TURNING UP THE VOLUME: HOW EXECUTIVE COACHES USE ASSESSMENT TOOLS TO INFORM THEIR LEARNING IN THE COACHING PROCESS

by

RUBINA FATIMA MALIK

(Under the Direction of Laura L. Bierema)

ABSTRACT

In order to stay competitive, Human Resources Organizational Development (HROD) requires tools to support the workforce to enhance learning and high performance. This study assists the field in discovering effective methods in the executive coaching process to aid an organizational leader's growth and performance. Executive coaching has become a current global phenomenon, which aims to improve organization leaders' performance. Eighty-five percent of executive coaches use one of the five top assessment tools when working with a client (Sherpa, 2014). The purpose of this study was to understand how executive coaches learn from and use these assessment tools in the coaching process. In this qualitative research study, a semi-structured interview protocol was used with a sample of 15 expert executive coaches. The interviews of the participants and field notes were analyzed using a thematic analysis method to understand how the executive coaches learned from and used assessment tools with their clients.

The five main themes that emerged within the findings were: (1) willing to engage in continuing education to master skills; (2) building trust between the coach and client; (3) establishing the foundation for the coaching relationship; (4) turning up the volume to produce results; and (5) ensuring accountability to cultivate change. This study uncovered two conclusions: (1) the trigger to the learning cycle in the coaching process is the context-specific data retrieved from the assessment tool; and (2) executive coaches use assessment data to turn up the volume with their clients and enact relationship-based interventions.

A new relation-based, context-specific coaching model emerged. The model materialized from the executive coach and client creating a working partnership in which both parties invest time, effort, and skills in the learning and development of goals for the client using the data from the assessment tool. Grounded in informal learning, this model proposes that learning happens within the framework of the coaching relationship and the context-specific data for the coaching process comes from the assessment tool data results.

INDEX WORDS: Adult informal learning, Assessment tools, Executive coaching, Human resources development, Leadership development

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to all the women in my family and around the world who may not have had an opportunity or may not get an opportunity to have a formal education. Thank you for showing up daily, outside of your circumstance to create better futures for your children, families and communities, this is for you.

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"If you are grateful, I shall certainly give you increase" [Qur'an, 14:7]

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The history of coaching goes back to the days of Socrates, who was deemed the first coach with his philosophy and fascination with investigating the reasons for human existence and for inner awareness, marking the initial concept of personal and leadership development (Edward, 2003). The origins of the term *coaching* come from the Hungarian village of Kocs, which was known for its carts (coaches) that transported passengers safely through the harsh terrain between Vienna and Budapest. Coaching can now refer to a human coach helping to carry a client from one point to another through the harsh terrain of the client's environment (Stern, 2004; Sparkes, 1976; Underhill, McAnally, & Koriath, 2007).

Executive coaching is a key aspect of advancing individual and organizational performances (de Haan, Duckworth, Birch, & Jones, 2013; Underhill, McAnally, & Koriath, 2007). As mentioned by de Haan et al. (2013), executive coaches are professionals who specialize in leadership development, supporting an executive by "imparting actionable information, instruction and advice" (p. 41). In current academic research, executive coaching has been the most studied subtopic of coaching and is considered to be the forerunner among other forms of coaching (Griffiths & Campbell, 2009). Definitions of executive coaching generally focus on the practice of working with executives one-on-one to assist them in leadership roles and performance in their organizations. Orenstein (2006) stated that executive coaching is a "one-on-one intervention with a senior manager for the purpose of improving or enhancing management skills" (p. 106), whereas Stern (2004) defined it as a one-on-one interaction that is driven by data and is “an experiential, individualized, leadership development process that builds a leader’s capability to achieve short and long-term organizational goals” (p. 154). Another definition by Griffiths and Campbell (2009) declared that coaching is more of a “goal-directed, multi-experience process for enhancing people, work, and life and as well as an industry” (p. 16). There are common roots in all of these definitions of executive coaching: it is a process; it is about individuals; and it supports those individuals in achieving their personal and organizational goals. For this research, Kilburg’s (1996) much-cited definition of executive coaching, based on review of the literature, will be used:

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

Kilburg’s definition noted four aspects that are common to many executive coaching methods, which (a) use a one-on-one collaborative relationship, (b) collect relevant data and information, (c) use data as a guide to goal-setting and lastly, (d) use feedback (Gregory, Levy, & Jeffers, 2008).

Executive coaches come from various backgrounds and disciplines and represent an even broader range of credentials and techniques used to improve a client’s performance. The profession provides services across corporate, governmental, and nonprofit sectors, comprising more than 25,000 practitioners worldwide (Orenstein, 2006). What does it take to be an effective coach? Wasylyshyn (2003) discovered that there are three personal characteristics that clients look for: “(a) the ability to form a strong ‘connection’ with the executive, (b) professionalism, and (c) use of a clean and sound coaching methodology” (p. 98). The executive coach also needs to be perceived as respectful, caring, and practical. Additionally, the executive coach must have credibility and competence when working with clients to implement organizational change or transform individuals. The assessment phase is one of the major steps in the coaching process, allowing for the coach to obtain creditability (Diedrich, 1996; Kilburg, 1997).

Even though there are many principles and processes that support the role of executive coaching in assisting individual development, these principles and processes vary. Feldman and Lankau (2005) identified four major activities of an executive coach: (1) data gathering; (2) feedback; (3) implementation (coaching); and (4) evaluation. Linley, Garcea, Hill, Minhas, Trenier, and Willars (2010) examined the coaching process as three major steps: (1) identification; (2) assessment; and (3) development of an individual’s strengths. Stern (2004) states that executive coaches commonly preplan and follow a seven-step process: (1) initial needs analysis; (2) contracting; (3) data gathering; (4) specific goal setting; (5) coaching; (6) measuring and reporting results; and (7) transitioning into long-term efforts for the executive and the company. Kilburg (1996) detailes five components of executive coaching: (1) developing an intervention agreement; (2) building the relationship; (3) setting expectations; (4) providing behavior mastery and cognitive control; and (5) evaluation.

Although there are differences in the processes of executive coaching, assessment or data gathering is a common factor. Best (2010) has stated that “the assessment phase of a coaching relationship is an indispensable component of the process” (p. 22). During the assessment phase many executive coaches introduce assessment tools to get a better view of the client. By working with a coach using an assessment tool, individuals can alter their attitudes and perspectives, make a shift in consciousness, and increase in energy and leadership effectiveness (iPec Coaching, 2011). The assessment phase can also can inform well laid out, clear, and actionable coaching goals that facilitate the client's effectiveness and performance.

Assessment Tools in Executive Coaching

According to Pardini (2003), executives employ executive coaches to guide them through the coaching assessment phase in order to find out where problems lie and to improve the executive's individual performance as well as to improve the performance of their organization. Employing assessment tools with the client during the coaching process provides both the client and coach with a ready framework and a language with which to move forward (Linley et al., 2010). This common language from the assessment tool can be shared and understood by the coach and the client, creating a "culture and mindset shift through changing the nature of conversations" (Linley et al., 2010, p. 166). Assessment tools also provide a clear framework in which coach and client can locate and understand strengths in context and in practice. In the absence of a framework, "professional practitioners have to depend much more on their own intrinsic models of strengths development, while lay consumers are left to make sense of what can be quite complex information without a guide map to do so" (p. 167). In addition to benefits to using assessment tools, there are limitations to consider. For example, although there is a common language that the client and coach can use, the client can also be constrained by the language of the assessment tool, which is not relevant to their lived experience. Considering that one third of individuals cannot reliably identify their own strengths, to ask them to be vulnerable and identify their strengths accurately as a foundation can be a lot to ask of the client (Linley et al, 2010). Additional concerns to consider are making sure that the appropriate assessment tool is being used with the client, that the coach is using an assessment tool that is valid and reliable, and lastly that the coach has skills and experience in using the assessment tool (Peltier, 2001).

The use of assessment tools has benefits and limitations. When the tools are used appropriately, the client gains more benefit from the coaching process. For executive coaches, the learning from assessment tools can be of value, giving them further insight into their clients, allowing them to give clients a fresh perspective on their world, how they interact with others, and how they perform in their organization.

Assessment Tools in Human Resource and Organization Development

Assessment tools can help individuals see their own strengths and weaknesses, permitting them to enhance and utilize their strengths and manage their weaknesses (Birkman International, 2007). Research has found that "using one's strengths leads to a range of positive outcomes including better goal attainment, higher self-esteem, self-efficacy, vitality and well-being. Those who know their positive attributes also tend to have higher levels of work engagement, perform better at work, and are more constructive in their own development" (Linley et al., 2010, p. 165).

The use of assessment tools in human resource and organization development (HROD) is increasing. Assessment tools can be used by human resource and organizational development practitioners to assist organizations in determining employee success potential, to explore whether a person is a good fit for the organization, and to help individuals improve their effectiveness at work (Diedrich, 1996). The Executive Coaching Survey by Sherpa (2014) reported that 85% of the executive coaches surveyed used an assessment tool, which was up 5% from the year before. Birkman (2007) believes assessment tools are being used more due to increased research on their validity and predictive value and because more organizations are accepting the research and applying assessment tools. Today, "assessing personal styles at all levels within a company is becoming best practice, replacing the old trend of assessing only upper-level employees. This trend supports the assertion that there will be an increased utilization of personality assessments throughout organizations of all sizes and at all levels" (p. 4). Birkman (2007) has also stated that:

> Personality assessments are one aspect of the pre-employment screening process, and their use is increasing because of their low cost and time savings. Personality assessments may be better than skill tests for matching a candidate's strengths with the job's responsibilities. Further, it has been stated that companies who use personality assessments in pre-employment screenings are three to five times more likely to hire the right person for the job the first time. This finding is evidence of the growing amount of research that substantiates the effectiveness of personality assessments. (p. 8)

HROD has a "commitment to individual and organizational development" (Fenwick & Bierema, 2008, p. 25). Feedback from assessment tools contributes to organizational effectiveness as well as to employee success and development. HROD needs to appreciate that assessment tools are increasingly acceptable in successful organizations. It is also in the best interest of HROD to support organizational and individual development in the workplace by making sure the executive coaches employed are using assessment tools in order to have more objective information on which to assess and coach employees.

Learning as an Executive Coach

Executive coaches are constantly engaged in learning. The question is what type of learning are they doing. Research is beginning to reflect that coaches learn mainly through two forms of learning, formal and informal. Coaches use formal coaching education along with informal learning experiences, such as their prior work knowledge, mentoring, coaching, non-formal professional development courses, and interactions with other coaches to learn in order to coach effectively (Lemyre, Trudel, & Durand-Bush, 2007; Werthner & Pierre, 2006).

Looking at various established learning theories in adult education, executive coaches' learning can be seen through the theoretical lens of experiential learning, particularly informal learning. Experiential learning theory defines learning as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience" (Kolb, 1984, p. 41). Learning is formal, informal, or incidental, depending on the intention, awareness, and direction (Marsick, Watkins, & Volpe, 1999). *Formal learning* is institutionally sponsored, classroom-based, and highly structured events, such as training. In contrast, *informal learning* may occur in institutions, but it is neither classroom-based nor highly structured, it is outside the curricula (Livingston, 2001; Marsick & Watkins, 1990). Informal learning is based on the idea that learning is "organized around real-life experience" (Marsick & Watkins, 1990, p. 55) and is "experienced-based, non-routine and often tacit" (p. 15). Informal learning can occur anywhere at any time, but the motivation to learn is higher when an individual is confronted with new challenges. The control in informal learning rests on the learner and is enhanced by critical reflection. *Incidental learning* is defined as learning "which occurs as a byproduct of something else" (p. 12) or as a "byproduct" of some other activity such as task accomplishment, interpersonal interaction, the organizational culture, trial-and-error experimentation, or formal learning. Informal learning can be deliberately encouraged, or it can take place despite an environment that is not highly conducive to learning. In short, incidental learning takes place even when one is not conscious of it (Marsick & Watkins, 1990, p. 12).

Watkins and Marsick (1990) have stated that the essential undertaking for learning is to develop new strategies for enabling an individual to be more effective (p. 207). In the learning process, gaining experience comes through working and interacting with people. The learning must take place with "collaboration and joint inquiry" (p. 209). Similar to the definitions of informal learning, coaching is about individual learning that supports individuals in becoming more effective in their own lives and in the workplace. Although executive coaching is highly structured in its learning design, informal learning can take place anywhere and anytime for the executive coach; learning can even happen from the assessment phase where it can aid the executive coach to make applicable decisions and choices in the coaching process (Marsick & Watkins, 1990).

Statement of the Problem

Assessment tools have been utilized for years to predict an individual's skills, how he or she will act or react, and how the individual can interact more effectively with others. The current process of using assessment tools has become a standard of practice for executive coaches, something that the executive coaches themselves have established and not due to any regulations by the profession (Sherpa, 2014). This study examines the learning from the executive coach's perspective and how the executive coach navigates the coaching relationship and the coaching process.

Currently, according to a survey conducted by Sherpa (2014), every executive coach uses some sort of an assessment tool. Although there are no good or bad types of assessment tools, 85% of the executive coaches use one of the top five assessment tools, which include: 360°, DiSC Profile, Myers-Briggs Type Indicator, Emotional Intelligence, and Strengths Finder (Sherpa, 2014). When used by an executive coach, the feedback gives the coach, client, and organization insight into the individual's behavior. Most assessment tools are used to scrutinize and understand how the client's personality connects with his or her performance (Birkman International, 2007), but presently there is not a lot of literature on the executive coaching process incorporating the use of assessment tools. In addition, there is a lack of literature that studies the sources from which the executive coach gleans information, what they learn, and how they apply what they learn from using assessment tools in the coaching process and coaching relationship.

Purpose of the Study

In this qualitative study, I interviewed executive coaches to understand how executive coaches learned from and used assessment tools in the coaching process. The following two research questions guided the study:

1. What do executive coaches learn from the use of assessment tools in their coaching process?
2. In what ways do executive coaches use the learning gained from assessment tools to navigate the coaching relationship?

Significance of the Study

This study builds on the fact that there are few studies on executive coaching. It edifies the theory and practice of executive coaching and the use of assessment tools along with supporting the field of Human Resource and Organization Development (HROD). The research will contribute to the growing profession of executive coaching by determining how assessment tools can be effective in the executive coaching process. This study will also benefit the field HROD by supporting the purpose of HROD, which "is to enhance learning, human potential and high performance in work related systems" (Ruona & Lynham, 1999). In order to stay competitive, the HROD field needs to have tools to support the workforce to enhance learning and high performance. This study will benefit the HROD profession by aiding the field in knowing what is needed and what is effective when working with and hiring executive coaches who will navigate the coaching process with their organizational leaders. In general, the coaching profession does not have a standardized process for using assessment tools; some coaches use them, some do not. It will also contribute to conversations about the possibility of regulating coaching processes and improving the requirements for professional accreditation and certification of all coaches.

Lastly, a review of the literature suggests that currently there is minimal empirical research on foundational methods, processes, and theories that guide the profession of executive coaching. A conceptual framework for describing and grounding the profession and process of executive coaching is presented in Figure 1.1. The framework specifically incorporates adult learning theory exclusively, informal learning, and assessment tools, which provide corroborated contextual data. The conceptual framework suggests an integration of these concepts that creates an opportunity for executive coaching to be grounded in the framework of informal learning and context-specific operative data. The integration allows preparation for the coaching process along with establishing the coaching relationship to move the client to success. This integration is supported by Marsick and Watkins (2014) who stated that informal learning can be impacted by interactions and the social context from which an executive coaches learns. They speculated that due to the open nature of informal learning, it allows the executive coach (learner) to find a "trigger" or to make meaning "from within the personal frames they bring to the situation and the information they pay attention to in order to focus their learning" (Watkins & Marsick, 2015, p. 4), in this case the "information they pay attention to" would be the context-specific data from the assessment tool and the "trigger," which according to Marsick, Watkins, Callahan, and Volpe (2006) is "a catalyst which instigates the informal learning process" (p. 5). In the executive coaching process, there is a recognition of an issue and the executive coach proceeds to develop diverse strategies for dealing with it within the coaching process.

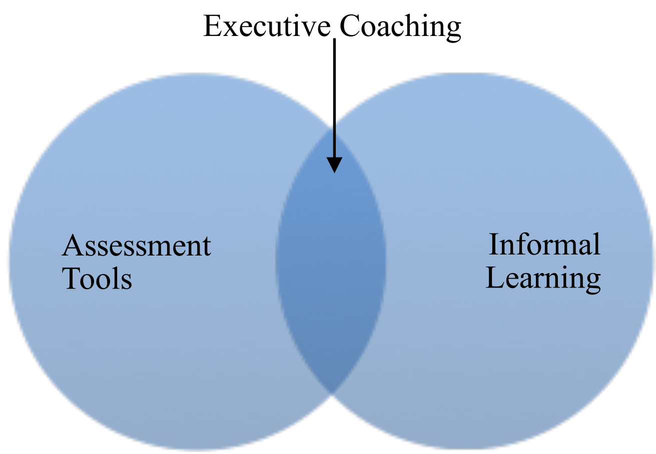

Figure 1.1. Conceptual framework for executive coaching and use of assessment tools.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

The purpose of this study was to understand how executive coaches learn from and use assessment tools in the coaching process. The following two research questions guided the study:

1. What do executive coaches learn from the use of assessment tools in their coaching process?
2. In what ways do executive coaches use the learning gained from assessment tools to navigate the coaching relationship?

This chapter is structured around major themes of executive coaching, assessments, and learning. For the purpose of this literature review, the research was conducted by reviewing the literature in multiple databases, including JSTOR, ERIC, PsychINFO, and EBSCO. The keywords, combination of keywords, and key descriptors that were used during the research process included: executive coaching, coaching, leadership development, professional development, assessments, assessment tools, psychometric assessments, experiential learning, formal and informal learning. The sources that were used for references included academic and practitioner journals, such as HROD journals, methodology journals, coaching journals, other relevant journals, and dissertations and monographs published within the past 10 years. A few supplemental resources were used, such as books and conference proceedings. Abstracts were consulted initially, and then sources deemed relevant were read in their entirety. The articles were analyzed and synthesized and then reported by the researcher to develop the literature review.

Executive Coaching

In some form or another, coaching has existed for centuries. Socrates could be considered to be the first coach because the philosopher was absorbed in investigating the reasons for human existence and inner beings, marking the initial concept of personal development (Edward, 2003). The term "coaching" originated in Hungary in the 15th century from the village of Kocs, where covered and very comfortable carriages (coaches) were manufactured that safely carried passengers through the harsh terrain and elements to their destinations. Since then the term has come to refer to a human *coach* who helps as a private tutor to carry someone to new levels of development and effectiveness. Coaches for decades have helped top athletes and artists improve their performance. In recent times, business professionals have identified coaching as a means to assist them in improving their performance personally and organizationally (Pinchot & Pinchot, 2000). This kind of coach, sometimes called an executive coach, supports clients in navigating through the harsh terrains of their organizational environment and individual development by helping them develop a skill, enhance performance, or shift their outlook (Goldsmith, Lyons, & Freas, 2000; Stern, 2004; Underhill, McAnally, & Joriath, 2007).

Executive coaching has evolved over time. The first reference to workplace coaching emerged in a peer-reviewed journal in 1937 in an article by Gorby in the *Behavioral Science Press* (Grant, 2003). The evolution of the coaching profession has progressed since then, experiencing significant growth in the last 10 years; it is now considered to be a mainstream $1 billion industry (Gladis & Pomerantz, 2008; Grant, Curtayne, & Burton, 2009).

This evolution to becoming mainstream can be described in four phases. The initial phase lasted for 30 years, starting in the 1950s when consultants intermingled psychology with organizational development tools. The second phase, the introduction phase, lasted for 15 years, starting in the 1980s when consultants began standardizing and professionalizing the field. Some believe that the term *executive coaching* was introduced by the Division of Counseling Psychology of the American Psychology Association in the mid-1980s. The third phase, the growth phase, started in 1995 when professional organizations and specialist institutions were established and literature around coaching started to build a presence (Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001). Now in its maturity phase and considered to be mainstream, coaching is rapidly growing and gaining attention as a typical proactive management development tool in the international management and psychology literatures (Brooks & Wright, 2007; Grant et al., 2009; Hoffman, 1998).

Executive coaching is considered to be a leadership development tool customized to work for individualized, one-on-one development (De Haan, Duckworth, Birch, & Jones, 2013; Underhill et al., 2007). The field of executive coaching has emerged for several reasons. One of the main reasons is that it was used as an intervention to save the careers of executives who had been derailed or were otherwise in crisis (Bono, Purvanova, Towler, & Peterson, 2009; Feldmen & Lankau, 2005; Underhill et al., 2007). It was a softer way for the manager to state that an intervention was needed when executives were failing due to lacking leadership skills rather than lacking technical skills (Feldmen & Lankau, 2005). Some have suggested that executive coaching is repackaging certain practices from consulting and counseling to make the process more acceptable and less threatening to executives (Tobias, 1996). Another reason for its emergence was as a response to criticisms of MBA programs for failing to cultivate leadership and ethics in their graduates, along with the lack of emphasis on cultivating actual management and leadership skills for managing people, such as interpersonal skills and basic leadership skills (Gehlert, Anderson, & Swanson, 2013). Organizations have become proactive in seeking executive coaches to support their high-potential leaders. They are also seeing the justifiable investment results in their executives' output, quality improvements, cost savings, and reduced turnover (Joo, 2005; Peters, 2009). In order to meet growing demand, higher education institutions have developed and implemented courses that focus on coaching as a profession along with teaching students coaching skills and best practices. In addition, some MBA schools provide executive coaches to support their students' leadership development.

The growth in executive coaching has become a global phenomenon, due to changing workplace demands and the need for a "subtler set of competencies," including interpersonal skills, adaptability to change, and cultural sensitivity (Joo, 2005, p. 463). de Haan and Duckworth (2012) found that coaching is commonly an effective intervention, even if the impact is limited. Although they stated that it is an effective intervention, they also suggested that, "presently *all* coaching outcome studies are weak by the standards of psychology and general medicine" (p. 8).

There are understandable reasons for this young profession to have limited effects, especially considering that there is little to no funding for major research in the area of coaching. Joo (2005) also states that, "practice is way ahead of theory" (p. 463) and that there is a lack of empirical studies that document and support the effectiveness of coaching, in addition to a lack of data encompassing what makes coaching effective or not.

Executive Coaching Defined

Executive coaching is developing as a cross-disciplinary field (Grant, 2003). In current academic research on the coaching marketplace, executive coaching has been the most studied subtopic of coaching and is considered to be the forerunner among the other forms of coaching (Griffiths & Campbell, 2009). Various fields have significant knowledge bases that are relevant to coaching, including counseling and clinical psychology, sports psychology, health psychology, educational psychology, organizational psychology, and management. Although the background of coaching comes from various fields, the behavioral sciences seem to form the foundational body of knowledge since behavioral science focuses on implementing and maintaining human and organizational change (Grant, 2003).

Although it is rapidly growing and gaining attention in the management and psychology literatures (Brooks & Wright, 2007; Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001) and gaining widespread interest, there does not seem to be one single agreed-upon definition of executive coaching (Brooks & Wright, 2007; Brotman, Liberi, & Wasylyshyn, 1998; Joo, 2005). Some define executive coaching at a general level, while others focus more on the individual or organizational levels. Most include the ideas that coaching is one-on-one and there are common themes of learning and development that are linked to performance improvement (Bluckert, 2005). Orenstein (2006) states that executive coaching is a "one-on-one intervention with a senior manager for the purpose of improving or enhancing management skills" (p. 106). Stern (2004) defines it as a one-on-one interaction that is driven by data and is "an experiential, individualized, leadership development process that builds a leader's capability to achieve short and long-term organizational goals" (p. 154). Another definition by Griffiths and Campbell (2009) declares that coaching is more of a "goal-directed, multi-experience process for enhancing people, work and life and as well as an industry" (p. 16). Gehlert et al. (2013) state that it is a method used in business programs to develop high-functioning executives while Bono et al. (2009) view executive coaching as "a custom tailored, individual training intervention" (p. 361). Joo (2005) sees it as a "consultation focused on managers and senior leaders in organizations" (p. 462). Ratiu and Baban (2012) call executive coaching "an effective action on change and development, whose results depend on coachee's participation and involvement in the process" (p. 139), whereas de Haan et al. (2013) and de Haan and Duckworth (2012) say that it is "a form of leadership development that takes place through a series of contracted one-to-one conversations with a qualified 'coach'" and that it "aspires to be a form of organization and leadership development that results in a high occurrence of relevant, actionable, and timely outcomes for clients" (de Haan & Duckworth, 2012, p. 41). David and Matu (2013) state that it is "an effective leadership practice facilitating the learning process of the employees for performing better and being more effective; thus, the employee benefits the most from the managerial coaching process, together with the manager and the organization" (p. 498). Benavides (2008) suggests that it is "a leadership modality" (p. 3). The *Executive Coaching Handbook* (2008) characterizes it as "typically done one-on-one, mutual trust and respect are needed to protect the confidentiality of the leader, and the information discussed in the coaching session and most often the coach is employed by the organization in order to positively impact the coach and organization" (p. 8). Brooks and Wright (2007) could not find consensus around a definition of the term "executive coaching." Like Joo (2005), Grant et al. (2009), and Stachowiak (2011) drew from Kilburg's (1996) much-cited definition from review of the literature, of executive coaching:

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

Kilburg's definition has four aspects that are common to many executive coaching definitions: (a) it is a one-on-one collaborative relationship; (b) relevant data and information are collected; (c) data are used to guide goal setting; and (d) feedback is used (Gregory, Levy, & Jeffers, 2008). For the purposes of this research, Kilburg's definition, perhaps the most cited in the literature, will be used to define executive coaching.

