasises the idea, saying that:

"We all have all these ups and downs and you know coaching and empathy is one way we can support people through those downs I think" (647-650).

This acceptance from John, as discussed earlier, is also acknowledged by Sarah, Daniel and David. However, John, like the others, emphasises that executive coaching is aimed at higher performers. In contradiction with the developmental focus and addressing issues that he discusses, he also struggles to bring these ideas forward. This is clear when he attempts to highlight the developmental focus, saying:

"I should say that coaching is an enabling opportunity as well, so you know some of the … some of the … I guess some of the examples of where coaching works well is with high performance" (654-658); however, even within this statement, there is some acceptance that executive coaching is not solely for development.

Therefore, it is clear that all participants demonstrate a reluctance to accept that executive coaching helps in resolving problems. Nevertheless, the evidence within my study suggests that coaching is used to tackle specific problems, such as work performance, relationship issues and supporting executives to settle into their new roles.

4.5 Summary

In this chapter I present my findings, generated through interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA). The stated intention is to generate a deeper understanding of 'how executive coaching works' within the context of the study. My detailed line-by-line analysis develops the themes below:

- Create Understanding
- Develop Opportunity
- Generate Motivation
- Encourage Action
- Support Throughout
- Ensure Continuity
- Tackle Problems

The themes represent how my study participants make sense of their dyadic executive coaching experience. I incorporate direct transcript extracts from the participant interviews to enhance the transparency of this qualitative study (Yardley, 2008). This also helps me to create space for the participants' voices within the findings, and also to demonstrate that the interpretations are drawn from questioning and empathetic hermeneutics (Smith et al., 2009; Smith, 2011). The approach I follow to present my findings in this chapter is widely acknowledged in IPA literature and suits my study. However, if I were to follow pure ideographic commitments, each participant could have been given priority over themes in presenting the findings.

My next chapter is the discussion chapter where I compare and contrast the findings with the literature previously discussed in Chapter Two.

5 Chapter Five – Discussion

This chapter explores my findings with reference to the literature review in Chapter Two. This synthesis leads to the conclusion and recommendations. My aim is to generate understanding of how executive coaching works by addressing:

"How do leaders make sense of their dyadic executive coaching experience?"

In Chapter Two, I highlight the scarcity of research into executive coaching and the lack of understanding of 'how executive coaching works'. Thus, the discussion aims to generate this understanding by comparing and contrasting findings with the existing literature. First, I briefly present an overview of my theoretical contributions in the first section of this chapter. Then, the discussion focuses on individual superordinate themes presented in the same order that they are presented in the findings chapter.

It is also acknowledged that the findings of my study are contextual and culturally embedded (see Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, the knowledge developed by me is subjective, experience-based insight, unique (as in Burrell and Morgan, 1979; Johnson and Duberley, 2000) and constructed by my participants and myself (see Smith et al., 2009; Robson, 2011). I have given sufficient understanding of the context of this research, culture of the organisation and the participant backgrounds within my thesis so that readers can make sense of, and evaluate the use of, my contributions. The discussed limitations of this study (see section 3.17) should also be taken into account in an attempt to make sense of my findings and contributions. The positional statement (see section 1.6) and the reflexivity (see section 3.16) are also helpful in interpreting my findings and evaluating the relevance of them to another context.

5.1 Discussion

This section discusses an overview of the theoretical contributions from my study. It develops an overview of:

"How do leaders make sense of their dyadic executive coaching experience?"

The narrative presented in Chapter Four (summarised in table 5.1) demonstrates how executive coaching works within the context of my study. The evidence I develop to establish how that happens offers a unique contribution by demonstrating a holistic view of how executive coaching works with some empirical evidence. As shown in table 5.1 and discussed in my literature review, there is evidence within the current literature

that supports some element of the narrative I develop but there is insufficient understanding of the holistic view. My narrative enhances the understanding of how executive coaching works in a case study organisation. This study therefore fits into the research gap identified in the literature review where there is insufficient understanding of 'how executive coaching works' (see Fillery-Travis and Lane, 2006; Myers, 2017; table 2.1). The critical literature review in Chapter Two reveals that coaching research places more emphasis on return on investment (ROI), outcomes (for example resilience, goal attainment, flexibility, skill development, effective change management) and that 'coaching works'. The focus on these aspects of coaching appears as an attempt to meet the demands of the business environment (see psy expert and managerialist discourses). Therefore, it is evident that previous researchers have not been asking the right question (as in Fillery-Travis and Lane, 2006) to generate sufficient understanding of 'how executive coaching works'. My study helps to fill this void in the current literature.

Furthermore, Giglio et al.'s (1998) explanation of 'how coaching works', links to my findings. Giglio et al.'s (1998) paper, however, is a description of the authors' experience in coaching practice. There is no empirical evidence within the paper to support the claims. The cyclical process that the authors develop does not appear to work within the case study organisation. The narrative that I develop shows an open-ended nature of coaching which seems to confirm that coaching employs an andragogy-informed more open approach (as in Bernstein, 1971; Garvey, 2011). For example, providing opportunity and empowering the coachee (coachee-led agenda) and encouraging actions (see table 5.1) rather than having a structured and controlled approach (see Gray et al., 2016). My study does not find a clear beginning or end (as initially suggested by Giglio et al., 1998). However, later in the paper, Giglio et al., (1998) emphasise that the idea of presenting how coaching works as a stage-process is to facilitate understanding. Thus, my study provides some empirical support for the conceptual understanding developed by Giglio et al., (1998).

Moreover, my findings reveal that there is an organisational agenda within executive coaching, and that it is used to tackle problems (performance, relationship) within the case study organisation. Coaching, in the context of this research, also helps coachees to become coaches themselves. These findings also appear as unique contributions from my study. I first highlight them (see table 5.1) by distinguishing the themes that align with the current literature and those which offer a unique contribution from my study. Then I develop an overview of these contributions before moving to the detailed critical discussion of each theme in section 5.2.

No	Superordinate Themes	Sub-Ordinates Themes	Complies with literature or offers a unique Contribution
1	Create understanding	Questioning to support, Improve self-awareness, Develop understanding, Generate clarity	This is a widely represented theme within the current literature
2	Develop Opportunity	Challenge to develop, A tailored approach, Coachee-led agenda, Organisational agenda	This theme complies with the current literature. However, '*organisational agenda*' offers a unique contribution by challenging dominance discourse (coachee-led agenda) in coaching
3	Generate Motivation	Non-judgmental relationship, Focus on development, Positive attitude towards EC	This theme complements the current literature
4	Encourage Action	Encourage to act, Facilitate reflection, Informal evaluation	This is another represented theme in the current literature
5	Support Throughout	Employ theories to support, Help to improve, Conversation to develop	This is a widely represented theme in the executive coaching literature
6	Ensure Continuity	Develop an independent learner, Coachee becomes a Coach	The theme complies with the current literature. However, '*coachee becomes a coach*' offers a unique contribution
7	Tackle Problems	Help in dealing with problems	This theme is also a contribution from my study which is a divergence from the development discourse

Table 5-1 Contribution

My study suggests that coachees who engage in the process become coaches of themselves and others. However, very few writers (as in Redshaw, 2000; Knights and Poppleton, 2007; McCarthy and Milner, 2013) in the literature acknowledge this idea.

The majority of these acknowledgements appear conceptual and there is insufficient research evidence to support the idea. On the other hand, Giglio et al., (1998) emphasise the importance of developing self-monitoring skills but this is just a suggestion from the authors. Therefore, my finding that coachees become coaches due to their engagement with coaching appears as a theoretical contribution to the current coaching literature (discussed in detail below). The context in which my participants operate, the support from the organisation for coaching and the positive experience of coaching by the participants seem to have influenced them to act as coaches. Thus, the circumstances of the study context appear to help coachees to become coaches. As noted above, this is an under-represented theme in the current coaching literature despite coaching's success in communicating positives.

Diverging from the positive aspects of coaching, my study also finds that executive coaching is sometimes used to tackle problems, such as performance, attitude, behavioural and/or relationship issues (as was found in Giglio et al., 1998; Natale and Diamante, 2005; Grant et al., 2009). The current literature presents the uses of executive coaching, such as tackling performance problems, behavioural issues and executive derailment as obsolete practices in executive coaching (as in Hall et al., 1999; White, 2006; Coutu and Kauffman, 2009; Kempster and Iszatt-White, 2013; Stokes and Jolly, 2014). Tackling problems may have been interpreted as a negative use of coaching and the dominance of development discourse seems to have outshone negatives within the field (as in Western, 2012; Garvey et al., 2014; Page and De Haan, 2014).

Western (2012) views 'tackling problems' as a domain in which psychotherapists and psychologists have shown interest and distances the idea from coaches. This finding appears to link the psy expert discourse to managerial discourse to some extent. However, in my study, the idea of tackling problems does not appear as an obsolete concept. This is evident despite the research site having a strong coaching culture and the participants' positive perception of coaching as a development intervention. Therefore, it appears as a contribution from my study (discussed below in detail) which challenges the dominant development discourse. However, my study does not suggest that the primary focus of executive coaching is to address the issues highlighted above. The study participants also demonstrate some reluctance to accept that the coaching is used to tackle problems. This continues to evidence the positive attitude towards coaching within the case study organisation which seems to shape the participants' interpretations (as in Smith et al., 2009; Gao, 2017).