What Executive Coaching Is Not

Executive coaching is considered to be a helping relationship profession. Helping relationship professions include coaching, mentoring, and therapy. What these professions have in common as helping professions is that they work together with the client by "one person assisting another in exploring feelings, gaining insight and make changes in his or her life" (Hill, 2009, p. 4).

Executive coaching, although in the same category, is different from its other helping relationships partners, executive coaching can be considered as an intervention for self-mastery, where an individual seeks the coach to increase their performance and leadership skills (Hayden & Whitwoth, 1996). Mentoring is about "cultivating fruitful relationships, one that includes actions as well as words" (Daloz, 2011, p. 78). Griffith (2013) states that it is a popular relationship building tool in organizations to "build competency, networks, and train future leadership within an employee base" (p. 24). Although in executive coaching a "fruitful relationship" is cultivated between a client and coach, it is a more short-term relationship that is focused on working with the client to be task focused and structured on well-defined goals (Hart, Blattner, & Leipsic, 2001) and not on "modeling, counseling, supporting, advocating, introducing and sheltering (D'abate, Eddy, & Tannebaum, 2003, p. 376).

Although coaching and therapy are interventions that support behavioral change, therapy is considered and used for one identifiable and diagnosed condition under the medical field criteria. Another difference is that coaching is about the present time and action-oriented to improve one's performance and skills, whereas therapy deals with the unconscious, historical issues of the client (Hayden & Whitwoth, 1996).

Executive coaching has set itself apart to be considered a helping relationship that deals with present day concerns of the client with a structured game plan to create results and master skills and modify behavior.

Diversity of Coaching Styles

Coaches are increasingly entering the coaching profession from many different professional and educational backgrounds (de Haan & Duckworth 2012), including management, education, leadership development, personal development, and especially psychology (Grant, 2003). These different backgrounds bring different knowledge bases, theoretical frameworks, and practices to the field. Each area wants to claim ownership of the field of coaching, but no single group of knowledge dominates the field, although psychology claims a large portion of the literature (de Hann et al., 2013; Grant, 2003).

There are numerous sub-categories of coaching. The majority (88.1%) of professional coaches are engaged in leadership development. Other popular areas include life coaching, career coaching, and team development coaching. Two-thirds of coaches work in two or more of the areas mentioned (Brooks & Wright, 2007). In career coaching, the client and coach work together to support the client in identifying career goals and making decisions around these goals. The primary focus is on the client's short- and long-range career objectives, and the role of the coach could include helping the client plan, seek, or change career direction (TECF, 2008).

In some cases, coaches will administer an assessment to support the client in identifying a career path (Underhill et al., 2007). The objective of life and personal coaching is to support clients in accomplishing goals in different aspects of their lives, rather than improving business performance (Underhill et al., 2007). The main focus of this type of coaching is on the client's personal goals. The coach also works with the client to develop actions and new thought patterns to have their thoughts, feelings, and actions match what they want to achieve in their personal effectiveness and satisfaction (TECF, 2008). Although career and life/personal issues and concerns may arise in executive coaching, Stern (2004) states that executive coaching differs in its distinct style for it has a twofold focus: to develop executives as leaders, while at the same time helping them to produce sustainable results for the organization.

Characteristics of an Executive Coach

There are many key characteristics of an effective executive coach to bring about successful coaching outcomes with the client. There are three personal characteristics that Wasylyshyn (2003) states clients look for: "(a) the ability to form a strong 'connection' with the executive; (b) professionalism; and (c) use of a clean and sound coaching methodology" (p. 98). The executive coach also needs to be perceived as respectful, caring, and practical (Diedrich, 1996). The executive coach must have credibility and competence when working with clients to implement organizational change or transform individuals (Kilburg, 1997).

Executive coaching is being labeled as an "emerging competency" (Kilburg, 1996, p. 59) that is a sought out intervention that promotes professional development (Maynard, 2006). One reason for this is because executive coaches come to the field with diverse backgrounds in occupation and knowledge base. Executive coaches come to the field from various backgrounds, disciplines, and credentials and an even broader range of techniques may be used to improve clients’ performance. The profession provides services across corporate, governmental, and nonprofit sectors, exceeding 25,000 practitioners worldwide (Orenstein, 2006, p. 106). A study by International Coaching Federation indicates that 99.9% of coaches come to executive coaching from a prior professional background. The majority of respondents in the study were from management roles (67.8%), followed by professional services/consultancy (28.8%), human services (15.3%), and small business owners (6.8%) (Brooks & Wright, 2007). Additional backgrounds included business consultancy, teaching, workplace training, social work, journalism, learning and development, organization development, clinical, counseling, and sports coaching. These different backgrounds offer richness and diversity to coaching approaches, a positive aspect of the field. However, they also create different theoretical frameworks and practices in the field, generating a need to have quality training and rigor in order to produce competent coaches (Brooks & Wright, 2007; de Hann et al., 2013; Grant, 2003). The lack of clarity and consistency for coaching backgrounds, practices, training, and outcomes has created a quandary for organizations in attempting to select capable coaches (Bono et al., 2009).

Competencies of an Executive Coach

There is debate in the literature surrounding whether having psychological training makes a meaningful difference to coaching practice (Gehlert et al., 2013). The research of Bono et al. (2009) showed, however, that educational background alone did not predict a coach’s philosophy, process, behavior, or effectiveness. Bono et al. (2009) discovered that psychologists who were coaches (consistent with their education and training) tended to use multiple methods of assessment and evaluation, but they did not necessarily make better coaches. Therefore, using academic background as selection criteria for coaches was not recommended. Their research suggested that the focus should be directly on asking questions such as, “What are the knowledge, skills, and abilities coaches need to help individuals gain insight and motivation?" and, "What coach behaviors are the best predictors of long-term behavior change in the individuals they coach?" (Bono et al., 2009, p. 394).

Effectiveness of Executive Coaching

de Hann et al. (2013) systematically examined how several dynamics contribute to coaching effectiveness and based effectiveness of coaching on the client's perception of coaching effectiveness. In such a definition of effectiveness, the key factor is the client-coach relationship or "working alliance." Personality factors played less of a role, and they found that "an executive coaching intervention will be tailored not only to the needs and interests of the individual client or 'coachee' but also to those of the individual coach, given his or her particular background, theoretical orientation, and interests" (p. 41). Gehlert et al. (2013) also agree that good coaching outcomes depend on a strong interpersonal connection and stated that, "a positive working relationship between coach and participant has been found to be one of the most important factors for effective executive coaching" to build trust and rapport (p. 79). Gehlert et al.'s assertion has been supported by the work of several other authors (de Hann et al., 2013; Ratiu & Baban, 2012; Tobias, 1996; Wasylyshyn, 2003). In addition, Bierema's (1999) study on executive women's learning and development demonstrated an important need for interconnectedness to create a democratic process for learning. Creating rapport also allows the coach to pay attention to the readiness of the clients, their stages of change, and their particular developmental needs (Ratiu & Baban, 2012). Good coaches also exhibit emotional intelligence and create an environment where they can use their interpersonal skills to elicit personal sharing, inspire participants to try new things, and encourage the client's own self-awareness (Gehlert et al., 2013). Additional skills coaches use are goal setting, developing alternative perspectives, and encouraging problem solving (Roche & Hefferon, 2013).

Reasons for Enlisting an Executive Coach

The need for organizations to stay competitive has created a need to identify leaders with leadership potential. It is important that individuals are provided with leadership development opportunities (Kim, 2007). To fill this need HROD professionals need to consider the notion of using developmental activities, in order to enrich learning and boost high performance to have the leaders that support the organization to stay competitive.

Executive coaching is considered to be a developmental activity, a leadership development tool. Organizations identify the need for executive coaching as an important and popular leadership development tool (Weller & Weller, 2004). It is estimated 50% of executives who use conventional interventions for professional development fail (Keil, Rimmer, Williams, & Doyle, 1996). Executive coaches are making a positive impact on the executives in the organization by improving leaders' self-awareness, decision-making skills and interpersonal relationships (Kaye, 2006).

Human Resource Organization Development (HROD) professionals have a "commitment to individual and organizational development" (Fenwick & Bierema, 2008, p. 25) focusing on training and development, organization development, and career development. HROD is using executive coaching as a learning and development solution to develop skills for executives (Joo, 2005). Executive coaching is becoming a solution for the demanding workplace and is a valid intervention for HROD objective of training and development when it comes to cultivating and strengthening talent management.

Executive coaching is on the rise and is used by many HROD departments in organizations as a form of leadership development intervention to develop high-performing executives (de Haan et al., 2013; Gehlert et al. 2013, Hoffman, 1998; Joo, 2005; Weller & Weller, 2004) and contribute toward their positive growth (Grant et al., 2009). It is used by top business programs to "enhance and speed the development of executives" (Gehlert et al., 2013, p. 78) and to foster a "constructive developmental tendency toward the fulfillment of one's capacities and the fulfillment of one's potentials" (Linley & Harrington, 2006, p. 45). The customary purpose of executive coaching can be condensed down to the following functions: developing leadership efficacy by enhancing wellbeing; shifting behaviors and attitudes; fostering self-awareness to identify strengths and weaknesses; improving leadership skills; preparing strategies to improve performance, success and efficiency in career advancement; increasing organizational performance; and facilitating individual and organizational change (Baban 2012; Benavides, 2008; Bono et al., 2009; Grant, 2003; Grant et al., 2009; Joo, 2005; Koonce, 2010; Linley et al., 2009; Ratiu & Baban, 2012).

Benefits of Executive Coaching

There is little empirical evidence that supports the results of executive coaching. de Haan and Duckworth (2012) found, however, that coaching is "generally an effective intervention even if some effect sizes are small" (p. 14)). Bougae (2005) found in a study that asked executive leaders: "What is the impact of executive coaching from the perspective of the executive leader in a multinational telecommunications organization?" (p. 4) that the executives stated improvements in areas of interpersonal skills, self-awareness, decision-making skills, team-building, organizational skills, personal performance feedback and positive personal impact and they testified to enhanced interpersonal relationships. Grant et al. (2009), Gehlert et al. (2013), Joo (2005), and Benavides (2008) found that coaching supports clients in increasing their performance, self-awareness, clarity and attainment of goals, and ability to deal with change and uncertainty in the context of the organization. Coaching contributes to greater workplace well-being and resilience (reduced stress and depression), increases self-confidence and insight, and cultivates management skills (Benavides, 2008). Linley et al. (2009) and Joo (2005) agree that it helps develop strong leaders who have a higher degree of idea sharing, improves attitudes, and broadly increases organizational performance at individual and institutional levels. The benefits and outcomes from the perspective of the client depend on perceptions of the relationship between client and coach, client self-efficacy, and how the range of coaching techniques is perceived. As discussed above, the key factor is the client-coach relationship since it mediates all other possible effects (de Haan et al., 2013).

The Executive Coaching Experience

Executive coaching is unique because the coach is a “facilitator of learning, change, and peak performance” to support the client (Ratiu & Baban, 2012, p. 140). The executive coaching process is “shrouded in mystery” (Bono et al., 2009, p. 362), and there is no common standard of practice (Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson 2001). Due to the many different approaches and practices, any successful coaching engagement needs a foundation of clear and actionable coaching goals, and the end result should be measurable (de Haan & Duckworth, 2012; Koonce, 2010). Engaging the coachee in a well-planned and intentional process ensures that coaching is productive and impactful (Nelson & Hogan, 2009). McNevin (2010) stated that there is “little uniformity in practices” (p. 13), but it is clear that the basis of practice should include “listening, reflecting, and questioning, with an apparent attention to the personal growth of the client” and not just on the “business-related outcomes” (p. 15).

Executive coaching process. The process of executive coaching involves a progression of activities, opening with the initial assessment of discovering the client's strengths and weaknesses (Sherman & Frea, 2004). Although steps and approaches for emphasis vary, there seem to be actions that are common among authors in the literature (Diedrich, 1996; Keil et al., 1996; Kilburg, 2000; Peterson, 1996; Richard, 1999; Saporito, 1996; Sperry, 1993; Tobias, 1996; Witherspoon & White, 1996). Benavides (2008) stated that the coaching process should be "client-focused, client-oriented, performance-focused, and performance driven" (p. 16). Both the coach and the coachee need to be fully engaged in the bi-directional relationship to produce long-lasting results. There needs to be a commitment to the process to help the likelihood of success, which leads to higher satisfaction for the coach and client (Ratiu & Baban, 2012). Table 2.1 displays a few empirical studies that discussed the role and process of executive coaching. Kilburg (1996) detailed five components of executive coaching: developing an intervention agreement; building the relationship; setting expectations; providing behavior mastery and cognitive control; and evaluation. In 2001, Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson identified six stages: establishing the coaching alliance; assessment; feedback; goal-setting; actual coaching; and follow-up. Gehlert et al. (2013) focused on the first step of the coaching process: matching. They argued that matching has a significant impact on outcomes and is a crucial part of the process. They suggested a four-step method to improve matching (pp. 81-82). Joo (2005) shared a conceptual framework process that is central, including coaching approach, coach-client relationship, and feedback receptivity of the client.

Although coaches may use different tools and processes, Bono et al. (2009) discovered that coaches who tend to use multiple methods of assessment and evaluation, have a "richer picture of a client's needs and more rigorous outcome evaluation" (p. 394). A discussion of the top assessment tools used by executive coaches and their effectiveness follows.

Table 2.1

Empirical Studies of Roles and Process in Executive Coaching

Author, Date and Title	Methodology/ Sample	Theoretical Framework	Key Findings
Bono, Purvanova, Towler and Peterson, (2009), A Survey of executive coaching practices.	Web-based survey to 1,260 self identified executive coaches.	No framework discussed	Discovered that competencies viewed as important by psychologist and non psychologist coaches; skills such as the ability to build rapport, and listening and counseling skills were key coach competencies.
Brooks & Wright (2007), A survey of executive coaching practices in new Zealand.	A survey was mailed to134 executive coaches with a 46% response rate.	No framework discussed	The study focused on the under-studied nature of the executive coaching industry in New Zealand; no consensus around a definition of the term 'executive coaching' - they use Kilburg's definition of "a helping relationship…" (30)
Grant, Curtayne & Burton (2009), Executive coaching enhances goal attainment, resilience and workplace well-being: a randomised controlled study.	Quantitative and qualitative measures. Assessed 41 executives who received 360-degree feedback.	Cognitive-behavioral solution-focused approach	Emphasizes the role of coaching in helping to deal with change and uncertainty; aids goal attainment, contributes to greater workplace wellbeing and resilience, increase self-confidence and insight, cultivate management skills.
Ratiu & Baban (2012), Executive coaching as a change process: An analysis of the readiness for coaching.	Quantitative, 87 executives and managers.	Transtheoretical model.	"The coaching intervention maximizes its efficiency by adjusting itself to the developmental needs of the coachee" (140) - improves "leadership skills, behaviors, attitudes, strategies […] performance, efficiency in work and career success." (140-141)

Assessments

Assessments have been used and discussed in various capacities across different fields from education, management, and psychology to sports and coaching. One thing that is similar in all the areas is that effective assessments help to better understand the individual and to be able to support decisions that impact their advancement, placement, and instructional needs. Good assessments have evidence of validity. They also measure the purpose of the assessment for which they are being used. Another characteristic of good assessment is its consistency or reliability (Dietel & Knuth, 1991).

In education, sports, and some other areas, assessments are used mainly for the purposes of evaluation. In education, student learning is evaluated and feedback is given to students through assessments (Boud & Falchikov, 2006). Boud and Falchikov (2006) have a specific vision of assessments in education as “learning-oriented assessment.” Such assessments have three purposes, and they emphasize the undervalued nature of the last objective: (a) assessment for certification and marking achievement (summative); (b) assessment to assist current learning (formative); and (c) assessment to “foster learning throughout life” (sustainable) (pp. 400-405). They emphasize the role of assessments as a tool to assist all future learning, called “sustainable assessment.” Assessment is important beyond the academy, and higher education plays a fundamental role in contributing to a “learning society” (p. 400). If assessments are “contextualized, participatory, and relational” (p. 408), they will be able to “effectively equip students for a lifetime of assessing their own learning,” and in this way assessments can be judged on their ability to contribute to the formation of a conscious citizenry (p. 400)

A Starting Point: The Assessment

In the field of management, assessments are used for various reasons including "to take into account career development, training needs, retirement plans, workforce diversity, succession planning, and mentoring programs" (Kim, 2003, p. 534). First, assessments may be used in management for the purpose of succession planning, since "employee assessments of retirement plans can provide significant information in terms of workforce changes that require succession planning" (Kim, 2003, p. 543).

Assessments can also be conducted in the form of a needs assessment, which can evaluate how employees' knowledge, skills and abilities are being utilized in the performance of their individual duties" (Kim, 2003, p. 543). Currently 80% of midsize and large companies use personality and ability assessments for pre-employment or new-employee orientation tools. Human resources training and development leaders use assessments as an opportunity to assist professionals in self-reflection and self-evaluation so that they fit well with their positions and organizations (Gutner, 2008).

The use of assessments has risen; in Sherpa's (2014) *The Executive Coaching Survey* it was reported that 85% of the executive coaches surveyed used an assessment tool, which was up five percent from the year before. This is a consistent growth. The use of assessments had risen 34% in 2005 to 65% just a year later (Birkman International, 2007). Birkman believes assessments are on the rise because of increased research on their validity and predictive value and because more organizations are accepting that research, and as a result, opting to utilize assessment tools. Birkman (2007) also states that:

> personality assessments are one aspect of the pre-employment screening process, and their use is increasing because of their low cost and time savings. Personality assessments

> may be better than skill tests for matching a candidate's strengths with the job's responsibilities. Further, it has been stated that companies who use personality assessments in pre-employment screenings are three to five times more likely to hire the right person for the job the first time. This finding is evidence of the growing amount of research that substantiates the effectiveness of personality assessments. (p. 8)

Organizations are also seeing the applicability of using assessments for more than just one-on-one personality assessment. Outcomes such as high performance, career satisfaction, and advancement are proof that assessment centers are successful tools in selecting employees and predicting their success. Assessment centers support the development process because they are rooted in the organizations' competencies and job analysis, behaviors, which are closely associated with real job performance and culture. They are standardized, focusing on "behavioral and performance-based exercises, measuring multiple skill dimensions using multiple exercises" and they "have the capacity to measure unique characteristics of human capital and match them to organizational strategy and culture" (Garavan, 2007, p. 151).

Assessment tools have had a controversial history in predicting performance, and research has discounted the extent to which the client's personality determines coaching success. Seen as having low validity historically, in the 1990s, some assessment tools became more accepted. Currently, "research is now oriented towards a more thorough understanding of the nature of the relationship between personality and different aspects of types of performance" (Stewart, Palmer, Wilkin, & Kerrin, 2008, p. 33).

In the past, higher-level management positions have primarily been the main focus of assessment and development. Currently, "assessing personal styles at all levels within a company is becoming best practice, replacing the old trend of assessing only upper-level employees," supporting a growing "utilization of personality assessments throughout organizations of all sizes and at all levels" (Birkman International, 2007, p. 4).

Assessment Phase in Executive Coaching

A successful executive coaching engagement requires the development of clear and actionable coaching goals that become the foundation of work with the client (Koonce, 2010). Sudermen's (2012) research discovered that "coaching goals could be developed to assist the leader" (p.56). Motivational Systems Theory states that the main task for coaches is to support their client to "align their core personal goals with their choices and behavioral investments" (Henderson, 2009, p. 244).

Koonce (2010) states that the one should use the assessment phase to support the client by identifying areas requiring coaching and goal setting. Even though there are differences in the processes of executive coaching, the assessment phase (data gathering) is still a common tool to form coaching direction. Although approaches vary, most executive coaches have in common the five-step process for coaching: trust building; contracting; assessment; intervention; and follow-up (Barner, 2006; Best, 2010; Feldman & Lankau, 2005; Linley et al., 2010; Stern, 2004). The critical part of engaging a client in the coaching process is the assessment phase (O'Neill, 2000; Tabias, 1996), which is an important "starting point for developing an understanding of the person" (Tabias, 1996, p. 89) and for exploring strengths (Roche & Hefferon, 2013).

In the assessment phase, the information gathered usually includes background data on the client's work history, organizational culture, preferred leadership style (set of behaviors that the client typically employs when managing team members and negotiating with peers and superiors), current work setting, and goals (Barner, 2005).

The assessment interview is an important part of the overall coaching process. If the assessment interview is customized properly, it allows for a better understanding of the client, their aspirations, and challenges. An effective assessment interview can provide the executive coach with a wide range of information, meeting the "unique requirements" of whether the client needs transitional, developmental, or remedial coaching (Barner, 2005, p. 105). Using information from the interview data and assessment tools also permits the coach to give a "dispassionate third-party perspective" on the client, which can support the coach in planning and implementing effective coaching interventions (Barner, 2005, p. 105).

Characteristics of an effective assessment phase include: validity, clear purpose and communication, positive participant experience, great feedback, focus on key actions, management support, business analytics, sustained development, and strong connection to business context (Paese & Sinar, 2014).

As stated by Best (2010), "the assessment phase of a coaching relationship is an indispensable component of the process" (p. 22). The assessment phase assists the executive coaching by providing information to better understand their client by knowing their aspirations, and challenges. In addition, the assessment phase, a major step in the coaching process allows the coach to gain creditability. Executive coaches require some basic knowledge, and some key foundational element of coaching in individual assessments (Stern, 2004, p. 156). Diedrich (1996) believes that today it is important to use the process in order to be considered "value-added" practical (p. 62).

Assessment Tools in Executive Coaching

Kilburg (2001) holds that coaches created behavioral changes in their clients. In order to coach them effectively, the coach needed to include specific behavior modification methods.

These methods include among others, corrective feedback, behavioral contracting, reinforcement techniques, and commitment enhancement techniques. Kilburg (2000) states that there needed to be techniques for a coach to use in order to facilitate growth and minimize resistance during coaching sessions. Referring to the use of assessment tools, he proposes that, “using other techniques and tools of organization development, psychotherapy, behavior modification, and education” (p. 117), was a means to that end.

Successful assessment tools make potential leaders aware of their own strengths and weaknesses, permitting them to enhance and utilize their strengths and manage their weaknesses (Birkman International, 2007, p. 9). Furthermore, assessments are used in organizations to determine employee success or explore whether a person is a good “fit” for the organization, and as developmental tools to help individuals function effectively or improve their effectiveness (Diedrich, 1996, p. 61). Research finds that “using one’s strengths leads to a range of positive outcomes including better goal attainment, higher self-esteem, self-efficacy, vitality and well-being” and that “those who know their positive attributes tend to also have higher levels of work engagement, perform better at work, and are more constructive in their own development” (Linley et al., 2010, p. 165).

As in many helping interventions, a range of tools and techniques are used. The context in which the tools and techniques are used and for what purpose are what separates coaching from other helping professions. In the assessment process phase, coaches may utilize an array of the 75 assessment tools that executive coaches use ranging from Myers-Briggs Type Indicator to multi-rater feedback instruments (Sherpa, 2014; Tobias, 1996). Hanson (2014) states that the level of development needed would determine the assessment type and assessment strategy to assist development goals. The real-time data that are gathered from using assessment tools can help leaders with feedback that supports their effectiveness (Koonce 2010). Roche and Hefferon's (2013) study established that using assessment tools in the context of the coaching relationship is very important for gaining the benefits of coaching. Henderson (2009) reviewed the use of the Assessment of Personal Goals and states that coaches need to be able to connect the client's feelings and experiences, requiring them to have "ideas for how to translate their self-knowledge into productive and therapeutic action" (p. 245), which is what a good assessment should be able to do.

Roche and Hefferon (2013) emphasize that structured follow-ups are important in the de-briefing process of an assessment tool. This provides for more extensive development, and conducted properly it can contribute to "goal-attainment, self-efficacy and psychological development" and can "give coaching some of its much needed credibility by providing a consistent and evidence based framework" (Roche & Hefferon, 2013, pp. 31-32).

Benefits and limitations of assessments. Even though there are benefits and limitations to using assessments tools, because one-third of the population cannot reliably identify their own strengths, assessments do offer both client and coach a ready framework and a language with which to move forward (Linley et al., 2010, p. 166). The main advantage in using assessment tools is that there is a common language that can be shared and understood by the coach and the individual creating a "culture and mindset shift through changing the nature of the conversations that people have, moving from their often inherent negativity bias to the "positivity payoff"—the idea and evidence that there are multiple positive outcomes that flow from paying more attention to the positive aspects of human experience" (Linley et al., 2010, p. 166).

A further advantage of what the assessment tools provide is a clear framework in which coach and client can locate and understand strengths in context and in practice. In the absence of a framework, “professional practitioners have to depend much more on their own intrinsic models of strengths development, while lay consumers are left to make sense of what can be quite complex information without a guide map to do so” (Linley et al., 2010, p. 167).

Although there are advantages, there are some limitations. One limitation is making sure that the executive coach is grounded and educated in the assessment tool to be able to give productive feedback to the client. Hooijberg and Lane (2009) discovered that coaches except an active role from the coach, being able to provide the interpretation of the results and being able to identify patterns along with recommend action steps. These action steps are very important for them to stay focused and take action. Other limitations are the measurement methods used by the assessment tools, if the assessments are measuring what they intend to measure (i.e., personality, competency, performance, etc.), and if the items used in the survey are valid. Boyatziz (2006) discuss the need to be able to measure the results of the assessment and how they link to the impact to the organization. Hooijberg and Lane (2009) learned that the organization and the client themselves caused limitations as well when fulfilling on the action or development plan from an assessment tool. The lack of time and organizational support to support the client was a complication. The client themselves was a restriction, having to overcome their own habits and personality.

Variety of Assessment Tools

There are more than 75 different types of assessment tools that executive coaches can use with clients, and they range from multi-rater (360°) surveys, multi-rater (360°) interviews, personality inventories (Myers-Briggs), cognitive ability tests, and behavior-based interviews (Barner, 2005; Sherpa, 2014). Each tool measures a competency at some level, but each differs substantially in the nature and quality of the information gathered. For example, “simulations provide the most in-depth and direct competency information because they allow experts to observe an individual's behavior relative to specific competencies" (Brown, 2003, p. 5). On the other hand, personality and cognitive ability tests are aimed at gathering underlying trait-type data that add to the understanding of behavior. These assessment tools can allow for "a deeper awareness of one's underlying emotion(s) and one's self-defeating tendency while under stress" (Brown, 2003). In addition, they can help re-direct one's inner energies, giving the client more inner freedom and mental power (Kaluzniacky, 2004, p. 97). Because attitude is subjective, they can be altered. By working with a coach using an assessment tool, individuals can alter their attitudes and perspectives, make a shift in consciousness, and increase in energy and leadership effectiveness (iPec Coaching, 2011).

Most assessment tools are used to examine and understand how the client's personality connects with his or her performance (Birkman International, 2007). Currently, according to a survey conducted by Sherpa (2014), every executive coach uses an assessment tool. Although there are no good or bad types of assessment tools, 85% of the executive coaches use one of the top five assessment tools (Figure 2.1) which include: 360°; DiSC Profile; Myers-Briggs Type Indicator; Emotional Intelligence; and Strengths Finder (Sherpa, 2014). The most commonly used and cited assessments indicated in Birkman's (2007) research and Sherpa's (2014) research are Myers-Briggs Type Indicator (MBTI) and the DiSC Assessment. Another assessment type that is popular among executive coaches and organizations is the 360 Degree Assessment, a multi-rater assessment that focuses on the client's performance and the development needed, allowing the executive coach to assess the client and create goals for improvement (Koonce, 2010).

Goal assessments. Henderson (2009) reviewed the use of the Assessment of Personal Goals and states that goal assessments play a crucial role in coaching interventions geared toward behavior change and altered decision-making, since they are "designed to bring unconscious goals into consciousness" (Ford & Smith, 2007, p. 156).

Psychometric assessments. Sudermen (2012) conducted research to evaluate the effectiveness of using a psychometric assessment tool for a new organizational leader and team development. An assessment tool was used with brand new organizational leaders when they started their new jobs and again at the end of their first year. He found that the results from the assessment tool provided substantial benefits. The data gathered using the assessment tool gave the new leaders useful insight into their leadership development gaps. He discovered that it was useful to use an assessment tool in coaching situations to assist in attaining organizational and individual changes. Overall, he stated that using an assessment tool "demonstrated strong value as a coaching tool" (p. 57).

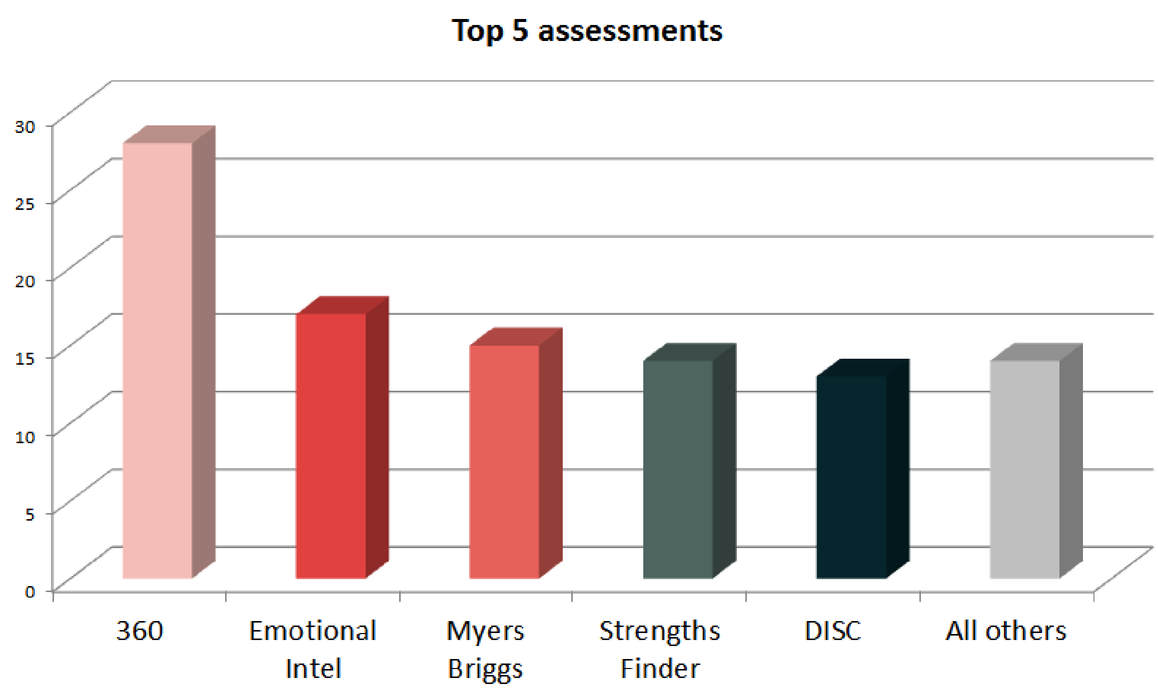

Figure 2.1. The top five assessments executive coaches use (Sherpa, 2014).

Even while assessment tools seem to be generally effective, they are source of disagreement among executive coaches. Coaches differ in whether they use assessment tool results to “develop insight” into the client or “facilitate goal setting or action-oriented planning” (Bono et al., 2009, p. 363). In addition, Hanson (2014) state that assessments need to be linked to development, viewing this as “the big synergy opportunity” (p. 3) for an “integrated architecture” (p. 4). According to Hanson, there ultimately needs to be a “fully integrated assessment-development architecture” (p. 8).

Assessment tools are and will certainly be used increasingly in the field of executive coaching. Executive coaches are well-served to use assessments to glean further insight into clients, supporting them through fresh perspectives on their world, their means of interacting with others, and how they perform in their organizations. Table 2.2 illustrates a small number of empirical studies that discovered the benefits of assessments as well aa strategies for learning.

Table 2.2

Empirical Studies of Assessments and Strategies for Learning

Author, Date and Title	**Methodology / Sample**	**Theoretical Framework**	**Key Findings**
Griffiths & Campbell (2009), Discovering, applying and integrating: The process of learning in coaching.	Qualitative study, 13 coaches were interviewed.	Grounded Theory	The findings showed how the coaching process used learning theories which helped to deepen and accelerate the learning of the client.
Hooijberg, R. & Lane, N. (2009), Using multisource feedback coaching effectively in executive education.	Qualitative study Online survey, sent link in an email to 700 participants.	Grounded Theory	Found clients wanted coaches who interpret results, makes recommendations, inspire action and conduct themselves professionally, the client is more committed to take action. Also found the obstacles that that hindered action, the client themselves and organization.

Roche & Hefferon (2013), The assessment needs to go hand-in-hand with the debriefing: the importance of a structured coaching debriefing in understanding and applying a positive psychology strengths assessment.	A qualitative study using semi-structured interviews with thematic analysis with 20 participants of middle and senior managers.	Positive Psychology	The study found participants benefited from having a structured debriefing after completing a strengths assessment. Emphasizes that structured follow-ups are important in assessments. If conducted properly can contribute to "goal-attainment, self-efficacy and psychological development" (32)...and can "give coaching some of its much needed credibility by providing a consistent and evidence based framework." (31)
Tait (2004), Officers as mentors within the national guard context.	Nine officers who were exemplar mentors.	Qualitative Critical Incident Interviews.	The study discovered the top two learning strategies were learning from others and learning from experience. In the study, all but one manager learned solely through informal methods.

Executive Coach as a Learner

The recent evidence-based studies on coaching come mainly from behavioral sciences and business with some linkage to adult education and lifelong learning. When delivering change using the coaching process, there is an innateness of learning, thus connecting the coaching process to the recognized bodies of the learning theory (Griffiths, 2005). Adult learners tend to participate in multiple types of learning (Livingstone, 2001). Experience is an essential part of what, when and why adults learn, as explained by the theory of andragogy, which is the art and science of facilitating adult learning (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Learning is formed by our experiences and an individual is always engaging in learning, whether formally or informally.

How Executive Coaches Learn

The executive coach's learning is influenced by many factors. Research reflects that executive coaches learn both formally and informally. Executive coaches learn more effective coaching methods and practices through formal coach education along with informal learning experiences such as their prior work knowledge, mentoring, coaching, non-formal professional development courses and interactions with other executive coaches (Lemyre,, Trudel, & Durand-Bush, 2007; Werthner & Pierre, 2006).

Grounded in everyday learning, informal learning, experiential learning and action science are "partnering concepts" (Bennett, 2012, p. 24), with experiential learning providing the conceptual framework for informal learning.

Experiential learning theory suggests a profoundly distinct view on the learning process. It is considered to be a "holistic model" and highly interdisciplinary theory, addressing learning in diverse fields (Kolb, Boyatzis, & Mainemelis, 1999, p. 2). The theory blends "experience, perception, cognition and behavior" (Kolb, 1984, p. 21). What is central to experiential learning is "reflection (intention) on an experience from multiple perspectives while integrating the learning" (Bennett, 2012, p.25). Kolb defines the experiential learning process as "the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience" (Kolb, 1984, pp. 25, 41).

The intellectual origins of the theory can be traced to the 1930s in the work of Dewey, Follett, (educational philosophers), Lewin (social psychology), Piaget (cognitive-developmental genetic epistemology), Knowles (andragogy), Kolb, and others who expanded on the work of these pioneers (Conlon, 2004; Enos, Kekrhahn, & Bell, 2003; Kolb et al., 1999).

To understand the intellectual lineage and historical context of informal learning, it is necessary to begin with John Dewey (1938) and his foundational influences on experiential learning. Dewey made a significant contribution to theories of learning based on his personal experiences. He believed that education should address reflective thought. His influence can be seen in many who have researched informal education and Kolb drew on Dewey's work extensively. One of Dewey's key influences on informal educators was his belief that education must engage with and enlarge one's experience through exploration, thought, and reflection (Dewy, 2011). Reflective thoughts can support an individual by helping them to reframe the nature of a situation where the expected outcomes may not align with what actually occurs in reality (Marsick, Watkins, Callahan, & Volpe, 2010).

Kurt Lewin (1947) is known for bringing together theory and practice, better known as action research. Action research is a process in which a program is identified, an experiment is conducted, results are monitored, reflection is undertaken on the process, and results are used to reformulate the problem, ultimately initiating another cycle of inquiry. Coghlan and Brannick (2010) expand on the definition by providing the characteristics of action research which are "research *in* action, rather than research *about* action, it is a collaborative democratic partnership, the research is concurrent with action and there is a sequence of events and an approach to problem solving" (p. 4). O'Neil and Marsick (2014) added that it involves action and reflection to solve a problem within a small group in the case of this study, the executive coach and client. In addition, Stringer (2007) outlined the action research framework that includes "research planning, information gathering, data analysis, communication, and actions" (p. 21).

Much contemporary literature on experiential learning references David Kolb, who was also influenced by Lewin. Kolb's work on experiential learning supplies additional insights into learning from experience. He presents the process of experiential learning in a four-stage model. The model suggests that the learner experiences something, engages in reflection on the experience, and then develops a presumption from the reflection. The learner then creates an action plan in order to create new behaviors, thus forming a new experience in the cyclical process of learning continues.

Four abilities are required in order to learn from experience: (a) an openness to involve oneself in new experiences in order to gain new concrete experiences (*concrete experience*); (b) observational and reflective skills so these new experiences can be viewed from a variety of perspectives (*reflective observation);* (c) analytical abilities in order to create integrative ideas and abstract concepts from their observations (*abstract generalization);* and (d) decision-making and problem-solving skills so these ideas and concepts can be used in actual practice (*active experimentation*) (Kolb, 1984, p. 31; Merriam & Brockett, 1997; Wilson & Hayes, 2000).

Chris Argyris and Donald Schön (1974, 1978) promoted the idea that no one deliberately sets out to fail or create errors. They proposed that there was a gap between implementation and formulation. They formulated the concepts of single-loop and double-loop learning. Single-loop learning results in a behavior change and modification, if the change or modification does not occur, then double-loop learning occurs as the learner does critical reflection to learn from the mistake and correct the structure, strategy or goal of the assignment. The learner reviews and "examines values, assumptions and beliefs that influence how a situation or problem is framed" (Marsick et al., 1999, p. 7). Argyris and Schön (1974, 1978) have brought important dimensions to the concepts of informal and learning. First, learning takes place under the element of surprise. Second, critical reflection is needed to be able to dig deep and reframe beliefs and assumptions. And finally, professionals learn more than rules but learn to "think like a…" where skills are being learned in addition to background learning, which shapes the individuals like incidental learning (Marsick & Watkins, 1990).

Informal learning has been defined as “any activity involving the pursuit of understanding, knowledge or skill which occurs without the presence of externally imposed curricular criteria” (Livingstone, 2001, p. 4). Marsick and Watkins (1990) conceivably have the most often cited definition and well-known model of informal learning, which is based on a practical, useable approach to problem-solving in real life, day-to-day situations. The leaders in the area, Victoria Marsick and Karen Watkins (1990), defined the theory of informal and incidental learning in this way:

> Informal and incidental learning both speak to learning outside formally structured, institutionally sponsored, classroom-based activities. As a result, both informal and incidental learning often take place under non-routine conditions, that is, when the procedures and responses that people normally use fail. Informal and incidental learning, however, are not exactly the same. Incidental learning is defined as a byproduct of some other activity, such as task accomplishment, interpersonal interaction, sensing the organizational culture, or trial-and-error experimentation. As such, incidental learning is never planned or intentional, whereas informal learning can be planned or intentional, as for example, in self-directed learning or help consciously sought from coaches or mentors. (pp. 6-7)

They introduced their conceptualization of informal learning theory in the workplace in 1990 (Cofer, 2000; Marsick & Watkins, 1990). In the process of developing their theory, they have referenced theorists such as John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, and Chris Argyris, and Donald

Schön to validate critical reflection as a basis of informal learning. They attributed Argyris and Schön's action science as the primary influence on their model.

The framework for informal and incidental learning was adopted by Argyris and Schön in their basic framework of action research and single- or double-loop learning. To ground both learning theories in application, Watkins and Marsick (2003) have incorporated Argyris's action learning in their continuous learning model. The model is designed to test individual and collective assumptions: "the continuous learning model is generally positioned as a learning model using critical reflection as its basis for action and inquiry into problems, and therefore how to solve them" (Chenhall & Chermack, 2010, p. 597). The principles of action learning that are part of the continuous learning process are: (a) the learning is centered around a problem and the resolution is of high importance to an individual, team, or organization; (b) the core entity is a team, such as an executive coach and the client; (c) the process involves insightful questioning and reflective listening; (d) the problem is acted upon and the action is implemented; (e) there is a commitment to learning by applying learning; and (f) an executive coach guides the process (O'Neil & Marsick, 2014; Sanders & Thiagarajan, 2001).

Informal Learning

Executive coaches might agree that their learning is formal or informal on the intention, awareness, and direction (Marsick et al., 2010). Barth, Godemann, Rieckmann and Stoltenburg (2007) found that formal as well as informal learning situations are significant when it comes to developing competencies for sustainable development. There is a large body of research that discusses formal learning as it relates to adult learning. Formal learning consists of the traditional forms of institutionally sponsored, classroom-based, often highly structured teaching and training. Although formalized coach training is a common form of training and learning to aid executive coaches to gain expertise, it has been demonstrated that only 70% of what is actually learned comes from a formalized environment (Marsick & Watkins, 1990).

Learning that happens outside of the customary form of the structured classroom environment, where the learning is practical, meaningful and connects with the learner's desire to grow and develop has been of interest to many (Tait, 2005). In the literature, this form of learning has been viewed as experiential learning, non-formal learning, self-directed learning, informal, and incidental learning. Informal learning is based on the idea that learning is "organized around real-life experience" (Marsick & Watkins, 1990, p. 55) and is "experienced-based, non-routine and often tacit" (p. 15). Schugurensky (2000) differentiated informal learning by developing a taxonomy which suggests using two main categories (intentionality and consciousness) and three types of informal learning: (1) self-directed learning, where an individual takes on learning projects without the assistance of a 'resource person/educator' both intentional and conscious. (2) incidental learning, which is learning that happens without an intention of learning from an experience; there is awareness after the vent that learning did take place; unintentional but conscious; and (3) socialization/tacit learning, the internalization of values, attitudes, behaviors, skills, etc., that arise for the learner during everyday life. The learning happens in a retrospective; unintentional and unconscious manner.

Informal learning can take place anywhere at any time, outside of a curricula and the motivation to learn is higher when an individual is confronted with new challenges. The control of learning rests on the learner and is enhanced by critical reflection (Livingstone, 2001, Marsick & Watkins 1990, p.12). Informal learning can be deliberately encouraged, but it can still take place in an environment not highly conductive to learning. In short, learning takes place even when one is not conscious of it (Livingstone, 2001, Marsick & Watkins 1990; Schugurensky, 2000). Although informal learning has not been recognized by formal institutions and organization (Schugurensky, 2000), it has been researched in the workplace by Education Development Center, Inc. (EDC) and others who discovered that 70-90% of job-related workplace learning was learned through informal learning of employees (Cofer, 2000; Conlon, 2004). Marsick and Watkins (1990) validate that traditional training and development sessions need to focus on helping individuals by using informal learning, stating that "the potential exists to help people learn more effectively in the workplace by focusing on real life rather than on prescriptions, examples, and simulations" (p. 4).

Executive Coach Learning Through Informal Learning

Informal learning occurs when the learner has "the need, motivation, and opportunity for learning" (Marsick & Watkins, 1990, p. 28). Gola (2009) define them as "any individual practice or activity that is able to produce continuous learning; it is often non-intentional and non-structured learning" (p. 334) and outside of curricula (Livingstone, 2001).

Marsick, Volpe, and Watkins (1999) characterize informal learning as (a) integrated with work and daily routines, (b) triggered by an internal or external jolt, (c) not highly conscious, (d) haphazard and happens by chance, (e) an inductive process of reflection and action, and (f) linked to learning of others (p. 90). Although, informal and formal learning are intertwined (Marsick, 2009), there is a need to differentiate between them due to the rise of corporate universities and training programs (Bennett, 2012). Marsick and Watkins (1990) contrast informal and formal learning:

> Formal learning is typically institutionally sponsored, classroom-based, and highly structured. Informal learning, a category that includes incidental learning, may occur in institutions, but it is not typically classroom-based or highly structured, and control of

> learning rests primarily in the hands of the learner. Incidental learning is defined as a byproduct of some other activity, such as task accomplishment, interpersonal interaction, sensing the organizational culture, trial-and-error experimentation, or even formal learning. (p. 12)

Gola (2009) stated that "informal learning is often experiential learning which occurs in a particular context" (p. 344). Cseh (1998) also found that context was a significant factor. Marsick and Watkins (2001) validated that informal learning "takes place without much external facilitation or structure" (p. 30). To enhance this type of learning, three conditions are proposed: critical reflection to surface tacit knowledge and beliefs; stimulation of proactivity on the part of the learner to actively identify options and to learn new skills to implement those options or solutions; and creativity to encourage a wider range of options.

There are advantages of informal learning. A combination of the right environment and context can support and impact a learning environment (Cofer, 2000). Through focused reflection and action, informal learning can support the executive coach in various ways when using assessment tools, in particular by opening the learner to change. Executive coaches can use informal learning to shift old behaviors, negative mindsets, and behaviors that may have held them back and resulted in adverse consequences in their coaching process. The executive coach can use informal learning "to obtain help, information or support, learn from alternative viewpoints, gain ability to give greater feedback, consider alternative ways to think and behave (planned or unplanned), reflect on processes to assess learning experience outcomes, and to make choices on where to focus their attention" (Conlon, 2004, p. 287) when working with a client after an assessment tool has been administered.

Informal learning can also be used as a strategy when incorporating mentoring, coaching, networking, modeling, effective leadership and facilitation, interrelational aspects of teams, and individual characteristics and capabilities to support the learner's growth and development (Marsick & Watkins, 1990). Additional benefits of informal learning in workplace identified by Dale and Bell (1999) included: "flexibility, employability, adaptability of learning to context, rapid transfer to practice, resolution of work-related problems through regular review of work practices and performance" (p. 1). Drawbacks to informal learning are few, but may include "narrow, contextual focus; learning bad habits or wrong lessons; accreditation challenges; and the fact that such learning is so well integrated with work that it may not be recognized" (Marsick, 2009, pp. 265-266).

As discussed, learning can happen in different environments. When executive coaches are questioned about how they have learned something, most of them will state that they learned it in a formal learning situation (i.e., coaching training program). Eventually, when questioned further, they may also state that they learned from an informal learning environment (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgarttner, 2006), such as their prior work knowledge, mentoring, coaching, non-formal professional development courses, and interactions with other coaches to learn in order to coach effectively (Lemyre, Trudel, & Durand-Bush, 2007; Werthner & Pierre, 2006). Executive coaches can use the learning from the assessment process and assessment tool to support their coaching processes by learning more about their client, to support them in achieving their outcomes and supporting them to learn more about themselves to enhance their performance and effectiveness in their organization.

Chapter Summary

Executive coaching is a growing field that is emerging as the business terrain changes and executive leaders are asked to be more efficient and effective as leaders to increase productivity and profit for their organizations. Although coaching can be traced back to the days of Socrates, there seems to be a lack of one definition and most agree that executive coaching is considered to be a leadership development tool, customized to work for individualized, one-on-one development (de Haan et al., 2013; Underhill et al., 2007).

Bierema (2002) stated that organizations play a large role in creating a context for learning and for developing the workforce. In order to support and retain high potential employees in organizations, it is necessary for Human Resource Development professionals to create targeted opportunities for learning and personal development (Ng, Schweitzer, & Lyons, 2010). Executive coaching is the method that can give executives the opportunity to learn and develop by improving interpersonal skills, self-awareness, decision-making skills, team-building, organizational skills, personal performance feedback, positive personal impact, and enhanced interpersonal relationships.

Although there are variations of the coaching process, the phase in the process that is referenced extensively is the importance of conducting an assessment of client characteristics and practices using various resources and tools to gather data. When analyzed, the assessment data will inform a plan for the executive coach to assist the client in meeting their goals. Coaches have used assessment tools for decades to help top athletes and performing artists to improve their performance; business professionals can now use coaching to assist them in improving their performance personally and organizationally (Pinchot & Pinchot, 2000). Executive coaches have increased the use of assessment instruments to predict how an individual will act or react and how that individual can interact more effectively with others, which gives the executive coach, client and the organization insight into that individual's behavior. Most assessments are used to examine and understand how the client's personality connects with her or his performance. Assessments also support the clients so they can recognize the difference between their own perceptions and subjective evidence of how they impact those around them (Birkman International, 2007; Witherspoon & White, 1996). Assessments are a way for the executive coach to coach more effectively using objective data to inform the client's development plan (Berr, Church, & Waclawski, 2000; Bush, 2004).

Executive coaches are always learning formally or informally, depending on their intention, awareness, and direction (Marsick, et al., 2010). The executive coach can learn from the assessment phase or use of assessment tools to support their clients to achieve their outcomes and enhance their performances and effectiveness in their organizations.

In conclusion, executive coaches provide a valuable service to executives who require development guidance. A key part of the executive coaching process is the assessment phase, where the executive coach can learn to understand how their client "reacts" and "acts" and therefore being able to "navigate" the coaching process. Executive coaches use various assessment tools depending upon client needs. Due to the nature of working as an executive coach in the fast-paced world of business, it is essential that the executive coach learns in various ways to adapt in an agile manner to the client and the client's environment to meet their needs along with the organization needs more effectively. Therefore, the gap in the literature that this research will fill is giving to the field of executive coach how using assessment tools can strengthen the coaching relationship along with the coaching process. Also, how using assessment tools can be used to make the coaching process effective and efficient. In addition, it will also fill the gap of how executive's coaches can support HROD field by supporting the leadership development of their leaders that is data based, helping them to be partners with organization to stay competitive. Lastly, it will fill the gap of the shortage of empirical data to support the field of executive coaching by providing it a theoretical framework in which the field can ground itself, the coaching process and ways to regulate the process and profession.

CHAPTER 3

METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to understand how executive coaches learn from and use assessment tools in the coaching process. The following two research questions guided the study:

1. What do executive coaches learn from the use of assessment tools in their coaching process?
2. In what ways do executive coaches use the learning gained from assessment tools to navigate the coaching relationship?

This chapter is organized into six sections: (1) research design; (2) sample selection; (3) data collection; (4) data analysis; (5) validity and reliability; and (6) subjectivity.