My research also suggests that executive coaching within the context of the case study organisation carries an organisational agenda. This is understandable if the coaching is viewed from psy expert or managerialist discourse (see Western, 2012; 2017). However, this finding appears as a counter-argument to another dominant view in the current literature, namely that it has a coachee-led agenda (as was found in Gray, 2006; De Haan and Duckworth, 2013). This coachee-led agenda has been used to differentiate executive coaching from other developmental interventions (as in Yu et al., 2008; Petrie, 2011; De Haan et al., 2013). Some authors (Natale and Diamante, 2005; Coutu and Kauffman, 2009; Garvey et al., 2009; McCarthy and Milner, 2013; Athanasopoulou and Dopson, 2015; Gray et al., 2016) acknowledge this view of having an organisational agenda within executive coaching. They believe the power of the organisation as the fee-paying authority influences the process. The organisational involvement can therefore be viewed as an issue related to power dynamics (as in Louis and Fatien, 2014).

If the coaching is viewed from the soul guide discourse of coaching (see Western, 2012), the existence of an organisational agenda within coaching is problematic. However, psy expert and managerialist discourses indicate such possibilities (as in Western, 2017). The unpopularity of the 'organisational agenda' may have been influenced by the above-noted positive focus over the likely negatives in executive coaching. As suggested by Western (2012), there is also a reluctance in the coaching literature to discuss the organisational agenda. Nevertheless, organisational involvement in my study does not appear as a negative implication. The participants consider it as a positive mediation to support them at the initial stage of executive coaching. This also shows the possible space for soul guide discourse of coaching within business organisations. The idea of an organisational agenda within the current literature is over-shadowed by the dominant view of having an individualised agenda (as in De Haan at el., 2013; Theeboom et al., 2014; Grant, 2014) and it does not appear as positive support for the coachees (see Stokes and Jolly, 2014). Thus, my study contributes to the current literature by emphasising the organisational agenda present in executive coaching engagements. It also hints at the possibilities of using the tri-partite relationship positively rather than viewing it as a potential power conflict within the organisation as seen by some authors, such as Hunt and Weintraub, (2002) and Louis and Fatien (2014).

In this section, I discuss an overview of my findings and the contributions. The next section of this chapter evaluates in detail the individual themes in relation to the current literature.

5.2 Discussion of Themes

The above discussion reveals how executive coaching works within the case study organisation. It also highlights the theoretical contributions of my study. The brief discussion above serves as an overview of my contributions. The next section explores the superordinate themes in detail relating them to the discussed literature in Chapter Two. The findings that appear as contributions are related to two sub-themes (organisational agenda, coachees become coaches) and one superordinate theme (tackle problems). This section highlights those contributions whilst discussing the superordinate themes.

5.2.1 Theme one : Create Understanding

Executive coaching, within the context of my study, facilitates understanding (as was found in Brockbank and McGill, 2012; Du Toit, 2014) and enhances understanding to deeper levels through questioning and conversational engagements (as in Mezirow, 1991; Storey, 2011; Bachkirova, et al., 2014). The participants call this deeper understanding 'clarity'. The 'clarity' generated through executive coaching appears as 'understanding frames of reference' or 'schemas' (as proposed by Askew and Carnell, 2011; Du Toit, 2014; Hawkins and Smith, 2014) which apparently leads to sustainable behavioural changes (as in Mezirow, 1991). The initial understanding that is discussed by my participants appears as a surface understanding. The 'clarity' developed through coaching seems to help action generation and critical reflection.

Constructive questioning seems to be a fundamental mechanism of generating understanding (as claimed by Passmore and Fillery-Travis, 2011; Storey, 2011; McCarthy and Milner, 2013; Athanasopoulou and Dopson, 2015). The questions from coaches and the self-questioning practices by the coachees are relevant and valuable in developing understanding (as proposed by Reynolds, 1999; Souba, 2006) and appear to generate openness within them (as in Joo, 2005). The participants regard developing 'self-awareness' as the central focus of coaching (see Boyatzis, et al., 2006; Ely et al., 2010; Athanasopoulou and Dopson, 2015).

For example, Daniel, in discussing the issue of questioning, argues that it forces him to think about the answers. This shows that coaches use questions to generate answers (as was found in Mezirow, 1991; Brockbank and McGill, 2012; Du Toit, 2014). Souba (2006) believes the journey of transition starts with questions which comply with my study participants' claims about questioning. Questioning also helps to know the coachees' predispositions and assumptions which, in turn, enhances understanding (as

in Kaiser and Kaplan, 2006). David provides further evidence to support this notion emphasising that the coach asks really good questions. He agrees that these questions influence him to think deeper which, in turn, helps to draw results from him (as in Storey, 2011). My study participants therefore acknowledge the importance of questioning by emphasising that it generates understanding (Yu et al., 2008; Passmore and Fillery-Travis, 2011). The coachees' readiness to accept the challenging questions from coaches is present within the study. This may not be possible if the development discourse of coaching, the strong coaching culture and the positive perception of coaching are not present within the organisation.

Furthermore, my study reveals that executive coaching also generates self-awareness and that the participants consider it to be vital for their development. The idea is highly represented throughout this study. For example, Sarah mentions that leaders who are self-aware are able to make choices about improvements and changes. Thus, having self-awareness is helpful to change behaviours and generate actions (see Giglio et al., 1998; Yu et al., 2008; Passmore and Fillery-Travis, 2011; Wang, 2012; Cairns-Lee, 2015). My study finds that executive coaching improves self-awareness of the coachees (as was found in Joo, 2005; Kombarakaran et al., 2008; Ely et al., 2010; Athanasopoulou and Dopson, 2015). This self-awareness influences coachees to be more responsible for their actions and decisions (as in Du Toit, 2014; Bachkirova et al., 2014).

Self-awareness also surfaces as a source of inspiring new ideas (see Kegan, 1982; Storey, 2011), developing creativity and unlocking coachees' potential (see Taie, 2011). It directs coachees into new perspectives, resulting in new ways of doing things (as in Giglio et al., 1998; Yu et al., 2008), which helps them to be more effective in their role and to take informed decisions. For example, Sarah argues that if coachees are more self-aware, they are also more aware of the impact that they create on themselves and others and what they can do differently. John highlights this notion saying that leaders act as a result of generated self-awareness. Therefore, it is argued that the enhanced understanding generates actions and behavioural changes (as proposed by Gentry and Leslie, 2007; De Villiers, 2012).

The study participants claim that they are encouraged to explore different possibilities and multiple truths that may exist. This appears to help coachees to understand their frame of reference (schemas) and sense-making (as in Askew and Carnell, 2011; Brockbank and McGill, 2012; Du Toit, 2014). Du Toit (2006, p.286) argues that "we are more often than not unaware of our schemas and sense-making" and coaching, as

argued above, seems to help generate this understanding within the case study organisation.

Coaches make coachees more aware of these schemas through sense-making exercises (as in Du Toit, 2014). This influences coachees to make sense of things differently and also to incorporate new frames of reference, thereby encouraging a deeper level of understanding (as argued by Storey, 2011). John continues to support this view and believes that executive coaching helps to explore coachees' reality from their perspective and from their view of the world. This encourages them to explore different possibilities and opportunities (as in Grant, 2014).

The above-discussed questioning appears to become critical and multi-layered as the coachee-coach relationship grows (as in Gyllensten and Palmer, 2007; Brockbank and McGill, 2012). The developed understanding and the relationship itself help the coachee to take these questions positively (see Giglio et al., 1998). As stated above, the cultural implications, individual and organisational position of coaching also appears to help coachees to take questions positively. David, for example, says that the questions are probing and multi-layered. These questions help coachees not simply to settle for good but to analyse things more deeply. Consequently, executive coaching generates a deeper level of understanding (clarity) (as proposed by Mezirow, 1991; Bachkirova, et al., 2014). My study reveals that executive coaching continuously demands clarity from the participants. The coaches facilitate the process (clarity generation) through probing questions. In turn, this helps coachees to realise their potential and stretches them further without settling simply for 'good'. Further to this, the generated understanding helps the coachees to achieve their potential (as was found by Peterson, 1996; Frisch, 2001; Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson, 2001; Grant, 2006; Taie, 2011; Batson and Yoder, 2012). Therefore, the literature is quite compliant with my study findings that coaching generates understanding.