Research Design

In conducting research, the goal is to engage in a systematic process to learn more about something about which we do not know (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). There are several research methodology approaches to engage in this process – quantitative, qualitative, and mixed-methods. Which approach used depends on the epistemological stance of the researcher along with the intent of the research. There are four broad categories in which the researcher can locate their position: “postpositivism, constructivism, advocacy/participatory, and pragmatism” (Creswell, 2003, p. 6). The researcher and the study are focused on understanding the executive coaches’ experiences in learning from and using assessment tools to navigate their coaching relationships with their clients. Qualitative research is the best research methodology for this study due to its constructivist approach in which the researcher will investigate how the research subjects construct meaning (Crotty, 1998, Merriam, 1998, Ruona, 2005). Specifically, researchers use qualitative research methods to study how research participants make meaning of their worlds, navigate social relations, and construct their identities (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). As well, qualitative research allows researchers to comprehend the meanings participants themselves make of their experiences in the context of their environments (Merriam, 1998).

This study was a basic interpretive qualitative data study. Basic interpretive qualitative analysis is the most commonly used method across disciplines and fields of practice, from education to business (Merriam & Associates, 2002). An interpretative study demonstrates all the characteristics of qualitative research, the main focus being that the researcher is able to uncover and understand how a participant makes meaning of a situation or phenomenon (Merriam & Associates, 2002). In this study, I was primarily interested in using an interpretive approach in order to understand (1) how executive coaches interpret their experiences, (2) how they construct their worlds, and (3) the meanings they attribute to their experiences (Merriam, 2009). This method was selected in order to generate rich, descriptive data surrounding the ways coaches learn from and use assessment tools in navigating the coaching process.

Although there are some primary characteristics that are commonly held in all qualitative research, Merriam (2009) offered four characteristics that characterize interpretive qualitative research in particular.

The first characteristic of qualitative research is to strive to *understand the meaning* the participants have constructed about their experiences and world. The second characteristic is that the researcher is *the primary instrument* to collect and analyze data. It is important to understand that the researcher may operate with some shortcomings or bias. Rather than trying to eliminate them, it is important to identify them, and account for and monitor them to determine how they may influence the data collection and analysis. The third characteristic is that the process is *inductive.* In this process, researchers often use the data collected to gather evidence in order to establish concepts, theories and hypotheses. The findings are presented in the form of themes, categories, typologies, concepts and tentative hypotheses. The final characteristic is that the product of the research is *richly descriptive*. When presenting the outcomes, it may be presented in a highly descriptive manner, in the form of words and pictures rather than numbers. (Merriam, 2009; Merriam & Associates, 2002).

Sample Selection

The sample in this study consisted of a group of 15 executive coaches who served as "a portion, piece, or segment that is representative of a whole" (Onwuegbuzie & Collins, 2007, p. 281). Qualitative studies usually focus in depth on moderately small samples, with participants specifically selected in order to provide information that cannot be obtained from other subjects (Maxwell, 2005). For this study, purposeful sampling was used to identify and collect information-rich cases (Patton, 2002) strategically. The goal of purposeful sampling is to focus on particular characteristics of a group that will best support answering the research questions (Creswell, 2009). Moreover, purposeful sampling would allow me to choose from among those practicing executive coaching to acquire the most knowledge in order to discover, understand, and gain insight for the study (Merriam, 1998). Purposeful sampling was used in this study so that the participants were carefully selected with the expectation that the researcher would generate the greatest insight and understanding on the phenomenon of learning from and using assessment tools by executive coaches in their coaching processing. Merriam (2002) validates this by stating, "it is important to select a sample from which the most can be learned" (p.12).

Qualitative research aims to sample broadly and interview deeply such that all the variations of the study are captured. Instead of generalizing specific population values, specific characteristics of the sample are used to gather data that are relevant to the study (Elliott & Timulak, 2005). To learn the most, expert executive coaches were interviewed. Experts are better at carrying out aspects of their job and are vital resources to understanding what qualities, strategies, and resources are needed (Stough et al., 2001), along with being able to use intuitive observation skills and experience to make decisions that are relevant to the client (Dreyfus & Dreyfus, 1980). Dreyfus and Dreyfus (1980) also stated individuals become more skilled as they gain experience, that "skill in its minimal form is produced by following abstract formal rules, but that only experience with concrete cases can account for higher levels of performance" (p. 5).

To satisfy saturation, the most common sampling strategy, purposeful sampling, was used in this study to recruit expert executive coaches who use assessment tools in their coaching process. The following criteria define an expert executive coach: (a) currently practicing as a self-identified full time executive coach; (b) minimum of six years executive coaching experience; (c) uses assessment tools while working with clients; (d) minimum of five years of supplementary professional work experience; (e) self-reported evidence of higher education and participation in continuing education.

The first criterion was that the participant must have been a practicing self-identify full time executive coach. For this study, an executive coach was defined in Kilburg's (1996) much-cited definition of executive coaching:

> a helping relationship between a client who has managerial authority and responsibility in an organization and a consultant who uses a wide variety of behavioral techniques and methods to help the client achieve a mutually identified set of goals to improve his or her

> professional performance and personal satisfaction and, consequently, to improve the effectiveness of the client's organization within a formally defined coaching agreement. (p. 142)

The second criterion was that each participant must have been in practice for at least six years at the time of recruitment into the study. This was selected as the minimum amount of executive coaching experience because research has concluded that expertise is associated with years of experience (Berliner, 2001). Ericcson (2006) recommends that repetition and practice are significant in becoming an expert. He states that 10 years of experience or 10,000 hours' of practice are the benchmarks of becoming an expert in one's field. In this study six years was used as a minimum, aligning with the minimum amount of time it may take someone to reach 2,500 hours of practice (hours logged coaching) as needed to meet the ICF Master Coach Certification (MCC) criteria.

The third criterion was that each participant must have been reporting using one or more assessment tools in their coaching process. Flexibility was allowed in the use of assessment tools in participants' coaching processes since the particular type of assessment tool is not significant for the study.

The fourth criterion was that each participant must have had a minimum of five years of supplementary professional work experience. Research indicates that it takes three to five years of professional experience to demonstrate competence (Darling-Hammond, 2007). Although the participants did not need to have a particular type of professional experience, the valid experience would support their competence.

The fifth criterion was that there would be self-reported evidence of higher education and participation in continuing education by the executive coach. This would ensure that the coach was engaged in enhancing their ability to coach, applying theory to practice. This criteria also created credibility and trustworthiness with the executive coach and client. Sherpa (2011) found that training and experience are the top factors listed that make a good executive coach.

Along with criterion-based sampling, snowball sampling was used to identify participants. The process began with me querying suitable participants: “Who knows a lot about X? Whom should I talk to?” (Patton, 2002, p. 237). Snowball sampling allows for the sample size to increase as more and more people are asked to refer potential participants for the study. As part of the snowball sampling, I requested the use of an existing database of coaches from International Coaching Federation (ICF) along with Sherpa Executive Coaching. In response to my request for participants for this study, ICF and Sherpa provided recruitment efforts to obtain participators. ICF provided support by sending out an email to their database of coaches’ nationwide with the participant criteria, after an extensive approval process with their research department. Sherpa allowed me to post a request for participants in their LinkedIn group. I contacted the executive coaches who followed up to the email request or post to determine whether they met the criteria and to confirm whether they were willing to participate (Appendices A and B).

Data Collection

In qualitative research, there are three major approaches to data collection – interviews, observations, and documents (Merriam, 2002). In this study, two methods were used to conduct the research study. First, an interview protocol was utilized to conduct interviews with the purposefully chosen participants. Second, document analysis would support the information collected from the interviews.

The Interview Process

The qualitative interview design supported this study because it aims to inform concepts, describe multiple realties (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003), and develop understanding while allowing for unforeseen themes, ideas, and constructs to emerge (Rubin & Rubin, 1995). In particular, semi-structured interviews served as the primary method of data collection in this study. This method was chosen to allow participants to delve deep into their experiences and to allow the researcher to ask probing questions about participants' thoughts, feelings, and meanings about those experiences. The semi-structured interview format included a set of questions that guide the interview while also allowing flexibility for participants' responses to lead to additional insights and probing questions. The interviews followed an interview guide, created to outline a specific predetermined range of relevant questions (Appendix E). Even though the questions were predetermined and focused on eliciting unique perspectives of each participant, the format was flexible, allowing the researcher to initiate or expand on topics that would enrich the study as they arose (Rouston, 2011).

Collecting Interview Data

The interviews were conducted with participants until data saturation occurred. Qualitative researchers often use the criterion of saturation for sample size to gather data. This means that the researcher continues to add new participants to the study to the point that there is no new information emerging from the participants (Elliott & Timulak, 2005).

When collecting data, I intended to contact potential participants initially via telephone, email, or in person. Firstly, I asked for their interest in and willingness to participate in the research project. When a contender agreed to participate, we scheduled a 60-minute meeting at a convenient time and appropriate place to conduct a face-to-face interview and if needed, a telephone interview. I emailed an official confirmation letter explaining the study, detailing the interview process, and confirming the time and location. A consent form for review and a demographic form was attached to the email. The demographic form included basic data such as age, gender, professional background, education background, certifications, and assessment tool (s) used in coaching. This allowed me to have additional data on each of participant's background. The confirmation letter, consent form and demographic questionnaire are found in Appendices B, C and D, respectively. I requested that the form be completed prior to the interview and a copy returned to me at the beginning of the interview.

Prior to the interview, I presented two copies of the consent form to the participant again, explaining the study, detailing the interview and the rights of the participant, and answered any questions he or she may have had. After the participant and I signed both copies of the consent form, the participant was given a copy for their records and I took my copy and file it along with all other information pertaining to the research in a locked file cabinet in my home. The participants were given pseudonyms, to honor confidentiality. They were requested to give a pseudonym of their choice, some did and those we did not were given a random name from a list of name for their gender on the internet.

After I received the consent, I proceeded to the interview protocol consisting of semi-structured interview questions designed to understand how the participant learned from and used assessment tools to navigate his or her coaching process. During the interview, I asked questions from the interview protocol and inquired further with follow-up questions, using probes for clarification. Throughout the interview, I took field notes while I interviewing the participants to help supplement the interviews and to provide a more detailed description of the interview context, personal observations, and reflections during the process (Merriam, 2009). The discussions were audio-recorded digitally with the prior written and oral consent of the participant so that I could have accurate data for verbatim transcription. The recordings were professionally transcribed and each transcription was verified for its accuracy through a process of listening to the original recordings along with the written transcriptions.

I worked to ensure the confidentiality of the participants by using the following techniques: (a) interviews were audio-recorded, and when transcribed, no personally identifying information was used; (b) participants were referenced by a pseudonym at all times; (c) audio recordings would be destroyed once the study was complete; (d) transcripts, recordings, and other documentations were stored in a secure location. I will not release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than as required by the department at the University of Georgia responsible for regulatory and research oversight.

Collecting document analysis. Document analysis was also conducted to support the information collected from the interviews to gain a broader understanding of how executive coaches learn from and use assessment tools to work with and assist clients. Documents can be seen as anything that give further insight in analysis of qualitative data (Patton, 2002). They can be comprised of anything written, oral, visual, or physical artifacts (Merriam & Associates, 2002). For my study, I reviewed the demographic questionnaire that the participants completed, along with reviewing my field notes and observations to gain a deeper understanding of how the participants were using assessment tools to manage their coaching processes. Collecting data utilizing semi-structured interviews and documents analysis provided an enriched informative view of the data.

Data Analysis

Bogden and Biklen (1998) describe data analysis as "working with the data, organizing them, breaking them into manageable units, synthesizing them, searching for patterns, discovering what is important and what is to be learned, and deciding what you will tell others" (p. 157). Data analysis starts when, as Merriam (2002) says, "one begins analyzing data with the first interview, the first observation, the first document accessed in the study" (p. 14). In general, qualitative data analysis consists of processing the data by coding, categorizing, and drawing relationships among themes (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996). Data analysis in this study was based substantially on interview data. In addition, my field notes from the interviews, observations from attending an ICF-GA meeting and the transcripts helped to identify key words and phrases and to establish any themes or categories (Bogdan & Biklen, 2003; Merriam, 1998).

I used thematic analysis, a foundational analysis method, to identify, examine and record themes (patterns) from the data. This enabled me to systematically analyze the frequency of themes (patterns) from the executive coach's interpretations. In doing thematic analysis, Braun and Clark (2006) suggest a step-by-step guide for thematic analysis starting with familiarizing oneself with the data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing and refining themes, defining and naming themes, and finally producing the report.

I began my analysis by reading and rereading the literal transcriptions of the recorded data and my field notes to become broadly familiar with the data. I then created initial codes, searched for themes, and refined the themes by using qualitative data analysis software NVivo. I then began an analysis by using a line-by-line reading of responses, allowing for new themes to freely emerge in the data. This process rapidly generated themes. Themes in coding were identified by repetition within and across responses, similarities and differences, and a theory-driven approach that identified what the literature and hypotheses would predict (Ryan & Bernard, 2003). I examined and coded the data into broader concepts. This included words, phrases and topics, which appeared in the data (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998) and that “should come from the exact words of the participants” (Gelo, Braakmann & Benetka, 2008, p. 276). This permitted me to be organized, manage and recall data, and also allowed me to examine the data, raise issues with it, and generate relationships across the data (Strauss, 1987). After coding the data, I interpreted the information and organized it into similar categories. The central purpose of analysis is to organize the data into categories and subcategories and then connect them to understand the links among the categories, allowing the researcher to generalize the consistency and differences across the data. To enhance the data further, I used the field notes from my interviews, observation of an ICF-GA meeting and combined them with my interview transcripts to add to and construct deeper significance within the data.

Trustworthiness

It is important that there is control for validate through the research (Merriam & Simpson, 2000). A concern for all research is to demonstrate and show validity, trustworthiness, or authenticity of the study (Creswell & Miller, 2000; Merriam and Associates, 2002) since “both producers and consumers of research want to be assured that the findings of an investigation are to be believed and trusted” (Merriam & Simpson, 2000, p.22). There are many views on how to conceive of reliability and validity in qualitative research, since such research relies on subjective data gathered through stories, observations and documents and it often examines socially constructed interactions of subjects in their many realties of the world (Merriam, 2002). Nonetheless, measures can be taken to avoid threats to validity in qualitative research (Creswell & Miller, 2000). According to Merriam and Simpson (2000), there are two types of threats to validity, internal and external. Internal validity threats are "those factors which affect the degree to which the research procedures measure what they purport to measure," while external threats "pertain to the extent results of a study are generalizable to other situations" (p. 59).

To establish credibility, a study must pass internal validity. Maxwell (2005) states that validity is a "commonsense way to refer to the correctness or credibility of a description, conclusion, explanation, interpretation, or other sort of account" (p. 106). Merriam and Simpson (2000) measured internal validity by asking, "how congruent are one's findings with reality" (p.101).

In qualitative research, there are several ways to reduce threats to internal validity: (a) triangulation; (b) member checking; (c) thick description; (d) peer reviews; and (e) external audits, internal and external validity (Creswell & Miller, 2000). Triangulation is a well-known strategy to enhance validity in qualitative research. Creswell (2002) defines triangulation as "a validity procedure where researchers search for convergence among multiple and different sources of information to form themes or categories in a study" (p. 126). Denzin (1970) took the concept of using of more than one approach to investigate to findings by extending it. He distinguishes four forms of triangulation: 1) data triangulation, involving gathering data by several sampling strategies, so that slices of data at different times and social situations, as well as on a variety of people, are gathered; 2) investigator triangulation, which suggests having more than one researcher gathering and interpreting data 3) theoretical triangulation, which recommends using more than one theoretical position when interpreting data; and 4) methodological triangulation, recommending the use of more than one method when gathering data. For this study, in order to strengthen the validity of the research and to help maintain my bias, I used methodological triangulation by applying multiple techniques of data collection. I collected data through in-depth, semi-structured interviews, field notes from the interviews and observations from attending an ICF-GA meeting along with the demographic questionnaire document obtained from the participants.

As the researcher, it was critical to demonstrate validity by monitoring the possible entry of any bias or prejudice that may affect data collection, analysis, and interpretation. It was vital that I accounted for my own subjectivity (Patton, 2002). There were a few details that I could put into place to show reflexivity and transparence that would lend rigor and credibility to the research. One way to remain unbiased was to be focused on gathering high quality data (Patton, 2002). Another way to achieve validity and creditability as the interviewer and researcher was to make sure during the interviews to be an active listener by not speaking too much and displaying attentive listening. I also made efforts to take accurate notes and record audio. Further, I share the end document with participants for their review and considered any feedback they offer. Finally, an additional way of providing credibility was to participate in a bracketing interview. During this process, my mentor, a master executive coach, conducted a mock interview with me, using the exact questions that were to be used in the study. This technique allowed me to a) be aware of my own responses to the questions and bring awareness of my subjectivity, assumptions, and vested interests; b) consider how the nature and language of the questions may influence responses; c) ensure that the questions were framed in a way that would elicit the best data; and d) enable me to review, categorize, and analyze thematic material (deMarrais, 2001). I believed that employing these methods would safeguard the effects of my own subjectivity on the data collection and analysis.

Addressing external validity, thick description also supports increasing the generalizability of findings. Rich, thick descriptions are the details that ensure transferability of the findings by describing the settings, the participants, and the themes of the study (Creswell, 2002). To focus on the transferability of the findings, I explained in thick detail the framework guiding the research, the research questions, and the findings of the themes and threads of the research. I also kept a journal, documented my actions, and took notes during the interviews to further guarantee validity and reliability. Merriam Simpson (2000) also states that a study should provide enough information such that "readers will be able to determine how closely their situations match the research situation, and hence, whether findings can be transferred" (p. 103). It is my commitment that this research will impact the coaching processes of executive coaches through my published research and by making findings available for practitioners.

Another factor that can create a threat to validity is the generalizability of the study. Along with providing the thick, rich descriptions of the study and the data analysis, I sought to make sure that there was enough representation for saturation within the sample group and that they were selected by the purposeful sample selection criteria (Merriam & Simpson, 2000) to support the study's validity and reliability.

Another method for demonstrating trustworthiness of my research is peer reviews. This practice provides an external check and supports the researcher to be "honest" (Patton, 2002). Some researchers use the term "peer debriefing." Peer debriefing can be defined as "the process of exposing oneself to a disinterested peer in a manner paralleling an analytical session and for the purpose of exploring aspects of the inquiry that might otherwise remain only implicit within the inquirer's mind" (Guba & Lincoln, 1989, p. 308). I consulted with my doctoral advisor and my committee throughout the research process in order to solicit their feedback. I also referred with my peers in the doctoral program to support me in keeping accuracy.

Merriam and Simpson (2002) point out the importance of results being consistent with findings. Reliability can be problematic in conducting qualitative research, since participants construct their social world and replication is not likely to happen. Merriam (2002) states that reliability is about making sure that there is consistency and dependability between the data collected and the findings “to the extent to which research findings can be replicated” (p. 27). Dependability can be attained by making sure that the process for conducting the research is logical, traceable and documented (Schwandt, 2001). To increase the reliability of this study, I provided as much information as possible on the methodology for processes by which I was collecting and analyzing data. I also reviewed the interview guide for clarity and to make sure it related to the study design and research questions. Semi-structured interviews – the method used in this study –were also acknowledged to be more reliable than unstructured interviews (Merriam, 2002).

Reflexivity

A central concern of conducting qualitative research is voiced by Merriam (2002): “The human instrument has shortcomings and bias that might impact a study” (p. 5). Being able to identify, as well as monitor personal assumptions and potential sources of bias are critical in any research, but particularly strongly in qualitative research (Merriam, 2002). Patton (1990) states that “subjectivity is inevitable and the point is to be aware of how one’s perspectives affect the fieldwork” (p. 482). Merriam and Simpson (2000) also discuss the researcher as “the primary instrument for data collection,” which puts the responsibility on the researcher to manage any bias that might impact the study (p. 98).

In light of these reflections on the centrality of reflexivity to qualitative research, at the outset of this study I wanted to position myself in relation to this research by offering some information about my personal and professional background. I am currently an educator, a certificated executive coach, and a professional who is interested in the development of others, both professional and personal. As such, this study holds personal and intellectual significance for me. I realized that during the research process the need to constantly monitor my data interpretation through the lens of participants, rather than in light of my own preconceived notions and viewpoints. At the same time, my passion for this research stems from my desire to support people in their development, and in particular to increase opportunities for them to advance in their chosen careers.

These interests are deeply connected to my own personal history. I came to America at the age of eight, with little knowledge of the language and culture of America. I was placed in second grade and during my learning process as a young immigrant, I was lucky to have many trusted teachers and mentors. American media and culture also showed me how women were entering the corporate world and trying to break the glass ceiling. As a Pakistani-American woman, I lacked strong female role models around me. My mother is a housewife and my father worked in industry and is an entrepreneur. Upon graduating from college, I was a naïve young woman who was filled with motivation as a businesswoman, but I lacked the necessary resources.

My first experience in the world of professional development was in college, where I was referred to an accomplished professor in the field of Human Resources who later became a mentor and to this day, he retains this role in my life. He exposed me to avenues of networking in the field of Human Resources. After college, I began work in a corporate environment and my interest in Human Resources was confirmed through some difficult lessons. I soon became dismayed to find that my motivation and hard work did not result in the rewards I expected. I noticed that no matter how hard I worked, I was not provided access to resources or formal professional development I needed to achieve success. I was disappointed to find so few institutionally-sponsored and structured opportunities such as, training from which I could benefit professionally.

As I progressed in my field, I worked for several organizations that did not provide formal professional development opportunities. Even though I was constantly reassured that I had “potential,” no institutional support was provided to cultivate that potential. As I studied those who were “successful” around me, I too wanted to grow and develop. Drawing from the concept of informal learning, I started to observe those around me, and in particular the Vice President of Events and Human Resources. Marsick and Watkins (1990) state that informal learning is based on the idea that learning is “organized around real-life experience” (p. 55), “experience-based, non-routine and often tacit” (p. 15). Informal learning can occur any place, any time but the motivation to learn is greater when an individual encounters new challenges. I used to watch how the Vice President conducted herself and noticed how self-assured she was in her role in a male-dominated industry. I wanted those traits of being poised, confident, and an effective communicator while balancing my professional and personal lives.

As I observed and adopted some of those traits in my professional life, I did not get the same results. I eventually resigned from the organization and later discovered that I could have gone further if I had been given the proper tools for professional development. I went into my second career working for a non-profit organization, where I was given the opportunity to be coached and receive feedback from an assessment tool. During this process, I was able to see clearly the areas of weakness for me professionally. Taking the assessment also provided me insight into my personality, which further allowed me to understand my innate weaknesses that might hinder my success. I also came to understand that these were traits to be understood and addressed in my professional development, rather than immutable barriers to my advancement. The coaching process helped me to work effectively and efficiently and I consistently tripled my yearly goals. Experiencing the process of coaching showed me that if I had worked with a coach in the previous organization, I might have moved up in the organization instead of leaving after seven years. More importantly, I discovered that I could be a conduit for developing myself and others through coaching. The whole process of discovering myself through coaching made such an impact on me that I am now a certified coach and have been practicing for five years. As a college educator, I am able to use my skills as a coach to affect my students' professional development so they will have the opportunity to develop skill sets earlier in their careers for success in their chosen fields.

I acknowledged that my zeal for this topic along with my background as a certified executive coach, a faculty member, and my professional networks would influence how I interpreted data. As a researcher, I would have certain assumptions about the study and the executive coaches that I would interview. Furthermore, I recognized my own status as an "insider" in the context of this research and it is noted that "The more one is like the participants in terms of culture, gender, race, socio-economic class and so on, the more it is assumed that access will be granted, meanings shared, and validity of findings assured" (Merriam, Johnson-Bailey, Lee, Kee, Ntseane, & Muhamad, 2001, p. 406). As an "insider," I understood the language and process of coaching and how assessment tools are used in creating coaching outcomes. However, at the same time, as an outsider, I was a researcher and not a full-time practicing executive coach. Due to my dual status as both insider and outsider to this group of subjects, there may have been some complexity in how I gathered the data. While interviewing, I needed to be mindful of how I was being perceived by participants and what impact their perceptions had on their willingness to share openly and candidly. I was committed to managing my status by making sure that I was intentionally reflecting on and monitoring my own potential bias, along with utilizing the input of my doctoral advisor and committee throughout the research process. Throughout the course of the research, I remained attuned to my own shifting positionality.

My position at the outset of this study was that executive coaching and the use of assessment tools supports individual development. Even though I began the research with this opinion, based on the theoretical concept of informal learning, I trusted that the process would bring forward themes that would address the research questions. As I interpreted the data, I would be vigilant about my personal experience and the need to ensure that awareness of my subjectivity did not complicate my feelings, thoughts, and interpretations about the research data. Just as importantly, I was open to and looking forward to being changed in unanticipated ways by the process of qualitative research (Merriam and Associates, 2002).

Chapter Summary

This chapter summarized the methodology for this study. The purpose of this qualitative study was to examine the use of assessment tools in executive coaching process. In particular, this study was interested in the learning of the executive coach as a result of using assessment tools in their coaching process and navigating the coaching relationship with their clients. Issues regarding the design of the study, sample selection, data collection, data analysis, validity and reliability, and researcher subjectivity were discussed. Qualitative research was the most appropriate method for this study due to its goal to support the researcher in studying the lived experience of the subjects and to understand how they make meaning and sense of their worlds (Merriam, 1998). An interpretive qualitative research design was used to collect, analyze, and interpret data. To satisfy saturation, a criterion-based, purposeful sampling was used in this study to recruit expert executive coaches who use assessment tools in their coaching process. The following criteria defined an expert executive coach: (a) currently practicing as a self-identified full time executive coach; (b) minimum of six years executive coaching experience; (c) uses assessment tools while working with clients; (d) minimum of five years of supplementary professional work experience; and (e) self-reported evidence of higher education and participation in continuing education.