5.2.2 Theme Two: Develop Opportunity

My study shows that executive coaching presents opportunities for the participants (as was found in Jowett et al., 2012). All participants agree that, due to their busy schedules, they have been unable to give enough attention to themselves and their practice (see Rogers, 2007; Brockbank and McGill, 2012). Executive coaching provides some time and space for executives to work on their potential (as in Batson and Yoder, 2012; Palma and Pedrozo 2016). Challenges by the coaches around participant perceptions, thinking patterns and schemas appear relevant and supportive (as was found in Grant, 2006; Ladegard and Gjerde, 2014). The challenges are seen as

opportunities (see Day and Dragoni, 2015). For example, my study reveals that having the right balance of challenge and support during their engagement is a growth opportunity (as in Argyris, 1960; Du Toit, 2014; MacKie, 2016). In addition, challenging perceptions, thinking patterns and schemas of leaders (done through questioning) influence them to learn (as in Vygotsky, 1978; Grant, 2006; Ladegard and Gjerde, 2014). Vygotsky (1978) and Wang (2012) also endorse the idea that the right level of challenge is a primary factor of learning which stimulates thoughts (as suggested by Turner, 2006; Yu et al., 2008). Furthermore, the participants claim that the level of challenge presented by their coaches is not available to them in their day-to-day work life. This also makes coachees interpret the challenges posed by the coaches as opportunities. Daniel articulates the challenges he faces, saying that the coach does not allow him to have a nice conversation. Executive coaching is not about having nice conversations or agreements but creating opportunities through challenging exercises (as proposed by Rogers, 2007; Batson and Yoder, 2012). Therefore, all participants consider the challenges they receive through executive coaching as an excellent opportunity for their development (Day and Dragoni, 2015; MacKie, 2016).

The acceptance of the challenges by the coachees is understandable given that the organisation has a strong coaching culture and participants are highly positive about the executive coaching. They also consider executive coaching as a developmental intervention. Therefore, the challenges from the coaches are taken positively and the coachees use them as opportunities. However, in different contexts (region, culture, industry, individuals), there can be issues (see Deal and Kennedy, 1983; Schein, 2010; Chidiac, 2013; Schein and Schein, 2017), in an outsider (the executive coach) posing challenges to leaders who are well-established and regarded as successful. However, the findings do not highlight such issues within the case study organisation. One reason may be that the development discourse of coaching is embedded within the organisational culture. My participant interpretations are also informed by the organisational culture (as in Gao, 2017). Therefore, the constructed knowledge is subjective and contextual (see Burrell and Morgan, 1979) and does not possess a universal truth that can be generalised (see Flick, 2104; Easterby-Smith, et al., 2015). However, there is a possibility of transferability of the findings in which the interested parties should take the contextual elements of my study into consideration.

In addition, my study exhibits that the tailored nature of the intervention is also an opportunity for the coachees (De Haan et al., 2013). The coaches acknowledge that they attempt to tailor coaching for the individual by considering their skills, abilities, attitudes and perceptions (Giglio et al., 1998). Thus, executive coaching becomes more

relevant to the coachees, their individual preferences and their working contexts (as in Giglio et al., 1998; Turesky and Gallagher, 2011). Daniel thinks that most of the development programmes that he has attended are less relevant but rates executive coaching as a highly relevant intervention. It occurs in context where he operates and it is about him and his development (as in Lave and Wenger, 1991). Thus, coaching is unique compared to traditional developmental interventions (as was found in Bono et al., 2009; Solansky, 2010; Ladegard and Gjerde, 2014).

Solansky (2010) notes that the leaders are different and they have diverse experience, knowledge and abilities. Therefore, it appears important to explore the possibilities of tailoring development to make it more relevant (see Coutu and Kaufman, 2009; MacKie, 2016). There is evidence within my study that the coaches attempt to tailor coaching to make it more relevant to their coachees. Thus, my study signifies the importance of the individualised nature of executive coaching (as proposed by Turner, 2006; De Haan at el., 2013; Grant, 2014; Theeboom et al., 2014) which is done by targeting and is more specific to the individual. The space that the coachees gain in terms of devising their own plans is also an opportunity for their development (as in Segers et al., 2011). The literature (Bachkirova et al., 2014; Du Toit., 2014; Gray et al., 2016) acknowledges that coaching facilitates learner-centred learning where authority in devising and implementing lies within individual coachees. This ownership appears to drive self-direction and responsibility (see Smith and Brummel, 2013).

The idea of coachees having authority in decision making is relevant if the coaching is viewed through the soul guide discourse. The soul guide discourse is about leading more fulfilling lives rather than a goal-oriented, controlled approach which is more conversant with psy expert and managerialist discourse (see Western, 2012; 2017). Therefore, the positions of psy expert and managerialist discourses bring some doubts about the posibility of an individual having such ownership. The case study organisation, as an advocate of executive coaching, appears to facilitate the individual coachees to be independent to an appropiate level. My study also acknowledges executive coaching as a context specific (see Bono et al., 2009; Solansky, 2010) and tailored development tool which accomodates the diversity of the coachees (as in Bowerman and Collins, 1999). My findings reveal that the tailored and contexual nature is also helpful the participants to make effective use of the executive coaching.

5.2.2.1 Organisational Agenda

The methodology (see Chapter Three) highlights that IPA equally treats convergences and divergences of the findings. Divergences are important to generate wider

understanding and implications. This section discusses one such divergence from the above-discussed coachee-led agenda. The coachee-led agenda is a dominant view in the literature (as in Kilburg, 1996; Hudson, 1999; Grant, 2006; De Haan and Duckworth, 2013; Ladegard and Gjerde, 2014; MacKie, 2016) and also in my study. Nevertheless, there is evidence within the context of the study that there is an organisational agenda within executive coaching. Thus, executive coaching in my study is not fully coachee-led despite that being a dominant view within the current literature.

My study participants demonstrate evidence to claim that there is an organisational involvement within the intervention (see Kahn, 2014). For example, participants highlight that there is an attempt to create a three-way contract involving the organisation, coach and coachee. The idea of an organisational agenda surfaces in the current literature (Natale and Diamante, 2005; Coutu and Kauffman, 2009; Garvey et al., 2009; McCarthy and Milner, 2013; Athanasopoulou and Dopson, 2015; Gray et al., 2016) and the majority of these authors emphasise the power of the organisation that pays for the service as a reason for the organisational influence. The execution of power over the coachee and the coach by the organisation (as proposed by Louis and Fatien, 2014) is acceptable when coaching is viewed though the managerialist or psy expert discourses of coaching (see Western, 2012).

Natale and Diamante (2005) highlight that the coach, coachee and the organisation are all involved in deciding expectations for executive coaching engagements and that the organisational involvement is at the initial stages. According to Natale and Diamante (2005) this involvement helps to resolve contradictions within these stakeholders. However, Kahn (2014) and Western (2017), for example, do not specify a particular time for the organisational involvement. My study also reveals that the apparent involvement of the organisation happens in the early stages of the process. There is no evidence in my study to support the view that this involvement helps to resolve potential contradictions as claimed by Natale and Diamante (2005). However, Sarah, for example, advocates that it helps to generate understanding within all stakeholders (coach-coachee-organisation).

The coach participants in my study acknowledge that they develop three-way contracting in their coaching practice. Sarah is very positive about this involvement and believes that it generates commitment from all parties. She agrees that this involvement is there to set performance goals and to collectively identify direction but not to decide how to get there. Therefore, my study clearly evidences that there is an organisational involvement within the executive coaching process. It does not appear

as executing power over coachee and the coach as highlighted in the literature (see Natale and Diamante, 2005; Coutu and Kauffman, 2009; Garvey et al., 2009; McCarthy and Milner, 2013; Athanasopoulou and Dopson, 2015; Gray et al., 2016) or as a sophisticated way of management control (as in Fodge, 2011; Reissner and Du Toit, 2011; Fatien and Nizet, 2015) but as a positive support for the coachees within the context of this study. One possibility is that the coachees view coaching from the networked discourse (see Western, 2017) where lateral relationships and breaking barriers are given prominence over traditional power structures and hierarchies. The existence of such initiatives may be possible within the case study organisation given its strong coaching culture.

Furthermore, the current attention on power dynamics within the coaching literature appears limited (see Louis and Fatien, 2014) and both the participants, and the case study organisation, are very positive about executive coaching. The limited attention to power dynamics may also have implications to view the presence of an organisational agenda positively. However, the existing literature does not appear to view this as a positive implication and furthermore does not discuss it in enough detail to provide sufficient understanding of organisational involvement. Therefore, my study contributes to the current literature by highlighting that there is an organisational agenda in executive coaching.

Despite the emergent theme 'organisational agenda' within my study, the participants continue to emphasise that it is about the coachee having authority within the executive coaching process. This may be an indication of the successful use of executive coaching as a means of organisational control, as suggested by Reissner and Du Toit (2011), where there is a possibility that employees' hearts and minds are targeted and controlled (as in Fodge, 2011; Fatien and Nizet, 2015) to make them think and act in the way that the organisation prefers. There is also some apparent reluctance within the literature to discuss organisational involvement in detail. For example, Coutu and Kauffman (2009) and Athanasopoulou and Dopson (2015) agree that the development engagement is designed to meet the needs of both the executive and the organisation paying for the service but the authors do not continue the discussion. However, within the context of my study, organisational involvement is not viewed as problematic.

5.2.3 Theme Three: Generate Motivation

All participants agree that executive coaching plays a key role in motivating coachees (as in Batson and Yoder, 2012; Narayanasamy and Penney, 2014). The non-judgmental nature (Grant, 2014), the positive attitude that the coachees possess, and

the developmental focus (as proposed by Segers et al., 2011; Kempster and Iszatt-White, 2013) all help coachee motivation. The very nature of coaching connects coachees' intrinsic motivation to learn (as suggested by Giglo et al., 1998; King and Eaton, 1999; Knowles et al., 2015). My study evidences that the non-judgmental approach enhances coachees' confidence and creates space to test their development options without worrying about results (as proposed by Giglio et al., 1998; Hudson, 1999; Wang, 2012).

The non-judgmental and confidential nature of the intervention also helps the coachees to openly discuss their development gaps which enhances their understanding of their development needs (as in Ling, 2012). The study participants value the confidentiality and trust and seek to have external coaches. The trust and the non-judgmental approach presented in their executive coaching engagements helps them to be open in their conversations. It also helps them to understand their predispositions (as was found in Rogers, 2007; Western, 2012; Page and De Haan, 2014). For example, David directly accepts that he is not comfortable talking about his weaknesses with his boss or someone within the organisation. The developed trust and non-judgmental nature of the executive coaching relationship helps him to actively and openly engage in conversations (Zenger et al., 2011).

Sarah emphasises that trust is both about confidentiality and being non-judgmental, which facilitates coachees to talk about things that they do not generally talk about (as proposed by Ladegard and Gjerde, 2014; De Haan and Gannon, 2017). The established trust helps coachees to explore internal and external perspectives, which appears to help learning (as in Vygotsky, 1978; Gray et al., 2016). The non-judgmental and trusted space reduces their stress and anxiety which ensures effectiveness (see Grant, 2014). The open conversations that they engage in are action-oriented. Active engagement results in further understanding which helps coaches to consider coachees as resourceful individuals (as proposed by Du Toit, 2014). This also results in motivation.

This facilitation to engage in a genuine relationship that is safe and supportive (as in De Haan and Duckworth, 2013; Hamlin et al., 2016) makes executive coaching more psychological, engaged and positive (Brockbank and McGill, 2012). The existence of a tri-partite relationship (discussed above), leads to questioning the possibilities of forming such genuine relationships. However, within the context of the study, the organisational involvement is viewed as a positive implication that appears to support the success of the coaching engagement. In addition, the developed coachee and

coach relationship appears to be a good foundation for the success of the coaching engagement and for the coachees' motivation (as proposed by Gyllensten and Palmer, 2007).

The empowered role of the coachee within the relationship is also motivational, result-oriented (Mezirow, 1991; Giglio et al., 1998; Baron et al., 2011; Brockbank and McGill, 2012) and facilitates creativity (Giglio et al., 1998). However, as Western (2017) suggests, the individual values, beliefs and their relationship with society influence the way that someone develops, works, and continues with their work and societal relationships (see Deal and Kennedy, 1983; Louis and Fatien, 2014).

Moreover, the development focus of executive coaching also appears to be motivational for the coachees. For example, the belief that it is for development influences coachees to positively engage with the coaching (as in MacKie, 2016). My study participants continuously emphasise that the executive coaching is for their development. For example, David is highly positive and considers that having executive coaching is a way of recognising his contribution and impact. His chief executive officer also has an executive coach which further stimulates his thoughts. Thus, the discussed (see Chapter Two) shift from derailment to development influences the motivation of the coachees (as was found in Segers et al., 2011; Kempster and Iszatt-White, 2013). However, the coach participants do not discuss the development focus as something that they consider when facilitating coachee motivation. Thus, there lies an opportunity to explore this further to understand the possibilities.

Therefore, as previously emphasised, the development discourse within the case study organisation and its coaching culture appears to have implications for the participants' motivation. For example, if the coaching is employed to address specific issues within the organisation, the resulting motivation may not be possible (see literature discussion on derailment to development). The 'non-judgmental nature' highlighted above is also contestable if coaching is viewed from psy expert and managerialist discourses (see Western, 2017). In addition, power dynamics within the organisation (as in Louis and Fatien, 2014) need consideration in evaluating the transferability of my findings. For example, some (see Fodge, 2011; Fatien and Nizet, 2015) highlight the possibility that coaching is used as a modern way of management control. If an organisation aims to use coaching for this purpose, or if the coachees perceive it as a means of organisational and managerial control, the possibility of generating motivation by using coaching may be very low.

5.2.4 Theme Four: Encourage Action

My study reveals that executive coaching encourages executives to act (as in Western, 2012). Executive coaching within the context of my study facilitates participants to explore the priorities that they have neglected prior to their coaching engagements (as in Kilburg, 1996; Ely et al., 2010; De Villiers, 2012). David, for example, emphasises that he would not naturally look at those areas if he did not engage with the coach. This evidences the unawareness of the participants' sense-making process and mental schemas prior to the coaching arrangements (as proposed by Reynolds, 1999; Du Toit, 2014). My study does not evidence that the coachees have not been engaged with any sort of reflection prior to their coaching encounter. However, the intrapersonal reflection does not appear to be effective compared to the interpersonal reflective engagement (as in Brockbank and McGill, 2012). The objective dialogue and constructive questioning by the coaches appear to help participants to be more critical in their reflection (as proposed by Turner, 2006). My study also demonstrates that an empathetic nature, active listening and non-judgmental space supports the creation of opportunity for reflection (as in Ladegard and Gjerde, 2014; MacKie, 2016).

It is evident, for example with David, as he is certain that coaching helps him to be more conscious of his priorities. The coaches encouraged coachees to explore their strengths and look back to their previous experiences and analyse them to support future decisions and actions (as proposed by Mezirow, 1991). This critical reflection on their previous experience helps coachees to develop new understanding which, in turn, generates actions (as in Mezirow, 1991; Reynolds, 1999; Brockbank and McGill, 2012; Du Toit, 2014). The idea of reflection for action generation continues to appear within my study. For example, Sarah acts as a strong believer of reflection for development but emphasises the importance of reflecting objectively and openly (as was found in Brockbank and McGill, 2012). Thus, the coachees' engagement with the coaches through a reflective dialogue is regarded as a result-oriented relationship (as in Argyris, 1960; Schön, 1987).

In addition, the informal evaluations brought forward by the coaches also appear as a tool that generates action. These assessments surface as a mixture of challenges, support and questions with a formative focus (as in Smither et al., 2003; Ely et al., 2010; Gurdjian et al., 2014). Daniel views it as a 'natural check' and Mark calls it a 'centre check'. This check is a conversation, a questioning and a challenging but supportive exercise (Saunders, 2006) in which coachee and coach work together to understand further improvements (as in Schwandt, 1997). Thus, the assessment of

their coaching engagement is also tailored to individuals; therefore, the feedback that the coachees receive appears more relevant (see Gentry and Leslie, 2007).

The participants agree that the assessment creates enough space and opportunity to improve (as in Grant, 2014). My study reveals that the assessment is not something that declares the end of executive engagement; it is continuous throughout the process (as proposed by Ely et al., 2010). Thus, this demonstrates how the above-discussed sufficient space for improvement is created through assessment. Additionally, assessor and assessee being mutually part of the assessment makes it an innovative social engagement (as in Flaherty, 2011) and developmental rather than judgmental. Thus, this participatory, inclusive and conversational assessment (as suggested by Garvey, 2017) is helpful in generating further actions for improvement by constructing new realities.

Therefore, executive coaching appears as an intervention that encourages coachee participants to act. This action generation completes the transformation of the coachees within the context of my study (as proposed by Mezirow, 1991; Brockbank and McGill, 2012). Executive coaching, therefore, appears as an action-oriented developmental initiative (as was found in Ely et al., 2010; Western, 2012; Ladegard and Gjerde, 2014).

5.2.5 Theme Five: Support throughout

My study participants appreciate the support they receive through executive coaching. This support is manifold, namely, the space they gain, the accessibility of the coach, the non-approach and the probing questions (as in Ladegard and Gjerde, 2014). Additionally, my findings exhibit that the coaches employ theories to support coachees, and the coachees view this action as supportive. The conversations they engage in also appear as supportive within the context of my study. Both the coachee and the coach participants acknowledge that the support extended within the process plays a pivotal role in achieving the set goals (see Giglio et al., 1998; Batson and Yoder, 2012). The idea of goal setting is discarded within the soul guide discourse (see Western, 2012). However, it complies with the psy expert and the managerialist discourses (as in Western, 2017) which are driven by the cause and effect rationality. The applicability of these discourses for businesses operating in the 21st century is described by Laloux (2014). Garvey et al., (2009) and Garvey (2011) argue the possibility of decreased innovation and creativity if the coaching is to focus on goals. The authors also emphasise the possibility of goal conflicts. Another implication of goal focus is that it may prevent the coachees from taking a critical instance of the whole system (see

Habermas, 1970; Marcuse, 1991). Thus, there is a possibility of the coachees becoming mechanistic (see Western, 2017). I do not fully discard these possibilities.