Data were collected from 15 executive coaches utilizing semi-structured interviews and documents analysis. Combining these tools provided an enriched informative view of the data. The interviews were recorded, transcribed, and coded for thematic analysis, to categorize the recurring themes. In order to assure the validity and reliability of the study triangulation, peer reviews and thick description were used. My own subjectivity as a researcher was also discussed and being aware of potential bias allowed me to monitor my assumptions and interpretations throughout the research process.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

The purpose of this study was to understand how executive coaches learn from and use assessment tools in the coaching process. The following two research questions guided the study:

1. What do executive coaches learn from the use of assessment tools in their coaching process?
2. In what ways do executive coaches use the learning gained from assessment tools to navigate the coaching relationship?

This chapter provides an overview of the findings related to the research questions for this study. In this qualitative research study, a semi-structured interview protocol was used to conduct interviews with a sample of 15 executive coaches. The protocol was chosen purposefully in order to understand how executive coaches learn from and use assessment tools in their coaching process. This chapter also provides the demographics of the participants along with presenting the overall themes from the findings.

Participant Overview

A sample of 15 executive coaches was included in this study. In response to my request for participants for this study, the International Coaching Federation (ICF) and Sherpa Executive Coaching provided recruitment efforts to obtain participators. ICF provided support by sending an email with their research report to their database of coaches nationwide after an extensive approval process. Sherpa allowed me to request participants on their LinkedIn group. A semi-structured interview technique guided the approximately one-hour interviews. Throughout the interviews, an attempt was made to interview the participants face to face, because the executive coaches were from various U.S. locations as well as Canada. Twelve interviews were conducted by telephone and three were conducted in person, because those participates resided in Atlanta, which is the city where I reside. All participants completed consent forms prior to the interview, whether the interview was held by phone or face to face. Effort was made to stay focused on specific and prepared questions to make sure that the participants and I were objective throughout the interview process in order to yield unbiased results to support the research study. The thematic analysis was produced by reading the data, marking it by hand, rereading it, entering it in the NVivo application, remarking it, and dividing it into themes and sub-themes according to the major topics that emerged from the data.

Participant Demographics

One of the fastest-growing careers, executive coaching has no deficiency of individuals who are willing to provide the service. Sherpa's 2015 Executive Coaching Survey indicated that there has been a steady increase of executive coaches for the last three years with an anticipated growth of 23% in 2015. This section discusses the demographics of the executive coaches who were selected and interviewed for the study.

The 15 participants consisted of 10 females and five males; all of the participants were white or Caucasian. The average age of the participants was 60 years old; the youngest was a 46-year-old male and the oldest was a 75-year-old female. Table 4.1 is a summary of participant demographics.

Table 4.1

Demographics of Participants

Average Age	Gender	Ethnicity
60	Female – 67% Male – 33%	White/Caucasian - 100%

Seventy-three percent of the participants were certified as executive coaches through a coaching specific training program. Thirty-three percent of executive coaches were ICF accredited, which is an industry-recognized achievement that solidifies the professional identity of the coaches. Out of the 27% of the participants who were not certified as coaches, 20% were certified in an assessment.

It was noted that 80% of the executive coaches were certified in an assessment with the credentials to administer the assessment. Out of this 80%, there were several who were also distributors for an assessment. The 20% who were not certified in an assessment were certified or accredited as executive coaches. Whereas one executive coach was neither certified as an executive coach nor by assessments, she was accredited by Board Certified Coach (BCC). She also taught certification courses for a university, and offered more than 30 years of professional experience, 20 years in executive coaching, and 25 years in using assessments.

The executive coaches ranged in academic degrees, with five participants (33%) holding a bachelor's degree, six participants (40%) holding a master's degree, one participant holding a J.D. degree, one participant holding a Specialist (Ed.S.) degree, and two participants (13%) holding a Ph.D. Table 4.2 is a summary of participant education and credentials.

Table 4.2

Participants Education and Credentials

Education	
Bachelor's Degree Master's Degree J.D. Specialist Ph.D.	33% 40% 1% 1% 13%
Credentials	
Executive Coach Certification	73%
Executive Coach Accreditation	33%
Assessment Certification	80%

Participant Profiles

A brief synthesis of the 15 participants in the study is provided in this section, along with their demographics. Appendix F provides additional information gathered from the demographic sheet completed by each participant. To honor confidentiality, they were asked to give a pseudonym of their choice, some did and those we did not were given a random name from a list of names for their gender on the internet.

Aaden

Aaden is a 48-year-old Caucasian, male with more than 15 years of experience as an executive coach. He runs his own practice where he has been practicing for eight years. He has more than 25 years of professional experience. Aaden holds a terminal degree (Psy.D.) and has a clinical psychology background. Although he spent some time practicing in the psychology field, he described how he got "burned out" and discovered his passion was "helping people, going to the next level, reaching their potential" and realized that his goals would not be achieved in the clinical field. He heard about executive coaching and went on to research the field and realized, "this is for me," it's all about people's potential, how do you help people sort of self-actualize from a Maslow perspective and working with really successful, high functioning adults was exciting to me.” His executive coaching vision is defined as “the idea of working with people who influence the lives of hundreds or even thousands of people’s lives, (i.e., senior leaders in organizations). If I can transform the leadership in an organization that has hundreds or thousands of employees, then I’m really leveraging my skills set.”

Aaden further explained how committed he was in supporting leaders and also being the best executive coach he could be. He participates in continuing education and learning new assessments on a regular basis. He had just returned from a training when I interviewed him. He is certified as a coach and holds a PCC accreditation from ICF. He has been using assessment tools for more than 20 years. He is certified in seven assessment tools to administer several including individual and team assessments and he is also a distributor for DiSC.

Angie

Angie, a 63-year-old Caucasian female, has more than 12 years of experience as an executive coach. She holds an Ed.S, a specialist degree in Executive Development. Angie has spent most of her 35 years of professional experience in Human Resources Development, focused on training and development. As she took on succession planning, focusing high potential population and the senior executives, she felt like OD work “kind of started to flourish.” She was doing coaching in her work “although….it was coaching skills but it wasn’t the coaching as we know as executive coaching today.” Having had the experience from corporate America, she left to start her own practice, which she has been doing for over 12 years.

Angie is not certified as an executive coach and holds certifications in seven assessments. She said she felt that “I am at the end of my career and so I didn’t want to get certified,” as a coach. However, she is accredited through Board Certified Coach (BCC) to “prove” that she is certified since it has come up in conversations with clients. In addition to her experience, assessment certifications and accreditation, she teaches for the coaching certificate at a major university.

Anne

Anne, a 63-year-old Caucasian female with more than 15 years of experience as an executive coach, has 30 years of professional experience. Anne holds a Master's in Human Resources. Her background included working as a social worker and she then shifted into different human resources related roles. She expressed her enjoyment in one-on-one interactions to support people. She discovered that "the other talent I had, you know, one on one communications and was always told that people are always comfortable talking to me and I tend to help them bring out things and they reveal more, talk to me, come to me and that I make them feel more confident, those kinds of things, the one on one."

Anne participates in continuing education on a monthly basis, attending industry-related webinars and meetings at the local ICF coaching association, where I met her. She is certified as an executive coach and not certified in the assessment tool she uses. She has used the assessment tool for more than 16 years and indicated that she knows how to apply it and interpret it with her client.

Bella

Bella is a 68-year-old Caucasian female with more than 15 years of experience as an executive coach. She has more than 40 years of professional experience. She specified her passion for coaching: "I have been coaching for many, many years. I didn't know what that was called." Bella holds a Master's in Education with a focus on Adult Education Program Management, Education and Business. She is certified as a coach through several organizations and also holds a PCC accreditation from ICF. She has more than 20 years of assessment tool usage experience and is certified in more than15 assessments.

Bella learned about coaching through a colleague who needed a participant to coach while going through her certification. She chose to be coached and she says she became a coach by being coached. She participates in continuing education classes at least six to 10- times a year through her local ICF local chapter, tele-seminars and other advance coaching trainings. In response to her participation to expand her learning, Bella indicated she is a very well known in her community. Although she was a referral to me, I knew of Bella through the local ICF coaching association, where she was the president of the chapter several years ago. When being interviewed, she talked about how “my husband says that I am totally certified (laughs), I don’t need anything else and he’s right but it doesn’t hurt.”

Daisy

Daisy is a 53-year-old Caucasian female with more than 15 years of experience as an executive coach. She holds a Bachelor’s degree and comes to executive coaching with more than 30 years of professional background. Her professional background included working within human resources, mainly supporting the senior executives. She discovered her skills and interests in “enabling and helping those leaders get the results that they want and quite often, while I connect with the actual business content, what I really love to do is help them consider the human impact and dynamic.”

Daisy participates annually in continuing education for her business sustainability in coaching or assessments. Although she is certified as an executive coach, she is in the process of being accredited through ICF. She has been using assessment tools for 20 years and is a certified in five assessments. She believes that “you can’t just have one assessment and say, ‘this is what I use.' So, I think having the ability and being pretty familiar with these different assessments helped me kind of pinpoint it both for the culture of the corporation but also for what they person is looking to get and to need."

Darren

Darren, a 46-year-old Caucasian male and the youngest participant in the study, has more than seven years of experience. He comes into the field with a Ph.D. in Linguistics, 25 years of professional experience and seven years in running his own practice. Darren had a coach during his career transition and became curious about coaching and went into corporate training. During his tenure in corporate training, he started "formulating one of my beliefs about coaching and learning in general which is learning is easy, unlearning is hard." He stated that he did not have the experience of really supporting those he trained so he chose to leave that environment and started his certification to become a coach.

Darren is a certified executive coach along being PCC accredited from ICF. In addition, he is certified in five assessments. He has been using assessments for more than 10 years with his clients. Darren described being a true believer in assessments, exploring all types from those that are researched and validated to those that are on the spiritual realm. When discussing why he loved working with assessments, he stated: "The assessments can help to inform and guide their work as they interact with their world and also how I interact with the client so that I can make sure that I'm speaking their language."

Jasmine

Jasmine is a 52-year-old Caucasian female with more than 11 years of experience as an executive coach and a 20-year professional ground. She holds a Master's of Science in Professional Counseling. Her journey to executive coaching came due to her experience with an executive coach during her career transition. She wanted to be an influence in others as much as her coach had been during her career shift. Jasmine explained that she went on to get her degree in professional counseling to support her interest in human change.

Jasmine participates in ongoing continuing education in leadership and personal development along with assessment mastery. She is trained and certified through various coaching programs. She has been using assessment tools for 11 years and is certified in eight assessment tools. She uses assessments because she thinks “assessments were immensely helpful to me in really helping me understand who I am and so because I’d had such great experience with assessment and also training as counselor, you do a lot of study on the use of assessments and instruments.”

Jayden

Jayden is a 60-year-old Caucasian male with more than 15 years of experience as an executive coach. He holds Bachelor’s degrees in Psychology and Economics. Jayden has been practicing as an executive coach in his own practice for 15 years. He indicated that his 30 years of professional experience enrich his experience as an executive coach. He comes to the field of coaching from his experience with his mentor, stating, “He taught me about how to manage people and how to mentor people and I took those lessons to heart and then sort of became self-educated, if you will, in the process of understanding people.”

He explained how his passion to understand the workforce and how to motivate people brought him to use his experience and background to author a book to support employees to find the right environment for themselves at work. He explained his belief that one is responsible for creating the environment that allows them thrive and for creating happiness for themselves. Although he is certified in an assessment tool and has been using assessment tools for 25 years, he does not have a certification in coaching. He constantly learning through reading and researching.

Jaylinn

Jaylinn is a 67-year-old Caucasian female with more than 28 years of experience as an executive coach and more than 28 years of professional experience. She mentioned: “I’m a problem solver when you look at my Myers Briggs and I’m INTP as problem solver.” Her background afforded her the opportunity to go into the coaching professional, as she voiced: “I was always in positions where it was my job to help other people. And for me, it was just kind of natural…people would come to me and sit down with me and talk about, “Well, how do I do this?” and I said to you before we started recording, I’ve been doing coaching activities since before they called us coaches.” Jaylinn holds a Master’s in Social Work/Group Dynamics. She has been working in her own practice for 17 years. She is not certified as a coach, although she has more than 60 hours of coach training. She is been using assessment tools for 28 years and is certified in five assessment tools and is familiar with about three.

Jaylinn expressed that she loves coaching and that it is all about the client, meeting the client where they are. She further explained that “What I find very important is people understanding what their impact is on others especially as they move up in an organization and people are often times not aware of that which is how I got into using assessments and other kinds of things.” She does participate in continuing education classes, ranging from Wharton School of Business, Coachville, self-awareness classes and through her membership in ICF.

Kiersten

Kiersten is a 67-year-old Caucasian female with more than 14 years of experience as an executive coach with more than 15 years of professional background. She has a Bachelor’s of

Education, which she used to teach. Her interest in coaching came unexpectedly while at Case Western Missouri University. While completing a yearlong certificate, she was exposed to one the professors, Richard Boyatzis, who has written lots of books with Daniel Goldman on Emotional Intelligence and was discussing coaching. She was intrigued with the idea of coaching, contacted him, was trained, and four months later she was coaching. She described that in her practice "what's most important is what's most important to the client rather than to me."

She participates in continuing education on a yearly basis in coaches training or assessments. She is certified as an executive coach, holding a PCC accreditation from ICF and Case Western University. Kiersten has 14 years of using assessments and is certified in three assessment tools. Her interest in using assessment is to "really help the client to get why they're behaving they are so that in my experience that helps the change and the shift, the sustainable."

Louis

Louis is a 69-year-old Caucasian male, the oldest in the study, with more than eight years of experience as an executive coach. He has more than 46 years of professional experience and has been in business for himself for eight years. Louis has a Master's in Business Administration and a Masters in Fine Arts. Louis has worked in various industries throughout his career, largely in leadership and management positions. The thing that he discovered that what he liked "best about it was helping organizations and developing people within those organizations, helping people get as good as they can at what they do which obviously helps me as a manager and leader in what I need to get done."

Once he discovered that he enjoyed executive coaching and he got certified, Louis has decided to solely focus on executive coaching. He participates in continuing education on an annual basis. Although he is not certified in an assessment he has been using assessments for eight years and is familiar with more than five assessments that he uses in his practice.

Manuel

Manuel is a 57-year-old Caucasian male with more six years of experience as an executive coach and more than 30 years of professional experience. He holds a Bachelor's of Science in Marketing. Manuel came into the field because of his experience with using a coach during this professional career. As he was restructured during the recession, he started asking himself: "What is it that I really want to do next?" He worked with a coach and realized his passion. "I really had an opportunity to really decide, 'What have I enjoyed doing in my career?' and it was all about working with individuals, challenging their thinking, helping them grow, leading teams of people in different directions."

He participates in continuing education two to three times per year in assessments, coaching or facilitation based trainings. He is a certified coach, going the route of being certified via higher education. Manuel holds his certification through Kennesaw State University in Georgia. He has been using assessment tools for over six years and is also certified in seven assessment tools.

Posha

Posha is a 65-year-old Caucasian female with more than 20 years of experience as an executive coach. She comes to the field of coaching with more than 30 years of professional experience and Bachelors of Science in Communications. She then worked as a speech therapist for a while and ended up working for an organization in their training department. Posha described that as a trainer, she listened to people sharing their issues one on one, which led her to working with individuals and supporting them. Transitioning into talent management, she became very involved with the identification and development of high potential people throughout the organization. She did a lot of 360 assessment work with the executives. Based on these experiences, she has created her own 360 assessment that she uses in her coaching practice.

Posha participates in continuing education through her professional associations such as the Center for Creative Leadership. Although she took training courses in coaching, she is not certified as an executive coach nor is she certified in an assessment. She stated why she uses assessment tools: “I can get the whole focus of how other people view that individual which could have a real impact on the types of coaching that I do.”

Princess

Princess is a 75-year old Caucasian female with more than 15 years of experience as an executive coach and more than 30 years of professional experience. She holds a Master’s degree in Counseling. Nancy started out as a training professional, where she worked in the area of communication skills and leadership skills, which was the foundation of her business for many years. It was this experience that led her into coaching along with some other personal development training. She is a certified coach and she is certified to teach the certification courses in which she is certified.

She is certified in one assessment and is also a distributor for the organization. She is very knowledgeable of the assessment and is well known as someone who used that assessment tool. She is engaged in continuing education and learning along with teaching, and is also known in the coaching and training community. She currently is teaching a certification for DiSC through the local ICF coach’s chapter. She discusses how she got a “foothold” in the assessment area from her previous work experience where they used assessments and it was a part of her job to support clients in working through their goals.

Trixie

Trixie is a 54-year-old Caucasian female with more than 10 years of experience as an executive coach. She holds a Juris Doctor (JD) degree with more than 25 years of professional experience. Trixie's professional history has always included some sort of coaching, whether as an attorney or working in human resources. When she was in human resources, she determined Fwhat her real interest was "developing employees and getting them to use their strengths, leveraging their strengths and helping them figure out where they wanted to go in their life and in their careers. "Her employer sent her to formal coaching school where she learned the mechanics of executive coaching and started an internal coaching program.

Trixie participates in continuing education classes about four or five times per year ranging from coaching skills, employment law or human resources. She is an ACC accredited coach with ICF and holds three assessment certifications. She believes in meeting the client where they are and uses assessments in her practice because "I think assessments are good as a way to give people a window that they might not otherwise have been able to look through."

Themes of the Study

The analysis of the data brought forth themes that addressed the research questions and also yielded insights into how executive coaches learn from and use assessment tools in the coaching process. This section discusses the five themes that came about from the data analysis. These themes are supported by the rich verbatim excerpts from the participants' interviews. The five main themes (see Table 4.3) that emerged within the findings were (1) willingness to learn, (2) building trust, (3) establishing the foundation, (4) turning up the volume and (5) ensuring accountability.

Table 4.3

The Five Main Themes and Researched Questions Addressed

Research Question	Theme	Sub-Theme	Research Question Addressed
RQ 1: What do executive coaches learn from the use of assessment tools in their coaching process? RQ 2: In what ways do executive coaches use the learning gained from assessment tools to navigate the coaching relationship?	Willing to engage in continuing education to master skills.	• Assuring knowledge formally • Gaining proficiency informally	Lifelong development included not just self-learning but to be a better executive coach for their client; and to be able to offer clients a new perspective, a tool or model to help them further understand themselves.
RQ 2: In what ways do executive coaches use the learning gained from assessment tools to navigate the coaching relationship?	Building trust between the coach and client.	• Constructing rapport • Developing validity and credibility	Assessment tools form a foundation for trust between the client and the executive coach by cultivating a balanced footing - fostering emotions of security and credibility.
RQ 1: What do executive coaches learn from the use of assessment tools in their coaching process?	Establishing the foundation for the coaching relationship.	• Forming common language • Creating self-awareness and insight	A solid foundation influenced the coaching process by providing information to understand the client from the beginning, which resulted in establishing the groundwork of the coaching relationship
RQ 1: What do executive coaches learn from the use of assessment tools in their coaching process?	Turning up the volume to produce results.	• Making it about them • Zeroing in • Shining the light • Gaining perspective	Learnings from the assessment tool influenced the coaching process by validating and backing up the process.
RQ 2: In what ways do executive coaches use the learning gained from assessment tools to navigate the coaching relationship?	Ensuring accountability to cultivate change.	• Benchmarking • Leveraging objective data	Assisted in creating framework for insights, follow-up and actions steps.

Willingness to Learn

According to the findings, executive coaches used diverse ways of learning approaches to support their passion to learn. The analysis showed that all 15 of the executive coaches engaged in some type of formal and informal learning method to navigate their training as a coaching professional. Jasmine, a 52-year-old female with more than 11 years of experience as an executive coach, is certified as an executive coach and in several assessments. She participated in ongoing learning in the areas of leadership, personal development, and assessment mastery. In her interview, Jasmine echoed many of the other executive coaches' sentiments about their passion to learn, not just for self-learning but to be a better executive coach for their client; and to be able to offer clients a new perspective, a tool or model to help them further understand themselves. Jasmine expressed her passion for lifelong development as an executive coach:

> I try and give clients tools and models and data sets that help them frame the world in a way that they can begin to accelerate actions and decisions that are going to help them be successful. So, that's why I am always kind of scanning the universe with frames and models to kind of say, 'What might put this in the term of helping the client understand the world in a way that will help them navigate relationships or eliminate behaviors that might be hindering or holding them back?'

Also of great importance among the executive coaches was the learning and understanding of models that strengthened their understanding of human behavior to support the client, along with the models that supported the assessment that they were using. This learning process helped them to be more efficient in explaining assessment tool feedback along with helping the executive coaches personally understand the theory behind the assessment. Kiersten, a 67-year-old female with more than 14 years of experience as an executive coach, is certified both as an executive coach and an assessment administrator. She continues to pursue her understanding of assessment mastery, stating:

> From being trained in assessment tools, I have learned different models of why people do what they do or why people behave the way they behave and that brings clarity to me around what I'm seeing in the field. That's why I'm so excited about learning stuff because I'm going to learn

> something new about how this behavior… how this behavior down here is also driving that behavior directly… And it's so true but it's a visual. It's a model that somebody can look at and go, 'Oh, of course.' So, it's about learning the theory that the model is created on.

In their interviews, the executive coaches repeatedly expressed their passion for learning. These methods of learning were identified as formal and informal. These ranged from the formal learning gained through the certification and training process to the informal learning, which included experiential learning, self-directed learning, collaborative learning, and self-reflection.

Assuring knowledge formally. The majority of the executive coaches (80%) reported being certified in an industry-accepted assessment tool and/or ICF-approved coaching program. According to the participants, having this formal process of certification supported their learning process, allowing them an understanding of the procedure for evaluating and describing an assessment tool and navigating the mechanics of executive coaching. The formal learning from certifications and training gave them self-confidence and trustworthiness as an executive coach, and the responsibility of choosing an assessment and giving meaningful and tangible feedback to the client.

The executive coaches expressed that they needed assurance in their knowledge and competence in order to gain their clients' trustworthiness. Holding a certification was a key contributor in an executive coach's self-confidence. As indicated by Posha, Anne, and echoed by several participants, such as Manuel who commented that, "I think it's very beneficial and I know that it's helped me become a better coach."

Not only did certifications provide self-confidence, but having the training also boosted the trustworthiness of an executive coach. As was the case for Princess, who is a certified executive coach and later became a certified instructor for the course in which she was certified. She is also certified by and is an authorized distributor for DiSC, stating that, "It lends and builds credibility. If you go in there and have a product that's been well recognized and supported and people tend to respect that and it gives some structure to your coaching."

Another finding was the need to ensure that the executive coach understood the assessment, how to administer the feedback, the validity and reliability of the assessment, and how and when to use it, all in support of making sure the client was getting what they needed in regards to good assessment feedback. This finding was consistent among the executive coaches, regardless of certification and training experience. Kiersten stressed that, "You really have to study it, you really have to put some time into it or you're just going to be skimming the surface." Angie stated that the "other thing that is so important though is to understand not just the instrument but to understand what they're based on and understand what they're testing for."

The executive coaches took their role very seriously and stressed their ownership and accountability in making sure that the assessment they used was solid, researched, and valid. Another aspect that was vital to them was how the executive coach reviewed and presented the feedback from the assessment. Because the executive coaches attended training on the assessments to ensure they had the knowledge, it was really important to them to have quality training from the assessment company in which they were certified. Angie, certified in administrating several assessments, agreed with the idea of being responsible when selecting an assessment:

> I think it's important for coaches, I think they have a responsibility to say, 'Okay, was this developed by some great consultants in their office with their bunny slippers on? And then listing a hundred questions and then dividing them into a four box matrix? Or was this developed and has substantiated research behind and validity behind it?' And I think there is lots of tools on both of those sides.

Kiersten, who is certified to administer several assessments, speaks for other executive coaches as well when she explains the need for the assessment to be researched and validated:

> I feel strongly that assessments need to be backed by a lot of research. Myers-Briggs is, Kolbs, the ESCI is, like a zillion research studies on that. But I think that is really

> important instead of somebody's just brilliant idea that it's half-baked maybe, maybe not. Maybe it would be good if they got some research behind it. But I want that to prove to me that it's worth my time because you can't just pick up an assessment and understand it well enough to administer it and give feedback. You really have to study it, you really have to put some time into it or you're just going to be skimming the surface. And if it's not worth the time and in a coaching engagement because time is so important when you're working with the top executives.

Being able to deliver the feedback to the client in a positive and empowering way was a major concern for many executive coaches, so having the knowledge from the training and certification was very vital to the process. Princess and Angie, both certified in administrating assessments, discussed the importance of delivering the information from the assessment results:

> Princess: All tools are useful if people really know how to interpret them and understand them and have people hold themselves accountable for using the information from that tool.
>
> Angie: I think how the coach delivers the message [interpretation of the assessment] is very important.

The participants significantly discussed how formal learning from certifications and training gave them self-confidence and trustworthiness as an executive coach, along with responsibility in choosing an assessment and giving feedback to the client. Although the participants did gain knowledge through the formal process of learning, they also engaged in informal learning.

Gaining proficiency informally. Executive coaches unanimously indicated that they were passionate about learning. The totality (100%) of the executive coaches have learned about their aspiration for the profession from previous experiences in their professional background. They continue to leverage their expertise from their past experience to enhance their executive coaching, along with self-directed learning and using their community to support their learning. The executive coaches described using self-reflection as a means to learn to be an effective executive coach. The executive coach participated in ongoing informal learning by participating in experiential learning, self-directed-learning, collaborative learning and self-reflection.