However, my study participants do not highlight any such issues with the afore-mentioned goal-setting they engaged in with their coach. The full co-operation from all parties involved appears to resolve any such issues that may arise within the coaching engagement (as in Western, 2017). There is an enhanced possibility of such co-operation within the case study organisation given its wide acceptance of executive coaching as a positive intervention and the apparent commitment from the top management. The strong positive perception of coaching and the coaching culture of the organisation also seem to have influenced my participants' interpretations here (see Gao, 2017).

It also appears that the right balance of support and challenge are both important (Argyris, 1960; Du Toit, 2014; Day and Dragoni, 2015; MacKie, 2016). For example, David discusses the support he receives throughout the process but is aware that it is he who should act on his own development. However, the presence of the coach, trusted relationship and the conversations help him to deliver results (as was found in MacKie, 2016). The support does not come in the form of solutions but as questions, challenges and conversations (as in Ely et al., 2010; Wang, 2012). Sarah interprets support as being available for a conversation and encouraging sense-making by challenging the coachees. Therefore, there is evidence within my study that the coaches attempt to facilitate appropriate level of challenge and support. This has been helpful for the coachee participants (as in Day and Dragoni, 2015) and appears to ensure continous constructive actions (see Mezirow, 1991; Palma and Pedrozo, 2016) within the context of my study.

The theories presented by coaches help coachees to understand and take more informed actions (Connaughton et al., 2003). Having a good rationale for their actions also helps them to be positive and continue. Daniel believes that the given theories provide him with a framework to understand things and to organise his thoughts, and he appreciates the support received from the coach. All participants consider that exploring the theoretical underpinnings of what they do is both relevant and timely. This helps them to develop a rationale for their actions which, in turn, assists them to improve their action plans.

All participants consider conversation as a powerful tool of learning and development (as in Turner, 2006; McCarthy and Milner, 2013) and these conversations stimulate awareness and responsibility within coachees (see Turner, 2006 and Passmore and

Fillery-Travis, 2011). Mark, for example, thinks that the conversations develop his mental maturity and believes that, if this was to happen through natural organic progression it would have taken more time. This also evidences that the coaching in the context of my study, helps coachees to learn and act in a timely manner. Thus, the coaching conversations appear as learning in a social context (see Bandura, 1977; Lave and Wenger, 1991), which, in turn, facilitates space to explore external and internal elements of learning for improvement (see Mezirow, 1991; Gray et al., 2016,). The process ensures that the coachees become self-responsible learners (as in Fillery-Travis and Lane, 2006; Whitmore, 2011) within the case study organisation. Sarah endorses the idea and believes that just providing space to say things out loud helps coachees to learn. Thus, learning and development are less about facts and figures and more about the narratives of coachees and reflections of those narratives (as was found in Drake, 2011). There is evidence to claim that conversations in executive coaching facilitate coachee development (as in Garvey, 2011; Du Toit, 2014) as these conversations provide support to change the coachees' circumstances to be more effective (as proposed by Ling, 2012). Therefore, as David notes, executive coaching is seen as an investment and as support for the coachees. However, the readiness to engage in a conversation, receive support and be challenged, should be given further consideration if the results are to be applied in a different context.

5.2.6 Theme Six: Ensure Continuity

My study shows that executive coaching ensures continuous learning and development (as in Giglio et al., 1998; Bachkirova et al., 2014; Du Toit, 2014). The executive coaching facilitates these aspects within the case study organisation by developing independent learners and supporting coachees to become coaches. Mark accepts that his coach facilitates him to be independent and own his actions and decisions. The coachee participants appreciate the authority and independence they hold within the executive coaching process and the role that the coach plays as a facilitator.

This indicates that the coachee has the authority to decide what the coach does, discuss the options and challenges, and act as the facilitator. The discussed issues and possibilities of the coachees having such authority are still relevant and should be taken into account when making sense of my findings and their application to another context. However, within the context of my study, that authority and independence appears to help the coachees to be more confident as learners which, in turn, influences them to be motivated to act due to enhanced confidence levels (as proposed by Petrie, 2011; Segers et al., 2011; Smith and Brummel, 2013; Grant, 2014).

David also acknowledges that executive coaching facilitates him to be an independent learner and helps him to act upon his development due to enhanced understanding, commitment and responsibility (as in Ely et al., 2010; Batson and Yoder, 2012; Law, 2013; Narayanasamy and Penney, 2014). Sarah reiterates this view, expressing her experience of seeing her coachees' enhanced resourcefulness. Developing coachees' independence appears as an intentional act performed by the coaches. Thus, my study establishes that developing an independent learner is embedded into the executive coaching process (as proposed by Fillery-Travis and Lane, 2006; Whitmore, 2011). The idea closely links with the andragogy (see Knowles et al., 2015). This independence facilitated through executive coaching is a unique feature of the intervention (as was found by Yu et al., 2008; Petrie, 2011; Segers et al., 2011). The independence, authority and responsibility created within the process appear to help continuous learning and it therefore appears as a sustainable mode of learning (as in Bachkirova et al., 2014; Du Toit, 2014).

5.2.6.1 Coachee becomes a Coach

Another contributing factor to developing individual learners is that executive coaching facilitates coachees to become coaches within the context of this study. Throughout my study, the participants highlight positives complying with the current literature. Despite the success of communicating positive aspects of coaching (see Western, 2012; Garvey et al., 2017), the idea of 'coachees becoming coaches' is not fully represented within the current literature.

Daniel argues that executive coaching helps him to reinforce values and powers of coaching by encouraging him to coach (as in Redshaw, 2000; Knights and Poppleton, 2008; McCarthy and Milner, 2013). It is also evident that the coachees start self-coaching as a result of executive coaching engagement. The positive experience of executive coaching connects the coachee well with the techniques that the coach employs. Therefore, it is evident that seeing the results of coaching motivates coachees to start coaching (as proposed by Knights and Poppleton, 2007; McCarthy and Milner, 2013). As previously stated, very few coaching writers acknowledge the idea and most of these acknowledgements appear conceptual; there is no apparent research evidence to support the notion.

All the coach and the coachee participants agree on this notion and the idea is quite representative within the study but not in the literature. For example, John observes in his practice that his coachees think about the questions themselves as they coach and self-coach. He believes that coachees develop a habit of asking good questions. My

study also evidences that the coaches aim at developing these abilities in the coachees. Thus, this also appears as an intentional act by the coaches.

Giglio et al., (1998) discuss the importance of developing the coachees' self-monitoring skills but the aim, according to the authors, is to help cope with failure, reduce stress, and learn from challenging experiences. It does not appear as a suggestion to encourage continuous learning. Their work is also conceptual, as others cite within this section. For example, Redshaw (2000) argues that the coachees become coaches if the process is undertaken correctly. However, Redshaw's claim is also not research based. Furthermore, Knights and Poppleton (2008) believe that having a positive experience of executive coaching encourages coachees to enhance their coaching skills. McCarthy and Milner (2013) acknowledge this view; however, no evidence is presented by these authors to support their claims. Therefore, it is arguable that there are very few coaching writers who have identified the possibility of coachees becoming coaches due to their positive experience of coaching. In addition, there is insufficient research-informed rationale for these claims made by the above authors. Therefore, my findings offer evidence to highlight another positive element of executive coaching which is under-represented in the current literature.

These highlighted views suggest that executive coaching ensures continuous and contagious learning. The coachees becoming coaches of themselves (self-coaching), appears as 'learning to learn' (as in Brockbank and McGill, 2012) which results in continuous learning. This phenomenon is reflected in this study as participants start to become self-analysing, criticising and self-reflecting in order to explore new or better ways of doing things (as proposed by Mezirow, 1991; Du Toit, 2014). The coachee participants demonstrate these developed skills during the interviews through self-engagement in reflective exercises. These self-conversations and reflections help them to be more self-aware (as discussed above), more responsible and an informed learner (as in Mezirow, 1991). It appears to link with transformative learning. Thus, it can be argued that executive coaching offers a sustainable model of learning and development (as proposed by Du Toit, 2014). This also evidences the shift of roles in line with discussed concepts of andragogy where learners are treated as resourceful and responsible learners (as in Knowles, 1984; Bowerman and Collins, 1999; Knowles et al., 2015). Therefore, it is clear that executive coaching within the case study organisation influences coachees' continuous learning. Coaching also appears contagious as evidenced by coachees becoming coaches due to their positive engagement and experience.

5.2.7 Theme Seven: Tackle Problems

My literature review demonstrates that executive coaching places a key emphasis on performance enhancement and development (see Bond and Seneque, 2013; De Haan et al., 2013). The development discourse appears as one of the main reasons for its increasing popularity (McCormick and Burch, 2008; Segers et al., 2011; De Villiers, 2012; Edwards, 2012; Garvey et al., 2014). The development links of coaching since its inception (as proposed by Garvey, 2011) continues to appear in the current literature which is also evident within the case study organisation. My study participants positively acknowledge that executive coaching is developmental. This study also offers evidence to support the highlighted popularity of the developmental discourse.

Despite these positive implications of executive coaching, my study reveals that executive coaching is used to support coachees to deal with issues such as lack of performance and poor work relationships. This is another under-represented theme in the current literature. The current literature also highlights tackling problems as an obsolete concept (see section 2.3.2.1) citing that executive coaching has shifted its focus from derailment to development (as in White, 2006; Coutu and Kauffman, 2009; Kempster and Iszatt-White, 2013).