Experiential learning. The majority of the executive coaches learned about and entered the field of executive coaching from their previous professional background. There were 12 out of 15 executive coaches who stated that their interest in the profession and/or using assessments came from their professional background and previous on-the-job experience. Louis, who has more than 46 years of professional experience, commented that his previous professional background lead him into executive coaching:

> I worked in a number of industries throughout my life and largely in leadership and management positions…I've had a lot of management and leadership experience which I really enjoyed doing. One of the things that I found that I like best about it was helping organizations and developing people within those organizations, helping people get as good as they can at what they do which obviously helps me as a manager and leader in what I need to get done.

All of the executive coaches expressed that they were invigorated by having worked in organizations where they helped support and develop others. Trixie, with more than 25 years of professional experience stated:

> After having been in HR for many years, like nine or ten years of HR, I really determined that the parts that interested me were the parts that had to do with developing employees and getting them to use their strengths, leveraging their strengths and helping them figure out where they wanted to go in their life and in their careers.

This was echoed by Manuel, with more than 30 years of professional experience:

> I had a lot of experience in sales and marketing, working with individuals leading teams. I really had an opportunity to really decide, 'What have I enjoyed doing in my career?' and it was all about working with individuals, challenging their thinking, helping them grow, leading teams of people in different directions.

Angie, with more than 35 years of professional experience, gives her history:

> Have come up in training and development and as OD kind of started to flourish, I started moving into that and my major responsibility towards the end of my career inside corporate America was doing succession planning and mostly focused on the high potential population and the senior executives and doing development with those folks

Posha, with more than 25 years of professional experience, discussed how she entered the profession of training and development after college and how the skilled she gained in the business world has transferred over to her executive coaching business. She, along with several other executive coaches, expressed how they took what they learned and became better at it, implementing their past experience in their executive coaching business:

> I ended up getting into the business world [after college] and getting into a training department. When you become a trainer in some ways you people will tell you their issues one on one and so I kind of got pulled into that area… I started what was called talent management and we created our own 360 work. So, I'm pretty knowledgeable in 360 work. We did a lot of 360 with our executives. And so I became very involved with the identification and development of high potential people throughout the organization.

The executive coaches shared how they acquired competencies as a result of their coaching experiences. Many of the executive coaches stated that they were able to learn and see ways to better use assessments along with supporting their executive coaching process. Aaden, who has more than 15 years of coaching experience and is certified as an executive coach and assessment administrator, discussed how he informally learned about assessments early in his career:

> This is what sold me on assessments and had me change even my business model to always use assessments. And that is, in the beginning when I was coaching, I used to have it be an option, if people wanted to spend more money to do the assessment that was considered optional. And what I started to notice in my practice was that certain clients seemed to be getting farther faster in less time. And so in three months, let's say of coaching, I started to notice, 'What is it with these clients different from those clients and why do they seem like they're doing better faster?' and then I couldn't really figure it out and then one day, 'Oh, my gosh, who has done the DiSC upfront and who waived it?' and I discovered that the people that accelerated quicker, not always but more often significantly so were the people that chose to do DiSC in the beginning. So, that's where I really realized the value of it.

Informal learning has supported the participants to be sounder as executive coaches, for they learned how to connect with their clients beyond the assessment by using all their wisdom and knowledge from their previous experience. There were several executive coaches along with Posha—who is not certified as an executive coach or in an assessment—who expressed how over the 25 years that she has been coaching, she has learned how to use the assessments and yet not solely rely on them:

> If you'd asked me 25 years ago, I think my answers to your questions would have been significantly different. I would have told you that assessment tools are really, really, really important because the data that I'd get from that would so help me form the way the way I was going to work with a client. I think that now that I've been using assessment tools for twenty-five years. I have learned that they're not the end-all. That I have learned when to use them, when not to use them and that a lot of the information that I get as an experienced coach, I'm pretty intuitive, I pretty much pick up on it anyway.

Although 80% of the executive coaches were certified, a few, who were not interested in being certified, said they had a large amount of experience (between 12-28 years) and did not need the certification. They chose not to be certified and to let their passion and experience guide their executive coaching careers. Angie, who is not certified but is certified to administer several assessments, comments on her experience and justification:

> And then about six years ago, seven years ago, people started saying, 'Are you certified? Are you certified?' and I am at the end of my career and so I didn't want to get certified but somebody asked me if I'd do some teaching for the certificate at NYU and I took that on because I thought….so teaching executive coaching and life coaching. And I took that on because if anybody asked me if I was certified I could tell them that I teach the certificate at NYU and maybe that would carry some weight instead of being certified (laughs). So, I'm so old that the criteria…I'm teaching it as opposed to getting the certification. And also then…another organization. The Center for Credentialing & Education (CCE) they started doing a the Board Certified Coach (BCC) which is a board certified coach and so I did that certification because they had just started and so it was an easier certification process for me to go through to be quite frank. I just had to prove that I had done the things and so it was an easier certification for me to go through and not have to spend a lot of time or a lot of money kind of starting from scratch.

Although Jaylinn started the executive coaching certification process, she was mentored to let her experience speak for itself and did not get certified as an executive coach. She is, however, certified in administrating an assessment:

> I took a course from CoachVille. I said [to a mentor], 'Do I really need to go take some university course or whole certification thing? I've been doing this for twenty-five years,' and she said, 'No, we need more coaches like you who have the experience of working with people and creating solutions and assisting people and analyzing and delving and supporting' and so I didn't. I have taken individual courses since then. I just kind of kept doing…I love coaching, it's my favorite thing to do but I am not certified in a particular school.

On the contrary, Anne, while certified as an executive coach, is not certified as an assessment administrator. She talks about her on-the-job experience and how that supports her development when it comes to interpreting an assessment. This was reiterated by several coaches:

> The experience at the consulting firm using the Myers-Briggs was extremely influential in my development with using MBTI because I just got so much insight. I have not ever been certified because I didn't feel I needed to. I only had one client that actually asked me that…someone yesterday, in fact, for the first time ever, 'Are you certified to interpret it?' which I felt was shocking because I've never been asked it. I've always felt like I had such a deep level with it that I didn't really need to. But I love using it [assessment tool].

*Self-directed learning***.** Motivation to learn is a key indicator in the success of an executive coach. In the interviews, the executive coaches expressed their enthusiasm and desire for continued self-directed learning. The love for learning was repeated by all of the executive coaches interviewed. They discussed how they were voracious learners and avid readers, who were constantly on the lookout for anything that would enhance their ability to learn about human behavior or any tools that would help them work with their to clients be more successful. Their reading included books, trade journals that discussed different assessments, leadership journals, and websites. They participated in masterminds, classes on mastery in assessments and or coaching, and personal/professional development. Bella, who indicated that she participates in continuing education at least six to 10 times per year, stated the sentiments of the majority of participants: "It's terrible, Rubina. I love learning!" Jaylin, who participates in continuing education activities throughout the year, stated:

> I have read about all of the different types of both instruments and so I love learning about human behavior, you talked about wanting to learn…I want to learn all the time

> and that's one of my goals. I'm always trying to read up on Harvard Business Review and different leadership journals and just always trying to stay abreast of what is out there and trying them and testing them and seeing if they're relevant and useful. [Believes in] Learn something new every day.

*Collaborative Learning***.** The executive coaches described a strong sense of connection, collaboration, and support within the executive coaches' community, where they encouraged each other in their learning and expansion as coaches and professionals. It was discovered through the interviews, observations, and analysis of the data that they assisted each other in administering assessments and knowledge sharing, whether it occurred one on one or via local ICF Chapter meetings and conferences. ICF is a non-profit organization dedicated to professional coaching. It is recognized as the world's largest coaching organization that provides training and continuing education. The goal of the organization is to preserve the integrity of the coaching profession through internationally accepted professional standards. The standards include having three levels of accreditation. Associate Certified Coach (ACC), Professional Certified Coach (PCC) Master Certified Coach (MCC) provide coaches with viable criterion content. I have also witnessed the power of their culture of support when I attended an ICF-GA meeting. I was referred to the President of the local chapter by the organization's headquarters, whom I emailed. I was invited to attend the local meeting as a guest to recruit participants for my research. I was introduced from the podium and was allowed a few minutes to discuss my research and need for participants. I was welcomed and felt the support and a receptive attitude from the members. I walked away from the meeting with a list of names of individuals who were interested and others who stated that they would pass along the information to their network. The majority (six out of 15) of the participants in the study came from the ICF community, to which an email was sent by their research department. The participants were eager to help with my research; they were keen to help expand the credability of the profession through research. The data from the participant interviews validated my observations. Angie discussed how she taps into her community of executive coaches:

> I also connect with a lot of other coaches on a regular basis and find out what they're using. In fact, if I want to use a Hogan, I'm not trained in Hogan, I will actually call one of my colleagues to do it and she'll do that with me there and then I will pay her, I mean, the client pays her, in terms of doing the Hogan and doing the debrief so that I don't have to get certified in everything.

Jaylinn and Manuel echoed learning from other executive coaches:

> Jaylinn: Well, mostly from other people like me [when asked how she learns about assessments]. Like I said, I learned about DiSC from Linda who learned it from Stuart. You hear about stuff, you hear about great results that somebody got and it's like, 'Okay, what did you do?' and they'll say, 'I used this assessment, it worked great'…
>
> Manuel: It's probably a combination of talking to other coaches, talking to my partners but also taking assessments. [Learning about assessments]

Daisy, Louis, and Bella agreed that having trusted partners supported them:

> Daisy: I also identified trusted partners that I could access others that I'm not certified in and they could help with that piece of the puzzle.
>
> Louis: If I want to do the larger Myers-Briggs or if I want to particularly the Hogan, I know people who are certified and will do that for a fee.
>
> Bella: There only so many assessments you can be certified in or know so she looks at 'Whom do I know who already knows how to do this that if I felt like I needed it, I could call on them to do it for me, with me?

Going to conferences and learning from colleagues was also noted by several participants:

> Aaden: I go to a conference every single year on DiSC that's two days.
>
> Jaylinn: When we used to go to the regional meetings for DiSC, people would talk about, 'I use this and I used it in this way and it improves this result'…and so I think mostly DiSC and Myers-Briggs, if you're in this field…you just know about them. I don't know how I first heard about them….from talking to colleagues.

*Self-reflection***.** "Know thyself" is a Greek aphorism that asks one to know one's self prior to investigating others. Executive coaches take this teaching to heart. There was strong evidence that the formal process of taking an assessment supported them in self-assessment, allowing them to learn about themselves along with learning about how to support their client. Aaden discussed how getting objective feedback from assessments supports him to grow and be an executive coach and business:

> Learned a lot about myself. It helped me grow faster and more efficiently like getting some of this objective feedback about myself and helping me understand me which helps me own my natural strengths and limitations and decide how I want to manage things that I'm not so good at. …it's learning how I work more efficiently, understanding…even what I do well and what I don't well and so being with people, I'm good with having conversations and building a relationship or a report. So, it's better for me to be out in the street, so to speak, to build business. Some people build their business doing social media and online marketing and that sort of stuff. Some people are great at that and they love doing that, I don't like doing it and it's not what I used to build my business and I'm okay with that.

Princess commented on the importance of executive coaches to understand themselves to be more effective:

> I think that's huge for coaches to really understand who they are and how much they need to flex in order to meet the different styles because each of the different styles needs to be understood if you're coaching them and how can you be more effective if the way you approach the different styles. And so a lot of self-awareness and lots of looking at relationships on a day-to-day basis and kind of figuring out why isn't working or what's working and what makes it work? And so it's just huge, huge awareness.

Princess's view was substantiated by Jasmine and Darren:

> Jasmin: Assessments were immensely helpful to me in really helping me understand who I am.

> Darren: I learned about myself from using these tools. The way I see it, the assessment tools are in many ways about some sort of self-awareness.

This theme examined the executive coach's passion to learn to enhance their knowledge and self-confidence so that they can further support their client to success. The executive coaches used the methods of formal and informal to expand their knowledge. Learning was a large part of the motivation of the participants and their curiosity and investigation about how to be successful executive coaches. The same curiosity, which also helped to build trust with the client to enable the coaching process.

Building Trust

The data established that building trust was pivotal to the executive coaching relationship. Table 4.4 provides a reminder of the subthemes related to what building trust provides when navigating the coaching relationship.

Table 4.4

Sub-Subthemes Related to Building Trust in the Coaching Relationship

Theme	Sub-Theme	Research Question Addressed
Building Trust	• Constructing rapport • Developing validity and credibility	RQ2 - Building trust was fundamental in navigating the coaching relationship.

The participants (six out of 15) provided overwhelming feedback that the use of assessment tools and the resulting data were vital to the cultivation of trust in their relationships with their clients. Trixie confirmed that the use of assessment tools helped with building trust:

> It helps a client feel like they can trust me, I'm not just picking some weird thing out, I'm not randomly making up stuff. I'm saying, 'Okay, here's something that's been run by Gallop for many, many years … that I'm using something that's credible which thereby allows the client to trust me a little bit more.

Jayden, a 60-year-old male with more than 15 years of experience as an executive coach, matched Trixie's sentiment, further validating why using an assessment tool was important for cultivating trust:

> It's a tool to get people to focus on things, right? I mean, if I just sit there and just tell them all of this myself, it's much harder for people to trust and understand but if I'm working from a document that's created by them, then I can work them in a direction that is much more malleable than if I'm judging them in a vacuum.

Assessment tools form a foundation for trust between the client and the executive coach. While the executive coach and the client continue to cultivate their interpersonal engagement, the reputation and validity of an industry-accepted tool provides a balanced footing - fostering emotions of security and credibility.

Constructing rapport. Entering the executive coaching relationship with a rapport was a very important skill voiced by all of the executive coaches. The executive coaches used a range of methods to build rapport. The most common approach used was pre-coaching consultations to predict the amount of effort that would be required to establish rapport. This was important to Aaden who stated:

> I'll always have a dialog with that person directly before I agree to coach them or anything like that because it's really important to make sure there is a good rapport between us and that I'm clear that I can work well with this person and frankly, that I want to work with this person and vice versa, that they feel comfortable with me, that they feel they can trust me, that they have confidence in what I can bring to them as a coach.

The use of an initial report supported the executive coaches in fostering a connection with the client by giving them knowledge in knowing the style or personality of the client. Knowing the style, the executive coach could use the fundamentals of the assessment tool, apply the results to the client's development plan, and use the information to better communicate, express empathy and calibrate the client's behavior. Having this baseline knowledge about the client was reported to accelerate rapport, for the executive coach was able to understand the client quickly and get to the point of the core issues. The executive coach was not understanding her client from an intuitive sense, but from the data that were produced from the client taking the assessment. In turn, the client understood that it was not the executive coach giving his or her opinion; instead the client understood that the information was produced by a valid assessment tool. As Princess confirmed:

> If you go in there and have a product that's been well-recognized and supported and people tend to respect that and it gives some structure to your coaching, as I said before, without any assessment tools, it's just kind of a good idea.

Another trend that was voiced by Aaden and other executive coaches was that assessment tools supported rapport by demonstrating the executive coach's level of assurance and expertise in the field:

> I think people respect assessments as something valuable and important and it adds a level of professionalism and commitment that you're not just hanging out a shingle as a coach and 'Just call me up and we'll talk and I'm going to change your life,' it shows a dedication to using proven tools to accelerate the process and the service of the client getting their results faster and easier.

Developing validity and credibility. Another popular sub-theme among the 15 participants was the role of assessment tools in demonstrating validity and credibility in the executive coaching relationship. All 15 executive coaches mentioned that assessments reinforced their work with the clients. Louis expressed:

> It gives me and the client information, you know, news we can use, that we can believe is real. It establishes a validity and a legitimacy in the relationship. It's not just me saying, 'Well, I think you ought to work on this' or 'Your boss says you ought to work on that.' And it provides an information based platform for goal setting.

Aaden agreed with Louis and discussed the vulnerability part of doing an assessment while being coached and the importance of having credibility:

> I think it helps build credibility. I think that's a really key thing. And so people, early on in a relationship when I don't know them, they don't know me, though we're trying to build rapport and trust with each other, I think when I can sit down and go over a profile and have them see the results and it really is who they are and there is a vulnerability in that.

The executive coaches also benefited, expressing that assessment tools bolstered their confidence and enriched their relationship with client. As indicated by Posha, and echoed by several participants such as Anne, "It's given me more confidence as an executive coach, for one, that validity. It enriches our relationship."

There was a view that the clients were eager to receive some sort of formal validation or initial report that provided data for them to use. There were other participants who stated that not only did the data enrich their communication effectiveness with the client, but it also provided validation for the client in several ways. One form of validation for the client was allowing them to be introspective from an objective lens. As Darren stated, the client can feel like:

> 'There's nothing wrong with me, I'm just the way I am' and so that's part of it. Certainly related to that is just a lot more effectiveness so once they stop trying to do stuff they are bad at and lean more into stuff they're good at, they're going to get more effective and they're going to get happier.

Utilizing the objective data have also helped once-resistant clients overcome reservations about executive coaching, or those reluctant to listen to past constructive feedback. As Jaylinn shared, "I've coached people who were not thrilled that they were given a coach and so that takes something to establish trust, to establish respect." It was more difficult for the resistant client to disregard or deny information that emerged from the assessment tool. While the majority of the executive coaches felt they did not usually have clients who were resistant, they did find that the assessment tool triangulated and validated any potential issues the executive coach may have initially observed. Posha stated:

> If a person has a particular behavior …. I'm going to just say 'he', it just makes it easier than saying 'he/she'…if there is a particular behavior that person doesn't want to change, he feels that it's something that's part of themselves and maybe thinking that I, as an outside coach, maybe viewing this….in isolation. Having something like a 360 or even showing that certain behaviors or personality traits would be indicative of someone who is ISTJ or certain personality on DiSC, it can help support. So, it's not just me, there are other people, there is other instruments that can validate what I'm seeing.

The executive coaches were also adamant that the assessment tool should be reputable within the industry, in order to ensure validity and credibility. Princess and Aaden both expressed that it helps to have a product that is well acclaimed for:

> Princess: It lends credibility. If you go in there and have a product that's been well recognized and supported and people tend to respect that and it gives some structure to your coaching, as I said before, without any assessment tools, it's just kind of a good idea.

> Aaden: With an assessment that's a strong, highly validated assessment, you're not dealing with opinions you're dealing with facts about millions of people who've responded just like you did tend to the have these characteristics.

This was also important to Manuel, who corroborated those opinions and further explained the scientific relevance of the tool:

> I think it just provides a little bit of additional robustness or credibility to what we're talking about. A little more scientific relevance or a little bit more data behind it and I think it really…it gives a little more credibility to some of this stuff.

Furthermore, some of the executive coaches expressed the importance of not only using a credible instrument, but also ensuring that the executive coaches have the ability to interpret. This was very important to many of the coaches because they felt like it was the duty of the coach to guarantee the accuracy of information provided to the client, and in a way the client would be able to interpret and use. This ability would impact both the client and the executive coach, for it reflected on the profession. Several told stories about how they felt that the inability to interpret was a disservice because if the client had a significant amount of data from the assessment, it would be discarded unless someone could help them meaningfully "boil it down." Aaden validated this viewpoint:

> There are a lot of tools out there and I think some are better than others. I think it really is important that the coach discriminates about which tools to use when. And I think one hazard is sometimes coaches will use a bunch of tools but A) either not really know how to interpret and use them or B) just use them because they have them but may not even by in the interest of the client. Or worse, have them take it and not even help the client understand the results which unfortunately.

Building trust was an important part of the process for the executive coach when working with a client. Using assessments played a vital role in fostering rapport and creating validation and credibility in the relationship, affording the executive coach confidence. After the participants had established the footing for themselves, they had to establish the foundation for the client relationship from the information learned from the assessment results.

Establishing the Foundation

Throughout the study, it was discovered that all of the executive coaches frequently used what they learned from the assessment data to establish the coaching relationship. The data supported them by providing foundational information they were able to learn about the client to both build their coaching relationship and to coach the client as shown in Table 4.5.

Table 4.5

Sub-Subthemes Associated with Establishing the Foundation in the Coaching Process

Theme	Sub-Theme	Research Question Addressed
Establishing the Foundation	• Forming common language • Creating self-awareness and insight	RQ1 – A solid foundation influenced the coaching process.

One of the main ideas coaches discussed was how the data provided familiarity with their clients. This familiarity facilitated a foundation on which the executive coaches could understand their clients from the beginning. Having the information from the assessments gave them the ability to diagnose the client's strengths and weakness early on, a notion that was common among the participants. Daisy echoed the beliefs of several other participants when she explained:

> It lays down a foundation to have a discussion and so pretty quickly we can get on the same language and it also helps prompt the conversation and the insight and so you're looking to generate those 'ah-hah' moments and quite understandably and only what I think or what I can ask…I can ask the most powerful questions in the world but sometimes having that assessment can just help add a different angle to the discussion.

A number of coaches learned that knowing the client's type or behavioral style helped them to move through the relationship-building process faster and easier. With this understanding, they knew how to motivate and or communicate with the clients to foster faster results. The majority (85%) of the coaches agreed that having this information accelerated the coaching process on behalf of the client. Jasmine discussed how the data helped to accelerate and streamline the process:

> I'm always open to assessment because I just think it's outright data…I always tell clients, 'We could figure this out and talk about this but it might take us six, seven, eight sessions' but if we get in the data then we can just spend time just looking at it and figuring out what it means and get into the heart of what we really want to do. So, we're focusing on less on the collection and more on the action. And so I think data just accelerates knowledge and so it streamlines it and models it, just so we can look at it differently and begin to take action on it. Speeds up the coaching process.

Although the data did help with cultivating the foundation from the start, according to the findings, the coaches who participated in the study also found that using assessment tools did provide information, which resulted in establishing the groundwork of the coaching relationship. This baseline knowledge included a common language and self-awareness and insight, which facilitated a foundation for which the coaching relationship could succeed.

Forming common language. Within the findings, a prevailing sub-theme in establishing the foundation was the ability to create a common language among the client, the executive coach, and the organization. All of the participants expressed that the data gave them a common language on which to build a foundation of understanding. They also voiced that it was their responsibility to make sure that the client understood the assessment in a way that makes sense to them based on their personality style and who they are. Many of the participants stated that it helped to "simplify complexity." Another point was that a common language "helps them see things," thus supporting the clients in understanding the barriers they may be experiencing. Manuel expressed that it was a tool that was helpful with provisions, and that when using a specific assessment tool, "it kind of sets the expectation around a common language that we can use as we're coaching, as we're exploring, as we're looking deeply into things." Jasmine and

Bella noted the importance of an assessment tool and how the common language supports the client, which was voiced by many participants:

> Jasmine: Sometimes the human behavior of it can feel a little ungrounded and so the data helps people have a common language. Assessments help people often times have a common language to communicate and assess and foster greater understanding across different types, different leadership styles, and different ways of operating.
>
> Bella: They give us a common language so…if I were using DiSC, we could say something about the conscientious quartile and when that would be useful and needed to ramp that up a little bit and we both know what we're talking about. So, I think it gives us a common language.

The common language also aids the coach to explain the assessment results with the client. Anne and Darren discussed how they practice weaving the assessment results into conversations with the client. Anne indicated: "I weave that [assessment results] into the relationship and I find that really helps reinforce the coaching and their better understanding of it." Darren also stated:

> We weave it [assessment results] where it seems to make sense. Where we do the formal debrief of the assessments, we make sure they make sense, we modify them and make it personal and then we set the vocabulary so that moving forward, if we refer back to the assessment result that they remember what we're talking about and it makes sense. And from that point on, it's usually more about 'How do we weave this back in?'

In addition to building individual understanding by using common language, several executive coaches discussed how using a common assessment tool (with associated terminology) across a company also supports the relationships within the organization. The use of the common assessment terminology validates understanding within a company, where everyone speaks the same language and talk about the same competencies. Jaylinn expressed how it cultivated understanding in the organization for better communication:

> Sometimes it's really good to have more than one person in the organization have the knowledge of the assessments, like I said … it creates a common language and people can get along together better.

> They [assessment tools] are both very good for reducing conflict because it's like 'Oh, they're not doing that at me, they're just being them' and with some of them [organization] it gives them a common language so that they [employees] can communicate better, so they can understand each other better and when people understand each other better they do better work, they can often be more productive especially.

Jasmine's opinion parallels Jaylinn's by asserting that when there is a common language, there is understanding:

> Everybody [in an organization] uses it and so when they're managing, leading, talking with groups, they have a common language on 'Are you a D,i,S or C?' When you coach them and begin to talk and understand where they're coming from, it just gives them a platform to know what language, what's your natural human language.

Creating self-awareness and insight. Some executive coaches (four out of 15) mentioned a lack of awareness in their clientele, stating that the majority of the work that they did with them was not technical, but focused more on emotional intelligence due to the client's deficiencies in their interpersonal relationships. Louis commented:

> A lot of people I work with, they're more senior people, they're hard-charging, aggressive people. They haven't spent most of their lives being introspective or being particularly kind (laughs) to put it bluntly. That's not how they got there and so their self-awareness is often low and their emotional intelligence is sometimes leaves something to be desired.

All participants mentioned that self-awareness was key, the "heart" of what assessments fundamentally deliver. Posha explained:

> They [assessment tools] can be useful if the individual you're coaching is not very self-aware, this provides a way for them to get outside information about themselves and so it can hopefully increase self-awareness that in itself is so important. So, that is a wonderful use of the tools.