However, my study reveals that addressing issues is not an obsolete concept in executive coaching as emphasised in the literature. The attempt to tackle problems by using coaching may be partly due to its psychological and therapeutic influences (as in Wampold, 2001; Western, 2012; Grief, 2017) which links to the psy expert discourse of Western (2012; 2017). This encourages the argument that the coach-coachee relationship is about the coach doing something to the coachee, which contradicts with the shared nature of coaching (see Bachkirova and Kauffman, 2009). However my study evidences that, at times, coaching focuses on the 'wounded-self' (see Western, 2012). Therefore, coaching does not seem to have fully shifted its focus onto the 'celebrated self' (as suggested by Western, 2012), at least within the case study organisation.

For example there is evidence within my study to suggest that executive coaching supported Daniel to deal with some work relationship issues although he struggles to acknowledge this. One apparent reason is his positive perception of coaching embedded within the coaching culture of the organisation. Throughout the study he represents the positive themes well and remains an advocate of executive coaching; thus, he does not want to contradict himself by bringing other issues into the discussion. Moreover, another possibility is that he does not want to bring up the issues

with an outsider. Yet, executive coaching helps him to deal with the issues around this relationship (as in Giglio et al., 1998). However, the primary reason for coachees having executive coaching within the organisation appears to be development.

Some researchers (Giglio, et al., 1998; Hall, et al., 1999; Anna, et al., 2001; Natale and Diamante, 2005; Grant et al., 2009) directly acknowledge that executive coaching addresses a wider range of issues including: mental health; derailing behaviours; depression; correcting employee relation issues; poor interpersonal skills; demeaning and arrogant behaviour; and the list goes on. Nevertheless, the majority of the literature does not represent these issues or, at times, presents tackling problems as an obsolete concept.

Stokes and Jolly (2014) note that it was in the 1980s that the early inception of executive coaching was presented as a deficit model, with the intention of correcting toxic behaviours or offering support for under-performing executives to meet their organisational demands (Kets De Vries, 1989; cited in Kempster and Iszatt-White, 2013). Coutu and Kauffman (2009) state that, twenty years ago, executive coaching was employed for remedial work focusing on a medical model (White, 2006). Thus, its previous use was to explore issues that required resolution; however, now it is a potent and popular solution for executive development (as in De Haan et al., 2013). My study challenges this view as it appears that coaches within the study context continue to use executive coaching to tackle performance and relationship issues.

Furthermore, the researchers (Garvey, 2014; Stokes and Jolly, 2014; Athanasopoulou and Dopson, 2015) who currently discuss tackling problems demonstrate a reluctance to accept the idea directly. This phenomenon is also evident through my study. For example, David emphasises that leaders and coaches do not like the idea of addressing issues through the intervention. This attitude, for example, reflects on Garvey et al.'s (2014), discussion of drug taking, crimes and performance lapses where they emphasise the use of coaching to change the behaviours but do not articulate them as issues. This appears as part confirmation of David's view that '*leaders and coaches do not like the idea of addressing issues*'. The term "let's drop the negative discourse and use an inclusive one" (Garvey 2014, p.57) provides some direction to argue that there is an attempt to promote the positive aspects of coaching within the current literature. The unwillingness to accept that executive coaching addresses issues also continues within my study. This reluctance may have influenced the unpopularity of the notion of 'tackling problems' within the coaching literature and in practice. In addition, just as in current literature, my study participants also continue to

argue that executive coaching is for development. This suggests that the coaches may have not been hired primarily to tackle problems but the study offers evidence that it addresses issues (as in Coutu and Kauffman, 2009) related to coachee performance and work relationships. This phenomenon occurs despite the strong dominance of the developmental discourse and the coaching culture within the case study organisation which appears to influence the interpretations of my participants (as in Gao, 2017; Smith et al., 2009). Therefore, in my study I argue that 'tackling problems' offers evidence of a further unique contribution to knowledge which can be positively used to help executives in business organisations in the future. However, my study complies with Giglio et al.'s (1998) and Athanasopoulou and Dopson's, (2015) view that addressing issues is not the primary focus of executive coaching.

To re-instate the applicability of my findings and contribution into other organisations has not been investigated within the study. My intention is to create deeper understanding but not to offer generalisable knowledge. There is a possibility of transferability of my findings. However, the interested parties should consider the limitations of this study (see section 3.17), positionality statement (see section 1.6), and the discussion on reflexivity (see sections 3.16, and 3.16.1), and my philosophical assumptions (see sections 3.2.1 and 3.2.2) in order to make informed sense of my contributions.

6 Chapter Six – Conclusion and Recommendations

This chapter presents the lead out material mentioned in the introduction. Firstly, the chapter briefly discusses an overview of the project from inception to the end. This section of the chapter highlights:

"How do leaders make sense of their dyadic executive coaching experience?"

It then presents a summary of the above-discussed theoretical contributions from my study integrating them into the discussion on methodological contribution. This acts as another initiative to facilitate the reader's overall sense-making of the thesis.

I briefly discuss the emergent research avenues before moving to the end where I develop a brief reflection exploring my experience, learning and future.

6.1 Conclusion

My study seeks to understand how leaders experience executive coaching in a case study organisation by asking:

"How do leaders make sense of their dyadic executive coaching experience?"

I take particular interest in exploring how leaders make sense of their experience of executive coaching. The focus of the study informs my research methodology which is interpretative phenomenological analysis. This is underpinned by three philosophical instances namely, phenomenology, hermeneutics and ideography (Smith et al., 2009; Smith, 2011; VanScoy and Evenstad, 2015; Pańczak and Pietkiewicz, 2016).

A case study organisation, one of the largest financial conglomerates in the UK, was selected for the data collection and seven participants were interviewed (only five cases were analysed) using semi-structured interviews. Two interviews with each participant were conducted aiming to go deeper into their individual experience of executive coaching. Data were analysed following the IPA data analysis guidance presented by Smith et al., (2009). Thus, a detailed line by line analysis was conducted. To retain the ideographic commitments, each individual case was analysed before moving to the cross-analysis.

I identified seven superordinate themes from the transcript extracts from individual participants. I attempted to create space for participants' voices to be heard and to ensure transparency within the research process. Moreover, I tried to demonstrate that

the interpretations were generated through empathetic and questioning hermeneutics rather than suspicion. My findings develop a deeper understanding of how leaders' make sense of their executive coaching experience by addressing:

"How do leaders make sense of their dyadic executive coaching experience?"

It is also acknowledged that my findings are contextual and subjective. Therefore, they may not be applicable to other contexts apart from the case study organisation itself (see section 3.17). As previously discussed, my findings are positional within participants' "experience, their culture, language and locale" (Smith et al., 2009, p.195).

My study shows that executive coaching enhances executives' understanding and gradually creates deeper thought which the participants call 'clarity'. The coaches' questions appear as a major tool for creating understanding and clarity, which appear to be both related to an individual's self-awareness and the wider understanding of their development, work and life contexts.

Moreover, this study reveals that executive coaching has developed opportunities for the participants. These opportunities have arisen through the challenges that the coaches bring into the process, providing opportunities for coachees to expand their potential and allowing them an opportunity to develop their own agenda. This approach creates ownership and responsibility within.

The tailored nature of executive coaching is also influential as it widens the opportunity for the coachee. It also makes coaching more relevant for my study participants. The motivation also facilitates coachees to grasp the opportunities that come their way. The positive attitude that the study participants hold, and the belief that it is for their development, influence and enhance their motivation.

Furthermore, participants revealed that executive coaching also encourages them to act. The continuous reflection (both within and with the coach) appears to be a tool that generates actions. The informal evaluation that all coachee participants undergo has helped them to better equip themselves and prepare in advance for future challenges. As part of this evaluation, they have also started running a self-evaluation to understand the progress that they are making. In turn, this has ensured an action orientation.

The coaches ensure that the coachees are supported throughout the executive coaching process. Coaches employ theories and continue engaging in conversations to help the coachees. The coachees acknowledge that having some theoretical

understanding and the continuous support they receive through coaching conversations are helpful. Participants also acknowledge that the executive coaching facilitates continuous improvements. This continuity is highlighted as a result of coachees themselves becoming coaches and independent learners. My findings also reveal that executive coaching is sometimes used to tackle problems and that it carries an organisational agenda.

The discussion of the findings in line with the critically evaluated literature highlights the theoretical contributions of the study (discussed in Chapter Five and summarised in this chapter). Following from the summarised theoretical contribution, the methodological and practical implications from the study are also discussed as contributions in the section below.

6.2 Contribution from the Study

This section of the chapter discusses the study's contribution to executive coaching. It is categorised into three key areas; theoretical contribution, contribution towards methodological approaches, and implications for practice. However, the theoretical contributions of the study are discussed in detail in the previous chapter. Hence, the aim is to summarise them here.

6.2.1 Theoretical Contributions

The literature review shows that executive coaching is successful in communicating the positive aspects of coaching. Most of the interventional positives are highlighted in the current literature. However, my study found that executive coaching is both contagious and continuous. One major influence of continuous learning is that coachees become coaches due to their engagement with executive coaching. This is an under-represented notion in the literature despite the above-noted success in communicating the positive aspects of coaching (Western, 2012; Garvey et al., 2014). This claim is now supported by the evidence I developed through my study.

The authors who acknowledge this view also condition it by saying that for coachees to become coaches, their experience of executive coaching should be positive. This is also evident throughout my study as all the coachees who participated are quite positive (discussed in Chapter Four) about executive coaching and its ability to deliver results. These positive perceptions may have implications on coachees becoming coaches themselves.

In addition, this study reveals that there is an organisational agenda behind executive coaching interventions within the case study organisation. The dominant and widely accepted discourse in the current literature around this issue is that executive coaching employs a coachee-led agenda (see Yu et al., 2008; Petrie, 2011; McCarthy and Milner, 2013; Athanasopoulou and Dopson, 2015). My study also represents this view and there is evidence to suggest that the coach facilitates the coachees to come up with their own development agenda (Giglio et al., 1998; Scriffignano, 2011). However, my study evidences that there is also an apparent organisational agenda.

There is some evidence within the literature that discusses the organisational agenda within coaching (see Khan, 2014; Louis and Fatien, 2014; Athanasopoulou and Dopson, 2015; Gray et al., 2016). However, most authors who discuss having an organisational agenda also demonstrate reluctance to accept this view, or present the idea indirectly rather than accepting it directly. There are some (see Coutu and Kauffman, 2009; Athanasopoulou and Dopson, 2015) who argue that the organisations who fund coaching expect something back from the intervention. However, in my study, the organisational agenda does not appear as executing financial authority (that the organisation holds) over the coaches and the coachees. My findings position it as positive developmental support. Therefore, this study contributes to the current literature by highlighting the positive impact of the organisational agenda in executive coaching. The reluctance to accept this in the literature and in practice may be a result of the negative perception of the organisational agenda. Additionally, the dominance of the discourse 'coachee-led agenda' also appears to influence the unpopularity of an 'organisational agenda'.

Executive coaching has been promoted as a developmental intervention both in practice and in research. Despite this developmental discourse, which is highly represented in the literature, some researchers (Giglio et al., 1998; Natale and Diamante, 2005; Grant et al., 2009) argue that it is used to address executive derailments, issues related to coachees' behaviour and performance issues. Nevertheless, this idea is presented as an old concept of executive coaching in the literature (see Anna et al., 2001; Coutu and Kauffman, 2009; Kempster and Iszatt-White, 2013). Therefore, tackling problems using executive coaching is seen as an obsolete concept. My study reveals that the case study organisation uses executive coaching to tackle problems and to help executives to overcome the problems that they are facing. Thus, this study challenges the idea that tackling problems is an obsolete concept as it is currently being practised within the case study organisation, thereby offering further evidence of an additional contribution to the knowledge.

This section summarises the theoretical contributions of the study. The next section explores the methodological contributions from my study.

6.2.2 Contribution to Methodological Approaches

The coaching literature mainly considers the perspective of the coach (Coutu and Kauffman, 2009; Ellinger et al., 2014). My study explores both coachee and coach perspectives. This is an attempt to create a perspective balance by addressing the often side-lined coachee voice in executive coaching research (Western, 2012).

To explore both the coachee and the coach voices, I employ interpretative phenomenological analysis (IPA), a psychological research methodology (Smith et al., 2009; Callary, et al., 2015; VanScoy and Evenstad, 2015). The incorporation of IPA into the executive coaching research contributes towards developing a new body of research. This research approach encourages researchers to explore the individual experience of participants towards a deeper understanding and to generate knowledge (Passmore and Fillery-Travis, 2011). The application of IPA into coaching research is growing generally. However, the number of studies (see Gyllensten and Palmer, 2006; Gyllensten and Palmer, 2007; Buckle, 2012; Passmore and Townsend, 2012) published to date remains limited. Therefore, this study is a useful addition to the growing body of IPA research.

Moreover, the research design adopted for this study is unusual. To date, most IPA studies have followed a simple design, exploring a single perspective (e.g. parent or child) of participants by conducting one semi-structured interview (Smith, 2011). There are very few studies which go beyond this simple design. Some researchers (Clare, 2002; Larkin and Griffith, 2004; Buckle, 2012; Passmore and Townsend, 2012) explore two perspectives in their studies and others (Barr and McConkey, 2007; Wagstaff and Williams, 2014) conduct two interviews with each participant, aiming to understand their experience more deeply. To my knowledge, there is only one study (Clare, 2003) that attempts to explore multi-perspectives and conducts two interviews with each study participant aiming for a deeper understanding of their experience.

Therefore, my study stands as the first to enter into executive coaching research incorporating such a research design which is highlighted as a 'bolder IPA design' in the IPA literature (Smith, et al., 2009; Wagstaff et al., 2014). In addition, IPA is quite dominant in health psychology (Callary, et al., 2015) but there are a growing number of fields (Wagstaff et al., 2014) incorporating this phenomenological research methodology into their research. My study contributes to IPA by linking another field of

research, executive coaching, and bringing an outside perspective (Wagstaff et al., 2014).

This study's take on coaching as a subjective humanist philosophy (Garvey, 2014; Garvey, 2017) and IPA's philosophical underpinnings are a match which researchers may continue to explore in future. The clear justifications I develop to argue the case for IPA (see Chapter Three) may facilitate coaching researchers to seek possible applications of IPA in their future studies. Thus, this study acts as a thought-provoking initiative to promote innovative research methodologies into executive coaching research, which is a timely need (Passmore and Fillery-Travis, 2011).

Having discussed the methodological contributions of the study, the final part of the contribution section discusses the implications for practice.

6.2.3   Implications for Practice

My study supports the positive developmental discourse of executive coaching presented in the current literature. It offers scholarly evidence to enhance the understanding of how executive coaching works. Therefore, my study provides some evidence base for executive coach practitioners and addresses the imbalance of scholarly and practitioner-led-literature.

Despite the increasing popularity of executive coaching, the uncertainties of the result-delivery of the intervention have raised reliability issues of coaching practice (Sperry, 2013). Therefore, the studies of this calibre appear as decision-making support for organisations who aspire to employ executive coaching. The developed understanding of how executive coaching works may help in the future otherwise organisational decision-makers may fail to understand the validity of investing in the process (Ellis, 2005). My study outcomes may also influence organisations to develop diverse perspectives on their return on investment (ROI) beyond financial gains (Lawrence and Whyte, 2014).

Moreover, individual leaders who are keen on their progress may benefit from my study. The study's findings, for example, coachees becoming coaches, and also the continuous contagious nature of the intervention, may influence individual leaders to actively use executive coaching. Seeing the positive implications highlighted throughout this study may also influence them to become executive coaches and promote executive coaching within their organisations. Thus, my study possibly supports the growth of internal coaching interventions in business organisations.

Furthermore, understanding of the intervention's flexibility and also its individualised, tailored, person-led nature may encourage individual leaders to explore the possibilities and uses of executive coaching in their organisations.

This section of the chapter discusses methodological contributions and the practical implications of the study. The next section of the chapter evaluates the potential and fruitful research avenues generated through this study aiming to encourage further coaching research.

6.3 Ideation for Future Studies

My research explores the executive coaching experiences of both coachees and coaches. This is an attempt to develop some perspective balance within the current scholarly activities and within the literature. It also highlights the importance of the coachee perspective in research and notes that, currently, there is an imbalance of perspectives. Future research on the coachee perspective would benefit and support the creation of perspective balance which would also help in establishing credibility of executive coaching research and in practice.

The literature section discusses the under-represented coachee perspective and highlights the importance of perspective balance. However, there are no apparent discussions or encouragements to explore the organisational perspective of executive coaching. For example, the term 'three-way contracting', which emerges from my research, suggests the importance of knowing more about tripartite influences for executive coaching. My study does not explore the extent to which organisational involvement influences the practice of a coach nor the progress of executives. It also does not explore the 'power and influence' of the organisation. However, implications of power and influence in an organisation appear to be an area worth exploring further.

Evidently, more studies exploring the organisational perspectives in executive coaching would also be beneficial. This would enhance the understanding of implications of power, politics, and influences of different agendas (coachee, coach and the organisational) of executive coaching.

My study also indicates the importance of exploring the use of executive coaching to tackle specific problems. Further studies into this area would bring more clarity and enhance the scope of the use of executive coaching. Hence, it could be considered as a positive rather than a threat to the dominant developmental discourse. This will also

resolve the issues related to the reluctance to accept that executive coaching does, at times, address specific issues.

Another useful area of research would be to explore how any previous experience of executive coaching and a positive attitude towards it may influence the outcomes. My study reveals that positive experience of executive coaching has influenced coachees to be coaching in style and that they continue to employ the techniques learned. However, this is another area that I identify as under-researched.