Self-awareness is the foundation for clients to see how they behave, make decisions, their impact, what they are doing well, how they can improve, and traits they are not even aware of which may impact their effectiveness and outcomes. Assessment tools supported establishing a foundation to help an executive coach learn about a client and for the client to gain awareness and insight into understanding who they are, obstacles to their own effectiveness, and how the coaching would support them in their growth as a leader. Jasmine affirmed that "assessments accelerate the data of self and can help people really begin to understand their greatest strengths and how to amplify those and help them also identify potential shadow sides."

The participants discussed how they learned from the data, which helped them to stay focused and be able to "go deeper" with the client, for it was not just the client stating their needs; they had actual data showing them what needed to be addressed. Manuel talked about how it helped him:

> It's helped me because you can only ask so many questions and you can only ask so many open ended questions but this really helps you focus down and drill down because you've got this piece of awareness, 'Okay, let's explore, let's dig a little deeper around what this is telling us' and so I think it helps us have a little more focus around some conversations.

Trixie and Jasmine reiterated what many participants stated, that the assessment tool gave them data to learn about their client, the ability to better understand them, as well as areas for improvement:

> Trixie: The results of the assessment also give me insight about them although as a coach, I'm not in a position to make a judgment 'yes' or 'no.' However, sometimes the results, depending on what we're talking about in any given session, they may sort of help me shape the question that I might want to ask somebody to help them build some awareness.
>
> Jasmine: The awareness is how do we get the data we need so the clients can begin to see themselves clearly and kind of identify kind of the reality, the guiding vision, and the obstacles. And so the data sometimes can help give us some of the frames to accelerate discussion on what are some of the natural roadblocks that maybe impeding you from being optimally successful or might help us identify the areas that can help you develop kind of your next success.

As noted by majority of the participants, awareness and insights that were discovered about the client were concentrated on interpersonal relationships. Manuel and Aaden clarify that assessments encouraged the client to understand themselves to create insight in how they relate to others. They reaffirmed the awareness and insights that were revealed regarding building productive relationships:

> Manuel: It's really important also recognizing using these tools I think it gives people a great awareness of how they need to flex their style and their approach, depending on other people's styles as well.
>
> Aaden: The goal is to use the information to help people flex and adapt to the situation or the people in front of them to be more effective… that enhances communication, it promotes understanding and it helps people have more confidence in their ability to interact with a range of different styles of people which we all are in an organization setting are dealing with people very different from us and we have to work together.

Establishing the foundation with the client was very important for the participants for it provided them with a common language and also helped them to glean was to support the client to cultivate awareness for their development. The data supported that once the executive coach built the trust in the relationship, it was easier to turn up the volume on the client.

Turning up the Volume

The ability to foster a deeper understanding of the client and also back creating coaching objectives in the development plan for sustainable results was another theme that was echoed by the totality of the participants, a reminder of the subthemes are presented in Table 4.6.

Table 4.6

Sub-Subthemes Related to Turning up the Volume with the Client

Theme	Sub-Theme	Research Question Addressed
Turning Up the Volume	• Making it about them • Zeroing in • Shining the light • Gaining perspective	RQ1 – Learnings from the assessment tool influenced the coaching process.

In the coaches' opinions, data from the assessment tools helped them to understand the client better hence facilitated the ability to turn up the volume, which enhanced the quality of the outcomes (coaching objectives), made them more informed and helped to create better developmental goals and actions. Bella explained that the usefulness of using assessment tools was they allowed "turning up the volume:"

> Coaching is about changing in some way or enhancing or I call it, 'turning up the volume' on some behaviors and 'turning down the volume' on others in order to know what to do, one needs to know what's going on right now. And awareness is a blossoming…. awareness…. there is so much to learn about one's self that assessments are very useful in that way.

Posha expressed the impact also, which was reiterated by other participants, using the tool to support the client's development plan and sustainable results so that it is not another item that gets filed in the drawer as a good idea:

> If you can get the individual to develop a meaningful, targeted development plan from information that they received from the assessment that they're going to work at within the workplace…so you're transferring that knowledge in having them work on something that they've gained from the assessment and putting into play, that is wonderfully impactful. And so it's not just a tool that gets packed away, it's something that is a process and so it continues to live which usually means if there is a way to get a manager somewhat involved and helping the person be accountable for changes in perhaps behaviors, etc., that's a wonderful way to have an impact using the tools of assessment.

Making it about them. Although assessment tools reinforced the ability create powerful coaching objectives and development plan, there was a consistent theme for seven out of the 15 executive coaches. Although the data were there to create an agenda, no matter what it was all about the client at the end of the day. Jayden indicated that, "It's all about them but in context to the rest of the world." Jaylinn assured that, "if they're interested in data, then I'm going to provide data. If what they are interested in is big picture, I'm going to provide big picture." Kiersten confirmed the majority view by declaring that "really what's most important is what's most important to the client rather than to me."

Aaden and Daisy afforded that maintaining a holistic approach was important in meeting the client where they are:

> Aaden: Having a holistic approach is important where the client can really feel comfortable bringing whatever they need to bring to the coaching situation and be able to feel like they can share that in a way that they can process it, digest it, get some perspectives of how to handle it more effectively, can go a long way in the ultimate goal which might be to improve their leadership effectiveness.

> Daisy: The use of the tool helps me as a coach remember this is all about the coachie. You know, it's all about enabling and empowering them to make their change, right? … Also the years of coaching and having a good method of coaching approaches a methodology to follow, you truly learn that this is them…I need to go on their journey, I need to go where they're going, mindful of if it's in a corporate environment, what the agreed upon focus is as well but this is all about them. For me, that's my always learning, to keep myself grounded, that it's not about me, it's about their journey

Zeroing in. Princess and Jayden stressed the necessity of using assessment tools to help zero in on what was needed and wanted by and for the client. Just because the client thought they needed this or the boss may say they need that, ultimately the assessment data spoke:

> Princess: We can really zero in on the areas that are going to be in her best interest to work on. Most people like them [assessment tools] a lot because if you don't use coaching tools you're in the dark as far as areas that people want to work on and so it's a wakeup call for a lot of people to say, 'Oh, this is the way I am. I didn't realize that people came in different ways, I always wondered about that' and so it's a way for them to really zero in.

> Jayden: It's pretty hard to argue with the results considering the people themselves made all of the input into the results. So, it kind of gets people quickly to the spot that says, 'Yeah, I guess that's me because I answered all of those questions' and so you're kind of over that hurdle of trying to argue about who they are and who they're not.

Shining the light. The participants expressed the ability to shed light on what was in the best interest of the client and their goals. Participants discussed that they used assessments to shorten the cycle of gathering information, which helped them to get the data on the client quickly so that they could work on development of solutions and coaching objectives; being able to do this championed the ultimate goal, which was to support the client in achieving their goals. Princess and Trixie discussed the ability to assess and hear what was in the best interest of the client:

> Princess: I think assessments are absolutely core to coaching. I mean, that's kind of what we're doing all the time, isn't it? Helping people assess where they are and where they want to be and move forward. Yes, I think assessment tools are essential to coaching.
>
> Trixie: As a coach, as I listen to them I can hear themes and trends and if I keep hearing things pop up that sound to me like they're struggling with interpersonal kinds of things in terms of what they're doing in their workplace, I think, 'They probably need a little more awareness around emotional intelligence and social intelligence so that they can function better in the workplace.'

Gaining perspective. The participants agreed that they are always using the tools for the purpose of moving their client along the continuum of having an honest, real perspective of who they are, who they are not, who they'd like to be, and not what they think they are but who, at their core, they are. Having assessment data allowed the executive coach to turn up the volume for the client to challenge their perspective to have them be more flexible and adaptable. Angie commented that she used the information from the assessment tool to challenge the client:

> I find I feel as if I have a more solid basis as a coach to challenge their thinking. If somebody is saying, 'Well, I'm good with people' and then I provide observational feedback, 'Okay, you say your good with people, here is how you say you're good with people, you're doing X and Y, but let's take a look at your feedback. The people aren't feeling that. Doesn't mean you're not doing it but the people aren't feeling it. Tell me where that disconnect might be' and a lot of times they have to understand the whole idea of perception, that perception is reality, it's not that you're not intending to step on toes but their reality is that they're feeling as if they're being stepped on, used, discounted, whatever. And I think that kind of feedback is a way for you to be still objective and help them make sense of the feedback.

Manuel agreed with Angie's opinion:

> When we go through coaching we have a tool, there is some information there, it provides the coachee with a new view, kind of get their perceptions about it, maybe challenge their thinking, kind of understand what this might mean for them, understand what this might mean for them in terms of things that are helping them be successful but maybe things that maybe falling…becoming challenges for them.

Aaden stated that it leads the client to understanding and appreciation of differences:

> I'd say as human beings we tend to have a belief system, that has us see the world a certain way, like what's true and not true, what's good and bad, who I am and who I'm not, who other people are and who they're not. What's possible to change, what's not possible to change? That's a filter that we live our lives through. With something like

> what DiSC offers is a chance to see from an objective, non-judgmental way about what's true about me and different for someone else. And not have it be about a judgment where.

The capacity to turn up the volume to have a deeper understanding of the client and create a meaningful coaching development plan for sustainable results was echoed by the totality of the participants. After the participants were able to generate a plan to support the client success, the assessment tool feedback also provided an opportunity for the executive coach to be able to hold the client accountable.

Ensuring Accountability

Having supportive assessment tools to from which to glean information was very important to the executive coaches. One area of interest to the participants was the ability to measure client progress. Table 4.7 provides a reminder of the subthemes related to ensuring accountability.

Table 4.7

Sub-Subthemes Related to Ensuring Accountability

Theme	Sub-Theme	Research Question Addressed
Ensuring Accountability	• Benchmarking • Leveraging objective data	RQ2–Knowledge of objective data validated and backed up the executive coaching relationship.

The executive coaches valued the opportunity to measure initial and desired targets in order to assess the learning of the self-awareness shift in the client. Recognizing these target shifts benefited the executive coach, client and also the client's organization. Bella talked about how the assessment tool feedback should be actively used such that it is:

> Not just a tool that gets packed away, it's something that is a process and so it continues to live which usually means if there is a way to get a manager somewhat involved and helping the person be accountable for changes in perhaps behaviors, etc. That's a wonderful way to have an impact using the tools of assessment. The findings also revealed that using assessment tools

helped the coach keep the client accountable by creating benchmarks and evaluating their progress.

Benchmarking. The assessment tool feedback gave the participants a benchmark around the client and organizational agenda. Most of the participants reflected on the process of using feedback from the initial 360 assessment and subsequently, having the client take the assessment again in six months or as the executive coaching engagement, which was typically six months, coming to an end. Taking the benchmarking approach allowed for the executive coaches to diagnose the shift and also for the client to witness their own progression. Most of the executive coaches explained how at the end of the day, the underlying reason for working with the client was to help them to become more congruent and understand what they might need to be successful. As voiced by Jasmine, "it's about helping people find a place they can be successful and find their fit, grow and lead with impact." Being able to use the feedback from the initial benchmark data – and compare the results to the post-coaching results six months later – allowed for the executive coach and the client to examine the results of the shift. These results included the attainment of new skills, changes in behavior, promotions, departure from a mismatched role, or improvements as a team player.

Jasmine discussed how "…it all comes back to being congruent in who you are and where you stand in your power and I think assessments can help ground us in our power and help us make better choices in terms of how we use the data for being successful for ourselves, being successful for our teams and having great impact on our organization." Princess shared her sentiment and other participants agreed about how pleased they were to see the results of the shift, which was a gift to the client:

> If you start with the 360 and end with a 360, you can see where the shifts have been and then you can decide to do more coaching with them or end the relationship, if they shifted enough and the organization says, 'Everything is fine, thank you' or the person has left which has happened, they have found another job. At first I was feeling guilty about that and now it's like … I've given

them a gift.

There was also another method of using benchmarking – empowering the client with their personal initial assessment data so they could reference it throughout the executive coaching process. Kiersten shared how she would:

> Ask them to go back and review it at the end of the coaching because usually it's been forgotten after three or four months. And when they go back and look at it after several months of coaching they read it in a whole different way and see different things. And so that's always a good exercise, you can get some more out of it. And then I suggest to them to put it on their calendar and six months read it again because it will be yet a third experience.

Leveraging objective data. The participants voiced that they were all "big believers" of using assessment tools for they provided structured objective data that helped them to hold the client accountable. Trixie discussed how the use of assessment tools equipped the client with:

> Objective data that they can work from so that it maybe doesn't feel so scary and it gives them a framework to hang something on if they're trying to make changes and it helps them bring clarity as well as a framework.

The usefulness of this objective data was a concept that was voiced by all of the participants. Princess affirmed the usefulness of the data to help the executive coach hold the client accountable and be able to have people hold themselves accountable for using the information from that tool. Jayden reiterated her sentiment: "I'm working with in assessments tools is not my assessment of them, I'm working with the raw data of their own assessment of themselves."

Having this objective data aids the executive coach to hold the client accountable by assisting the executive coach in creating insights, follow-up material and actions steps. This information extracted by the objective data further aids the executive coach in creating a framework of accountability for the client success. Jasmine talks about how she uses it:

> Because I think that the data points, the data of self, if it's an individual, the data of teams, the more we can give them as a starting point or a framework to start with the

> more we can kind of take broad concepts and put them into more terms that people can grab hold of and take action on.

The participants considered how leveraged objective data to help the client "pierce their illusion" and understand their starting measurements. Jasmine and Darren commented:

> Jasmine: If somebody is saying, 'Well, I'm good with people' and then I provide observational feedback, 'Okay, you say your good with people, here is how you say you're good with people, you're doing X and Y, but let's take a look at your feedback.'
>
> Darren: It's one thing to say, 'No, I'm a very organized person' and believe it but if your boss, your peers and your direct reports give you a two out of five in terms of being organized, well, that's harder to maintain that allusion that something is a certain way because we all construct all of our worlds and our own little view of the world and we all construct our own illusions. And they can be remarkably robust and sometimes that illusion needs to be pierced and sometimes the only way to do that is to aggregate it in data. So, 'seven out of eight people say that you're disorganized,' it's hard to say all seven of them are wrong, I'm right…no, you're probably less organized than you want to be. So, sometimes it can help to deflate their own dysfunctional self-perceptions.

The findings reinforced the effectiveness of measurement and benchmarking as a basis for accountability throughout the executive coaching engagement. The objective data supported the executive coaches in benchmarking client success and establishing the action for client accountability.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter, five major themes were presented from data obtained from semi-structured interviews with fifteen purposefully chosen executive coaches in addition to observations and my field notes. The five main themes that emerged within the findings were (1) willing to engage in continuing education to master skills; (2) building trust between the coach and client; (3) establishing the foundation for the coaching relationship; (4) turning up the volume to produce results; and (5) ensuring accountability to cultivate change. In the first theme, it was uncovered that executive coaching learning involved formal and informal learning. The second theme discussed how the participants were able to establish the foundation with the client. The third theme talked about how assessment tools supported the coach to build trust. The fourth theme was how data collected from the assessment tools aids the executive coach by providing structured feedback and lastly the fifth discovered that using assessment tools upheld the client being held accountable. Overall, the themes show how the executive coaches learn from and use assessment tools in the coaching process.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this study was to understand how executive coaches learn from and use assessment tools in the coaching process. The following two research questions guided the study:

1. What do executive coaches learn from the use of assessment tools in their coaching process?
2. In what ways do executive coaches use the learning gained from assessment tools to navigate the coaching relationship?

In this qualitative research study, a semi-structured interview protocol was used to conduct one-hour interviews with a sample of 15 executive coaches. The interviews of the participants were transcribed and then analyzed using a thematic analysis method to find themes to support the study's research questions. The analysis of the data brought forth five themes that addressed the research questions and also yielded insights into how executive coaches utilize assessment tools in their coaching process. The five themes that materialized from the data analysis were: (1) willing to engage in continuing education to master skills; (2) building trust between the coach and client; (3) establishing the foundation for the coaching relationship; (4) turning up the volume to produce results; and (5) ensuring accountability to cultivate change. This chapter provides a summary of the conclusions related to the research questions for this study. It also provides the implications for theory and practice along with limitations and lastly offering future research recommendations.

Conclusions and Discussion

This study uncovered two conclusions about how executive coaches learn from and use assessment tools in their coaching process. The two conclusions were: (1) the trigger to the learning cycle in the coaching process is the context-specific data retrieved from the assessment tool; and (2) executive coaches use assessment data to turn up the volume with their clients and enact relationship-based interventions.

The trigger to the learning cycle in the coaching process is the context-specific data retrieved from the assessment tool.

Experience is an essential part of what, when, and why adults learn (Knowles, Holton, & Swanson, 1998; Merriam & Caffarella, 1999). Learning is formed by our experiences and an individual is always engaging in learning, whether formally or informally. The executive coaches who participated in this study stated how much they loved to learn and how they were passionate about learning. One participant stated that her goal was "to learn something new every day." This attests that adult learners engage in multiple types of learning continually, with "varying emphases and tendencies" (Livingstone, 2001 p. 5). In this study, the participants discussed their eagerness for learning using multiple learning methods, including formal and informal learning to become masterful and also to be able to invest in the client. They wanted to be grounded and educated in the assessment tool they used to be able to give productive feedback to the client. Hooijberg and Lane (2009) discovered that clients accepted an active role from the coach being able to provide the interpretation of the results and identify patterns along with recommend action steps. One of the advantages of informal learning is that a combination of the right environment and context can support and impact a learning environment (Cofer, 2000). In this study, the emphasis was on the executive coach as an individual learner who (Watkins & Marsick, 2015):

- Encounters a new situation and recognizes it is a departure from other routine examples of the problem at hand and thus calls for learning to adapt what is known or discover a new solution;
- Seeks to understand and reframe the situation based on the context and other relevant features of the problem;
- Probes for alternative solutions and chooses a course of action;
- Assesses gaps between knowledge and skills possessed and those needed to be effective, and acquires new capabilities needed for the solution Implements the solution, monitors results, and reviews intended and unintended consequences;
- Identifies lessons learned and adjusts the framing of the situation and/or actions needed; and
- Re-enters subsequent learning cycles until achieving a satisfactory result. (p. 5)

They also indicated that informal learning occurs through social interactions with others within a context, which is key to comprehending informal learning. When it comes to this study, the context-specific data that the assessment tool provide moves the executive coach towards the learning process. Kilburg (2001) states that the job of a coach is to create behavioral changes in their clients. In order to coach them effectively, the coach needed to include specific behavior modification methods. These methods include among others, corrective feedback, behavioral contracting, reinforcement techniques, and commitment enhancement techniques. Kilburg's (1996) much-cited definition, from review of the literature, of executive coaching stated that it is:

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

Executive coaches used assessment data to create strategies and methods with which to work effective and efficiently with their client to help them set their goals and improve their performance. Their opinion is that assessments are essential for development (Guttman, 2009). An advantage of using assessment tools is that they provide a framework from which coach and client can work and understand strengths in context and in practice (Linley et al., 2010). The research discovered that using assessment tools provided objective data that the executive coach and client would work from to "turn up the volume," giving them a context from which to work to make change and bring clarity and awareness to the client. Pardini (2003) affirmed this stating that executive coaches are employed by executives to guide them through the coaching assessment phase in order to find out where problems lie and to improve the executive's individual performance, as well as to improve the performance of their organization.

Roche and Hefferon (2013) emphasize that structured follow-ups are important in the de-briefing process of an assessment. Structured follow-ups provide extensive development, and if conducted properly could contribute to "goal-attainment, self-efficacy and psychological development" (Roche & Hefferon, 2013, p. 31). The participants discussed how having a framework through the assessment helped them create strategies to understand where to go with the client, helping them adapt their coaching style to meet the client's goals. The data created value for the executive coach to help them see the patterns and trends of their clients. As one participant stated, “I think I’ve learned to be multi-lingual in humanity and so assessments help me kind of know what people natural orientation is, helps me structure coaching.”

Executive coaches use assessment data to turn up the volume with their clients and enact relationship-based interventions.

Each of the executive coaches who participated in this study stated how using assessment tools provided them with data on which they could act. As one participated stated “news you can use.” In other words, they used the information to work deeper with their client. The real-time data gathered from using an assessment tool help leaders with feedback that supports their effectiveness (Koonce 2010). The information obtained from the assessment tool helped the participants to work with their clients in a way that created relevant data and common language that helped them to enact and understand their client deeper in the coaching process.

Relevant data. There are four common phases where executive coaching used data to support the coaching relationship, as noted by Gregory, Levy, & Jeffers (2008): (a) created a one-on-one collaborative relationship; (b) offered relevant data and information is collected; (c) provided data are used as a guide to goal-setting and lastly; (d) afforded feedback. Assessment tools provided relevant data and information on the client for the executive coach, which facilitated effectual coaching within the common phases to turn up the volume with client. All the participants agreed that the data obtained from the assessment tool helped to lay a solid foundation for the relation-based intervention by providing them with key information that they were able to use to sustain their client in the four common phases of executive coaching.

Created one-on-one collaborative relationship. The Executive Coaching Handbook (2008) discusses having mutual trust and respect are needed in the coaching relationship. Joo

(2005), Grant et al. (2009), and Stachowiak (2011) all drew from Kilburg's (1996) much-cited definition of executive coaching which highlighted the mutuality of the coaching relationship. Gehlert et al. (2013) also stated that good coaching outcomes depend on a strong interpersonal connection and stated that, "a positive working relationship between coach and participant has been found to be one of the most important factors for effective executive coaching" to build trust and rapport (p. 79). The majority of the participants found using an assessment tool and the data from the assessment tool in their coaching process to be valuable and important in building trust, credibility, and rapport with their clients. It also helped in adding a level of professionalism and a level of commitment with their clients; along with validity and legitimacy of the executive coach and their coaching process. As one participate stated, "It helps a client feel like they can trust me, I'm not just picking some weird thing out, I'm not randomly making up stuff; that I'm using something that's credible which thereby allows the client to trust me a little bit more." The use of recognized and supported assessment tools gave structure to the coaching and coaching relationship, thereby helping to create a positive and productive one-on-one collaborative coaching relationship.

Offered relevant data. Assessment tools can allow for "a deeper awareness of one's underlying emotion(s)" (Brown, 2003, p. 5). The information that was obtained enriched the experience of the executive coach and the client. As one participant stated, "human beings are messy." The data allowed clients to understand themselves better and also allowed the executive coach to understand the clients better. Fostering better self-understanding allowed the clients to see themselves in a transparent light, and as one participate stated: "one of the greatest things whether you're working with a professional who wants to be better or you're working with a leader who wants to have more impact" is offering them relevant data that can back their needs.

Having the data supports the coaching process by being able to have deeper, meaningful and impactful discussions very quickly, share the same language, and to add a different approach to the discussion when needed to deepen the client awareness.

Provided data to use as a guide to goal setting. The evidence also enhanced the focus and quality of the outcomes in the coaching process. While the primary focus of coaching is to support clients in accomplishing goals, there are times coaches will administer an assessment to support the client in identifying a path (TECF, 2008; Underhill et al., 2007). The majority of the participants agreed that using assessment tools helped them to support the client's goals because without using a coaching tool like an assessment "you're in the dark." Having data from the assessment tool allowed the executive coach to be able to get to the core of the clients' developmental needs more deeply and quickly. Roche and Hefferon's (2013) study established that using assessment tools in the context of the coaching relationship is very important for gaining the benefits of coaching. The assessment tool allowed for the executive coach to "really zero in on the areas that are going to be in their best interest to work on" stated a participant. Stern (2004) stated that executive coaching differs in its distinct style for it has a two-fold focus: to develop executives as leaders, while at the same time helping them to produce sustainable results for the organization. The data allowed the executive coach to enhance the outcomes by setting informed and meaningful developmental goals that aligned with the client and also the stakeholders.

Although the assessment tool provided structured data to set goals and outcomes for the client and stakeholders, ultimately, it was about the client. The coach worked with the clients to develop actions and new thought patterns to have their thoughts, feelings, and actions match what they want to achieve in their personal effectiveness and satisfaction (TECF, 2008). The research uncovered that at the end of the day, data or no data, it was all about the client. The participants were very concerned with making sure that it was not about them and that it was about the client, making sure that their approach was holistic. One participant stated that it was "important that the client can really feel comfortable bringing whatever they need to bring to the coaching situation and be able to feel like they can share that in a way that they can process it, digest it, get some perspectives of how to handle it more effectively, can go a long way in the ultimate goal which might be to improve their leadership effectiveness."

Afforded feedback. The data that are gathered from using assessment tools can help leaders with feedback that supports their effectiveness (Koonce 2010). A majority of the executive coaches used assessment tools to provide structured feedback to aid their client's success and effectiveness. The participants agreed that having data from the assessment tool accelerated the value of coaching for the client by being able to give objective feedback instead of dealing with opinions (of the coach, client and or stakeholders) so the client could better understand their natural tendencies, limitations, and strengths, from the start of the coaching process. Learning has been evaluated and feedback is given through the use of assessments (Boud & Falchikov, 2006). The participants were able to provide the client with a new view and challenge their thinking. As one participate stated, it allowed him to "understand why they (the client) were having the issues that they were having without sort of understanding the context of what your assessment means not in a vacuum but in the real world of how you are wired and how that wiring is compatible with certain people and not compatible with other people. I needed a base in which to generate those conversations."