Furthermore, the success of communicating and focusing on the positive aspects of coaching (e.g. support, goal attainment, skills development, leadership flexibility, and change management) has moved the industry forward. For this reason, exploring any negative effects and outcomes of executive coaching would help further progression of the industry and would clear doubts around negatives that have thus far been ignored. One coachee participant in this study indicates that executive coaching might demoralise coachees if they perceive that they have been assigned a coach to address issues that they currently face. These issues can be captured by exploring the negative effects of executive coaching in future research.

It is widely discussed that the *practice* of coaching is well ahead compared to *research* into executive coaching. However, with the increase of academic research in the field, research into practitioners' readiness to accommodate the contemporary research findings would also be a good area for further study. This would also enhance the impact and importance of academic research into executive coaching.

Finally, my study tries to influence further research into the impact of external coaches rather than internal coaching. All coachee participants in this study preferred to have an external rather than an internal coach. Justifications for this view are around trust; confidentiality and the comfort of being open with the external coach which were higher compared to working with an internal coach. My study does not deeply explore this issue nor draw any conclusions as it is not within the scope of the study. However, this appears as another fruitful area of possible research. It would help to understand the actual impact or value of having external rather than internal coaches.

Having discussed the possibilities for further research, I now reflect on my experience of conducting the study to mark a new beginning.

6.4   The End

The research journey was an excellent experience overall. Every step of the process was a challenge; the greatest challenge for me was learning to overcome my positivistic bias. In addition, learning to understand the ontological and epistemological implications of my instances for the study was also a major challenge. I realised that the methodological literature often made this more complicated than it should be. The simplified application of theoretical underpinnings and their justification (see Chapter Three) within this study would be helpful for researchers to look for justification for their actions rather than exploring ways of resolving complications around methodology literature. The complications are part of social constructs and also signs of different truths that exist in life world. Therefore, they continue to exist.

Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) was completely new to me. I spent a considerable amount of time trying to understand and master the techniques. As part of this exercise, I managed to network with IPA researchers dispersed around the world. The London IPA group and the IPA online forum were excellent platforms to engage with fellow IPA researchers and also share knowledge and issues. Some of the international conferences I attended were also excellent and thought-provoking sources for networking and knowledge sharing.

Moreover, the scholarly activities engaged in were a great source of knowledge and acted as confidence builders. Writing English at this level, for example, was more than a challenge which I took positively more often than not. The patience of my supervisors was phenomenal and that created space for me to keep improving. It helped me to realise that, given the opportunity, acceptance and empathy and being non-judgmental can help to develop lives. This knowledge continues to influence me in my practice in academia, in industry and in life.

Reaching the end also reminds me of the difficulties I went through in completing this thesis and the compromises I made. The self-belief, passion and motivation to reach the end played a vital role in this project. It reminds me of a quote that the World Cup winning Pakistani Cricket captain made at the CIMA (Charted Institute of Management Accountants) global leadership summit:

"Compromise for your vision but never compromise on your vision" (Khan, 2005, min.10.55-11.00)

The contributions from my study and the further research avenues highlighted above would benefit the wider research and practitioner communities in the field. I aim to publish papers from this thesis to promote that influence.

Moreover, the developments of knowledge through the process, the confidence gained, and the research and practitioner network developed, have already offered me some great opportunities. Thus, I am determined to continue to contribute to theory and practice of executive coaching and to inspire and create lives just as my mentors did for me. Therefore, the end reminds me that this is just the beginning.

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7.1 Appendix 1: Participant consent form

The Researcher

I, Duminda Rajasinghe, a doctoral candidate from York St John University, hereby confirm that the ethical approval for the research was obtained from the University Research Ethics Committee. The researcher has been given permission to access the research site by the head of organisational development. The research is looking at executive coaching experiences of leaders of the subject organisation and the way they give meaning to their experience in leadership development.

Interviewee

I, the undersigned, Mr/Mrs/Miss/Doctor...…, an executive level leader at ABC Ltd, have volunteered to participate in this research study. I understand that my participation is fully voluntary and I may withdraw or decline from the process at any given time with no consequences. Further, I understand that;

1. My personal identity will be safeguarded. The anonymity is upheld and guaranteed.

2. The research data results of the research will be published with no further consent from participants in electronic or any other form.

3. Duminda Rajasinghe has explained to me the purpose of the research and its implications. All my concerns, questions etc. regarding the study have been addressed and I am aware that I can contact Duminda for any further clarification that I may require in future.

4. I permit the researcher to digitally record the interviews and I am aware the recorded interviews will be transcribed for analytical purposes. Further, the data gathered will be solely used for the research purposes and they will be destroyed on completion.

5. Completed transcripts of this interview will be given to me for my review and acknowledgement of accuracy.

I willingly provide my consent to participate in this study and I am aware in case of withdrawal that all information given by me will be discarded from the research and destroyed by the researcher.

Signature of   Signature of
Interviewee: .... Researcher..
Date: .... Date: ....

7.2   Appendix 2: Interview Schedule for Coachees (first interview)

I explain the purpose of the research briefly to the participant and also the ethical considerations of the research. Participants sign the consent form before the interview.

1. Could you please explain your professional background (what experience, education, career etc.?)
2. What is your understanding of executive coaching/how do you understand executive coaching?
3. How did you come to be involved (with your coach/with the coaching programme)?
4. Why were/ are you interested in Executive Coaching?
5. How often do you meet with your coach? How did it work for you?
6. What did you do between sessions/meetings with your executive coach?
7. What did you expect to gain or achieve from Executive Coaching? How far were those expectations met?
8. How has executive coaching helped you?
9. Were there any surprises during the coaching?
10. Did you change anything because of the coaching? (e.g.: Behaviour, Knowledge, skills etc.)
11. Would you like to talk about anything else connected with your executive coaching experience?

7.3 Appendix 3: Interview Schedule for Coaches (first interview)

I explain the purpose of the research briefly to the participant and also the ethical considerations of the research. Participants sign the consent form before the interview.

1. Could you please explain your professional and educational background and your current role in brief?
2. What approach or model do you subscribe to? How long have you been coaching?
3. What kind of coaching do you do? And what do you aim to achieve?
4. Could you explain the Coaching process that you go through with your clients in general (can vary according to clients)
5. What made you choose Coaching as your profession (if their profession is coaching)?
6. How can coaching help in executive development?
7. How do you make sure that coaching works and brings the desired results for the individuals and organisations?
8. What sort of changes have you observed from Coachees/Clients who you coached (during and after). Are you able to give me an example?
9. How do these changes occur within executives?
10. Do you have anything else to discuss about your experience in Coaching?

7.4 Appendix 4: Example of a Second Interview Schedule - Daniel

1. You mentioned about going on coaching, training and leadership development programme(s).
2. Talking about executive coaching, you said she (your coach) just asks questions, how does this help?
3. You said that you were challenged by your executive coach! How did she do that and how did it help you to develop yourself?
4. You talk about some discipline being introduced into the process! That is, checking what you have done and how you have done the agreed tasks and if not, why not?? How does this help you to be better in your role?
5. It is hard to get clarity without having a coach around! How does coach/coaching bring clarity to you? (you said you had a clear idea of what needs to be done after having coaching)
6. You mentioned that you have seen that coaching has worked elsewhere and it has worked for you! How do you know that coaching worked for you and for anybody else?
7. Feel better, feel calmer, less stressed, more relaxed... You go with a problem or challenge and you come out with a clearer answer! How does coaching do this for you?

7.5 Appendix 5: Conference Papers Presented and Publications

Book Chapter

Rajasinghe, D. and Mansour, H. F. 2018 Coaching as an entrepreneurship learning and development tool. In: Mulholland, G. and Turner, J. eds. Enterprise Education in UK Higher Education: Theory Policy and Practice. Abingdon: Taylor and Francis. (Accepted)

Conferences

Rajasinghe, D., Aluthgama-Baduge, C. and Mulholland, G. **2018.** Interpretative phenomenological analysis as an entrepreneurship research methodology. Paper presented to: 25th Eurasia Business and Economics Society (EBES) Conference, Berlin, Germany, 23-25 May 2018.

Rajasinghe, D. **2017.** Executive coaching, a sustainable leadership development intervention, 18th International Conference on Human Resource Development Research and Practice across Europe, Lisbon, Portugal, 7th – 9th June, 2017.

Rajasinghe, D. **2015**. Executive Coaching for Leadership Development: Understanding Leaders' Sense-making of their Development, 17th Annual ILA Global Conference, leading across borders and generations, Barcelona, Spain, 14th – 18th October, 2015.

Rajasinghe, D. **2015**. Emerging themes of an Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis on Business Leaders Experience of Executive Coaching**,** Research Reflections, York St John University Research Conference, 10thSeptember, 2015.

Rajasinghe, D. **2015.** Interpretative phenomenological analysis to understand how leaders make sense of their development, 16th International Human Development Research and Practice Conference across Europe, University College Cork, Ireland, 3rd– 5th June, 2015.

Rajasinghe, D. **2014**. Interpretative phenomenological analysis as a coaching research method, 9th Post Graduate Research Methodologies Conference, York St John University, York, 10thNovember, 2014.