The feedback that was reported from the assessment tool provided evidence on what was occurring, although generally there might have been an overlap with what the client sees they need to work on and develop compared to what the stakeholders of the organization (boss/HR) sees. Having the objective data from the assessment, where at times there may not be an overlap, allowed the executive coach proficiency in which to work with the client, where otherwise without the data they might not be able to do so.

The benefits and outcomes from the perspective of the client depend on perceptions of the relationship between client and coach, client self-efficacy, and how the range of coaching techniques are perceived (de Haan et al., 2013). Data from the assessment tool support the executive coach establishing evidence for their coaching process and coaching relationship. The information allowed to work deeper with their client creating a common language and data driven approaches that helped them to understand their client, have clarity, objectivity and constructed feedback to help to with the client along with other stakeholders.

Common language. Being able to have a common platform in which to understand, explore, assess and connect with their client was something most of the participants stated as a benefit of using assessment tools. The starting point of a common language helped in simplifying the complexity of the client's needs and helped to understand the client's barriers along with helping them see things that they otherwise could not see. It furthermore provided an understanding of human behavior and the way humans act. Being able to have a common language is a major advantage in using assessment tool as stated by Linley et al. (2010) where that common language can be shared and understood by all the stakeholders—the coach, coachee and also the organization where creating a "culture and mindset shift" (p. 166) is essential in the sustainability of the growth of the individual (Linley et al., 2010). The ability to have and build a common language in which you can communicate with the coaching client helps with change of behavior. This was validated by Joo (2005) who stated that "the common purpose of executive coaching could be reduced to behavioral change, self-awareness, learning, and ultimately career success and organizational performance" (p. 468). One participant stated the importance of understanding and relating to the language of the client by saying “part of my job is to explain the assessments in language that makes sense to the person and that’s based on their personality type and also just based on who they are.” Along with being able to connect and interact with the client effectively, it also “gives kind of a benchmark to touch base on so that we can go back to it,” as one participants stated.

When organizations use a particular assessment tool throughout the company, participants expressed that it cultivated understanding in the company. The participants discussed how important it was to have a common language through the assessment within the organization, where the organization is using the same assessment tool throughout the establishment. This provides a stance in which individuals in the organization are aware because if no common language exists for individuals who are going back into the company after coaching, there is not fertile ground for them to develop. It is important for organizations to create a culture and invest in learning in the workplace this means rewarding, encouraging and being able to support employees to take on learning and also use it in the workplace (Marsick & Watkins, 2003). If there is a culture of the assessment language where everybody in an organization is aware of or using it, it is easier to know where the person is coming from. For example, one participant stated that when a manager is “managing, leading, talking with groups, they have a common language” on which to have effective conversations.

Being able to communicate in a meaningful way is a critical skill for leaders in the workplace (Cox Edmondson & Malik, 2013). The data from the assessment tool help with having a common language in which to communicate, assess, and foster greater understanding across different types of leadership styles and different ways of operating. This helps to reduce conflict because the perception becomes, “Oh, they’re not doing that at me, they’re just being them.” There is better understanding of others, as stated by a participant, when “people understand each other better they do better work, they can often be more productive.” Bougae (2005) conducted a study that asked executive leaders the impact of executive coaching, where they testified it enhanced their interpersonal relationships along with improved team-building skills.

The field of HROD is using executive coaching as a development solution to develop skills for executives (Joo, 2005). As in many helping interventions, a range of tools and techniques are used in the process. The context in which the tools and techniques are used and their purpose are what separate coaching from other helping professions. In the assessment process phase, coaches may utilize an array of the 75 assessment tools or interview their client to obtain information to create awareness (Sherpa, 2014; Tobias, 1996).

Although the benefits of having a framework have been discussed, in the literature there is not a formalized framework for executive coaches to use when working with their client. There is concern in the field of coaching for the lack of evidence based research along with common frameworks that solidify the profession, where they “give coaching some of its much needed credibility by providing a consistent and evidence based framework” (Roche & Hefferon, 2013, p. 32). Linley et al. (2010) stated that in the absence of a framework, “professional practitioners have to depend much more on their own intrinsic models of strengths development, while lay consumers are left to make sense of what can be quite complex information without a guide map to do so” (p. 167).

The research revealed evidence that leads me to propose the following new coaching model, where it is "client-focused, client-oriented, performance-focused, and performance driven" (Benavides, 2008 p. 16). This model considers Kilburg's (1996) detailed five components of executive coaching: developing an intervention agreement, building the relationship, setting expectations, providing behavior mastery and cognitive control, and evaluation and shortness into in a four-step process that is includes using an assessment tool.

Grounded in the assumption that adults tend to learn when it is centered on a problem and when the learning can be applied immediately. This model proposes that learning happens within the framework of informal learning for the executive coach and the client. The model incorporates the social interaction of informal learning where learning can occur with the contextual data from the assessment tool. The combination of these concepts creates an opportunity for executive coaching to be grounded in informal learning theory and context-specific operative data. The integration allows preparation for the coaching process along with establishing the coaching relationship to serve the client. This integration is supported by Marsick and Watkins (2014) who have stated that informal learning can be impacted by interactions and the social context from which an executive coach learns. The model sees the executive coach as someone who learns "from their experience when they face a challenge or problem that is new to them in some way, triggering a fresh look at the situation, followed by a search for alternative responses, taking action, and evaluating results" (Marsick & Watkins, 2014, p. 13). They speculate that due to the open nature of informal learning, executive coach (learner) can find a "trigger" or make meaning "from within the personal frames they bring to the situation and the information they pay attention to in order to focus their learning" (Watkins & Marsick, 2015, p. 4), in this model the "information they pay attention to" would be the context-specific data from the assessment tool, which is the “trigger.” The trigger, which according to Marsick, Watkins, Callahan, and Volpe (2006) is “ a catalyst which instigates the informal learning process” (p. 5). In the new coaching model there is a recognition of an issue (trigger) with the help of the context-specific data gained from the assessment tool and the executive coach proceeds to develop diverse strategies for dealing with the trigger throughout the coaching process. The model materialized from Marsick, Nicoladies, and Watkins’s forthcoming model of informal and incidental learning model. The model, based on situational context, was found to lack social interactions and feedback for the learner (Marsick & Watkins, 2014). Whereas the new coaching model’s cycle is more effective in that it includes feedback for the learner using the context-specific data from the assessment tool that initiates the relationship between the executive coach and client, which creates a relation-based, context-specific partnership in which both parties are engaged in investing time, effort, and skills in the development goals for the client and the organization.

Figure 5.1 illustrates the new relation-based, context-specific coaching model, where the data from the assessment tool serves as a trigger to the learning cycle that allows the executive coach to relationally turn up the volume with their client to build a relation-based context-specific intervention. The context-specific data is woven into the coaching process, helping the coach create behavioral modifications with their clients by corrective feedback (turn up the volume), behavioral contracting (building trust), reinforcement techniques (holding accountable), and commitment enhancement (establishing the foundation) (Kilburg, 2001). The context-specific coaching process for the model includes: (a) building trust; (b) establishing the foundation; (c) turning up the volume; and (d) ensuring accountability.

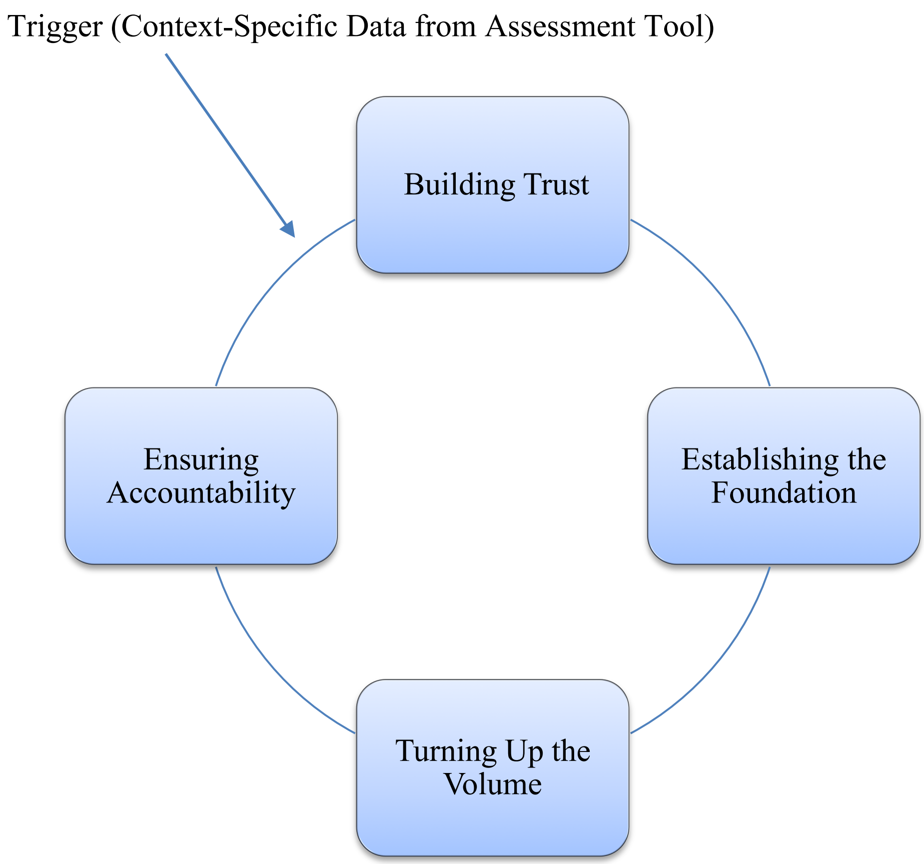

Figure 5.1. Relation-based, context-specific coaching model.

Building trust. Knowles (1975) discussed that the climate for adult learning should be one of being accepted, respected, and supported. O'Neil and Marsick (2014) stated that trust is needed before learning can happen. The climate of trust between the executive coach and the client creates a rapport, where there is validity and reliability in the relationship thus creating acceptance, respect, and support. Having trust in the relationship allows for establishing a partnership where there is a commitment from the executive coach to the client. This allows for the client to be open to challenges and take risks in shifting behaviors along with assistance from the executive coach in the coaching process, knowing that the executive coach is committed to their growth. Gehlert et al. (2013) agree that good coaching outcomes depend on a strong interpersonal connection built on trust and rapport where "a positive working relationship between coach and participant has been found to be one of the most important factors for effective executive coaching" (p. 79).

Establish the foundation. A successful coaching engagement needs a clear foundation. Engaging the coachee in a well-planned and intentional process ensures that coaching is productive and impactful (Nelson & Hogan, 2009). Having foundational information is important to establish a partnership in which the executive coach has familiarity of the client to understand their client from the start. Using the information from the assessment tool allows the coach to diagnose the client's strengths and weakness early on, to remain focused, and to "go deeper" with the client with the common language and client self-awareness and insights. Once the relationship has been built, it is easier for the coach to set the foundation of clear and actionable coaching goals (de Haan & Duckworth, 2012; Koonce, 2010).

Turn up the volume. Executive coaching is a key aspect of advancing individual (de Haan et al., 2013). As mentioned by de Haan et al., (2013), executive coaches are professionals who specialize in leadership development, supporting an executive by "imparting actionable information, instruction and advice" (p. 41). Executive coaches support the client by zeroing in and shining the light on their insights where they can help the client to develop an actionable development plan that assistances them to shift behavior and attain new skills and knowledge along with providing resources (e.g., books, articles etc.) to aid in deepening their insights and help them to apply their learning.

Ensuring accountability. To support the effectiveness of the client's behavior, which is essential to learning and motivation, there needs to be feedback and accountability (Ilgen, Fisher, & Taylor, 1979). To enhance the client's development, executive coaches need to benchmark and evaluate the client's progress to hold them accountable. This allows the executive coach to keep the client on the development plan, see the progress that has been made with the client to support the client, and also be able to report back to the stakeholders on the client's progress. Sherman and Freas (2004) mentioned that executive coaches need to use measures and accountabilities, which will help with client become to closer alignment with the developmental goals and outcomes.

The model will provide a relation-based process for the executive coach where context-specific data from the assessment phase is woven into building trust, establishing the foundation, turning up the volume, and ensuring accountability for the client's success. This proposed model will provide the client and the executive coach evidence for the client to shift behaviors, habits and attitudes along with being able to prepare strategies to improve performance for the client. The model will also provide the field of executive coaching a model that supports to solidify the profession, giving it credibility.

Implications

The field of executive coaching has evolved over time and with progressing growth, where coaches with a variety of backgrounds and training provide services to executives to enhance their performance and interpersonal skills (Grant, 2003). The growth supports the current needs of the organization to stay competitive and demands for effectiveness in interpersonal skills, adaptability to change and cultural sensitivity in the workplace (Joo, 2005). Executive coaching has been a common approach and intervention. This research contributes to the growing profession of executive coaching by providing implications for theory and practice on how executive coaches learn from using assessment tools in the coaching process.

Implications for Theory

There is minimal empirical research on foundational methods, processes and theories that guide the profession of executive coaching. In particular, how executive coaches learn. This study provides grounding for the profession and process of executive coaching being connected to adult learning theory specifically through informal learning. Executive coaching is considered to be learning-centered for the executive coach and the client, with the idea that leaders must be lifelong learners, evolving to meet the needs of the constantly changing organization (Morgan, Karkins, & Goldsmith, 2005)

The research proposes a new model in which the executive coach connects to adult learning, in particular informal learning, which is guided by the context-specific assessment data throughout the coaching process. This study now gives a foundation to a process that otherwise was not data driven nor grounded in theory. This study discovered that executive coaches learn formally and informally. The formal part of their learning rests with learning skillsets and being trained to improve their performance as executive coach. The informal learning comes from their experience, connection with other coaches, and their passion to learn.

Implications for Practice

This study has implications for the profession of executive coaching, including the executive coach, the client, the stakeholders in the organization and the field HROD. It supports the field of HROD by supporting the purpose of HROD, which “is to enhance learning, human potential and high performance in work related systems” (Ruona & Lynham, 1999) by informing the field of the latest development in the body of research. This study also allows for the HROD professional to understand how executive coaching can be used as a leadership development intervention, and that it is a well-planned and intentional process ensuring that coaching is productive and impactful (Nelson & Hogan, 2009).

This research supports the profession of executive coaching by helping to make the field a solid profession by providing empirical research, which describes how executive coaches learn and use assessment tools in their coaching process. The study also provides validity and credibility to the profession, allowing those who are considering executive coaching as an intervention to see the impact of the profession.

It has been stated that the executive coaching process is “shrouded in mystery” (Bono et al., 2009, p. 362), and there is no common standard of practice (Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson 2001). The data gathered gave insight into helping the field by providing thought leadership/next generation solutions in the field by offering a new data driven model, which is grounded in adult learning theory and driven by assessment data. This research allows for the executive coach to be able to show the impact of their work on executives, sharing "how coaches assess and develop senior level executives” (McNevin 2010, p. 131).

Lastly, adult learning theory provides a feasible framework for executive coaching. This research validates and connects the framework to executive coaching, which is a leadership development, behavioral, and performance intervention. In a similar way to the field of psychology and other behavioral sciences, adult learning practices aim to modify behavior, which provide additional competencies that are useful for executive coaches. Cognitive development is filled with learning models and adult development theories, that assist with cognitive and awareness proficiencies (Kegan, 1982) and which this study discovered, is one of the reasons executive coaches use assessment tools is to help the client become aware of their behaviors that need to be transformed. Learning is a developmental activity, which modifies leader's behaviors to assist in resolving their concerns (Day, Halpin, & Harrison, 2009). Knowles (1975) and Knox (1977) discussed that changing behavior and learning in adults requires progressive and fundamental growth, which executive coaching provides.

Limitations

There are several limitations associated with this study. The first set of limitations is related to the sample of the participants. By limiting the participants to self-identified, expert executive coaches, then limiting the research to include only ICF and Sharpa to obtain the sample of participants, there existed a lack of generalizability and a limited sample number of participants. Another limitation was a lack of diversity; 100% of the participants were self-identified as white/Caucasian. In addition, surprisingly there were a larger number of female participants (60%). I am not sure if that is reflection of the profession or a reflection of the participants who were recruited for the study. The sample size of 15 participants could be a factor; a larger size could have been used to get a more structured consensus. The majority of the participants came from ICF. Although it is the leading organization in the coaching industry and it may be that a larger population is required, different results may have emerged if the participants were drawn from additional sources and were able to share their experiences that related to using assessment tools in their coaching process.

Another set of limitations was my own bias as researcher. Due to my background in coaching, there were times that I had to make sure my personal bias and interests were not coming into the interview or the analysis. I used bracketing to make sure that I was focused and intentional with the participants. Although there were measures put into place to make sure that I did not interview individuals I knew, there were two participants who I did know professionally, which could have created another bias on their part and mine. I did make sure that there was not a concern by checking in with the participants and with myself to make sure I was not bringing in my bias, if any, about them. An additional limitation was that the majority of the interviews were done via telephone since the participants chose to be interviewed by phone due to location. Social media technology was not used in fear of bad connection. There would also be a limitation of the executive coach's geographical location, as the majority of the participants were from the East coast.

Future Research Recommendations

This study has suggestions on future research since the field of executive coaching is new and continues to mature as a profession and discipline. There are few empirical studies and the continuity of research in the field of executive coaching is very important for all stakeholders of the profession to improve the practice and provide validation and create credibility to the profession. This research supports the coaching profession by providing research data on the standardized process for using assessment tools; some coaches use and learn them to affect their client and their coaching process. My intention is that this research will contribute to conversations about the possibility of regulating coaching processes and improving the requirements for professional accreditation and certification of executive coaches internationally. This qualitative study contributes to the existing literature on executive coaching by validating how executive coaches learn and use assessment in the process for the success of the client to help enlarge what has already been studied on executive coaching.

Future directions include exploring: (a) the relationship between the amount of experience of the coach compared to reliance on the assessment tool when working with a client; (b) understanding how outcomes differ with the client when using assessments in the executive coach relationship and when not using an assessment tool; (c) gauging the difference in the usage of assessment tools in the different type of coaching (e.g., executive, life, personal etc.); (d) determining if there is a difference in the outcomes for the client if the coach is not using a structured framework compared to one using a structured framework; (e) learning if program certified, assessment certified executive coaches make better coaches; (f) how executive coaches eliminate the possibility of self-fulfilling prophecy in the executive coach and client relationship when using assessment tools; (g) a critical study of the use of assessments tools and how they might create implicit bias in the coaching process; and (h) replicating the present study with a sample of international executive samples and compare and contrast the learning. These studies would support the field of executive coaching and coaching by serving to improve the performance and productivity of the coaches as they work with their clients to learn and transform and modify behaviors.

Another area to research is coaching and assessing organizational teams. Organizations are moving towards teams for better organization performance. In particular, organizations are seeking to create high performance teams (Katzenbach & Smith, 2006). The opportunity to research the impact of using assessment tools in creating high performing teams is another area to expend to do further research.

Additional research would be to explore the lack of diversity of race in the field of executive coaching. There was a significant lack of representation of diversity in the profession. One hundred percent of the participants in this study were self-identified as white/Caucasian. There is a lack of diversity in leadership positions. This could be related to what Hu, Thomas, and Lance (2008) mentioned that race affects access to mentoring and mentoring outcomes affect the coaching profession. There is a need to explore why, in a growing field, there is a lack diversity and inclusion. In another note that is connected to diversity, Griffeth 2013 mentioned that women need skillsets and training they lack for advancement to the C-Suite. Another area to research is exploring how executive coaching can be used as a leadership development tool to gain skill sets and confidence for those who want to enter the C-Suite. There is an opportunity to see if executive coaching can help gain new and/or improve skillsets for success in the C-suite. Does it help them advance? How does it help them? Does it help them to be better leaders? Does it help them gain confidence and improve their overall self-image? What about coaching helps them? This empirical research could support data on the effectiveness of executive coaching when it comes to skill sets needed for success in the C-Suite for diversity and inclusion.

Further research in the area of coaching will strengthen and establish the profession. The most important step for the coaching profession would be empirical research to help with a conceptual framework that would standardize the coaching process. Standardization would provide consistencies in how coaching professionals practice, that would in turn ground coaching as a profession with professional standards that inform professional credentials and practices. Finally, I would like to encourage coaches to participate and collaborate with academic studies in which they can provide sponsorship to the profession and offer practical application to the research.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided a summary of the conclusions related to the research questions for this study. It also provides the implications for theory and practice, along with limitations, and finally, offering future research recommendations.

The purpose of this study was to learn how executive coaches utilize assessment tools in their coaching process. The following two research questions guided the study: (1) what do executive coaches learn from the use of assessment tools in their coaching process? and in (2) what ways do executive coaches use the learning gained from assessment tools to navigate the coaching relationship?

In this qualitative research study, a semi-structured interview protocol was used to conduct one-hour interviews with a sample of 15 executive coaches. The research study discovered two conclusions came about how executive coaches utilize assessment tools in their coaching process. The two conclusions were: (1) the trigger to the learning cycle in the coaching process is the context-specific data retrieved from the assessment tool; and (2) executive coaches use assessment data to turn up the volume with their clients and enact relationship-based interventions.

The executive coaches utilized assessments tools to learn and establish evidence for their coaching process. The executive coaches were able to use data to work deeper with their client, easier and quicker. The information obtained from the assessment tool helped the participants to work with their clients in a way that created a common language and data-driven processes that helped them to understand their client. The executive coaches stated how much they loved to learn and discussed their eagerness for learning in multiple learning modes including formally and informally to become masterful and also to be able to invest in the client. Lastly, the executive coaches used assessment tool data to create strategies in which to work effective and efficiently with their client. Assessment tools provided objective data that the executive coach and client would work from to make change and bring clarity and awareness to the client.

A relation-based, context-specific coaching model emerged. The model materialized from where the executive coach and client create a working partnership in which both parties are engaged in investing time, effort and skills in the learning and development goals for the client and using the data from the assessment tool. This model proposes that learning happens within framework of informal learning and structure of the executive coaching process comes from the assessment tool data.

Implications to the growing profession of executive coaching were provided for theory and practice on how executive coaches learn from using assessment tools to be more effective in their coaching process. There were several limitations associated with this study the first set of limitations are related to the sample of the participants and another with the researcher.

Recommendations for Future Research were provided for further research in the area of coaching that will solidify the profession and to give it an opportunity to ground itself as a profession with professional standards and empirical research data.

This qualitative study discussed how executive coaches learn from and use assessment tools in their coaching process. The findings discovered that the data guided the executive coaches to work with the client to success, to use structure in their coach process, and provided insights on how they like to learn.

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APPENDIX A

General Solicitation Letter

April 12, 2015

Dear Professional Associate:

Hello. I am intending this note finds you well. I am writing to request your support. As you may know I am a doctoral student at the University of Georgia in the Department of Adult Education, Learning and Organizational Development. I am currently in the data collection phase of my dissertation under the guidance of Dr. Laura Bierema. I am writing to request your support in helping me find participants for my study that explores how executive coaches learn from and use assessment tools in the coaching process.

The criteria to participate in the study is: (a) currently practicing as a self-identified full time executive coach (b) minimum of six years executive coaching experience (c) uses assessment tools while working with clients (d) minimum of five years of supplementary professional work experience (e) self-reported evidence of higher education and participation in continuing education.

If you know anyone you think meets the criteria and who would be willing to participate in the study, it will involve participation in one confidential sixty (60) minute individual, in-person interview with me. Interviews will be recorded and transcribed for analysis. The involvement in the study is voluntary, and they may choose not to participate or to stop at any time. All data collected during the interview will be strictly confidential. Every attempt will be made to keep identity protected by the use of pseudonyms. The results of the research study may be published, but no other individually-identifiable information provided during the course of the research will be shared.

The potential benefits of participating in this study is that the information will be extremely useful in informing the theory and practice of executive coaching and the use of individual assessment tools. This research will contribute to the growing profession of coaching by determining whether and how assessment tools can be effective in executive coaching and what some of the best practices are for using assessment tools.

If you have any questions about this research project, would like to participate, or can recommend someone who meets the study criteria, please call me at 404-XXX or send an email to XXX@gmail.com no later than XX, 2015. I will then follow up with you for a short conversation to discuss the details and arrange a time and place to meet.

Thank you for your consideration in helping to contribute to the study and the field of executive coaching. If you know other executive coaches who meet the criteria for the study and would be interested in participating, please feel free to have them contact me.

Warmly,
Rubina F. Malik, Doctoral Candidate
University of Georgia

APPENDIX B

Participant Confirmation Letter

April 12, 2015

Dear Research Participant:

Thank you for your interest in being participate in my research study. I am following up from our telephone conversation and confirming your participation.

Again, my research study explores how executive coaches learn from and use assessment tools to inform the coaching process. The University of Georgia and the Department of Adult Education, Learning and Organizational Development have approved this research project. I am currently in the data collection phase of my dissertation under the guidance of Dr. Laura Bierema.

As we discussed, our interview is confirmed for: [Date, Time, and Location]

Please reserve an hour and a half for this interview and prior to our interview, have reviewed the attached Consent Form and completed the Demographic Questionnaire. Please bring them with you to the interview or send to me via email prior to our interview.

To state again, the interviews will be recorded for later retrieval and analysis. The results of your participation in the study will be confidential and will not be released in any individually identifiable form without your consent, unless otherwise required by law. Pseudonyms to ensure your confidentiality will be used in the presentation and analysis of all findings.

If you have any questions about this research project, please call me at 404-XXX or send an email to XXX@gmail.com.

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this study. You will be contributing to the study and the field of excusive coaching. I look forward to meeting you.

Warmly,

Rubina F. Malik
Doctoral Student
University of Georgia

APPENDIX C

Consent Form

Turning up the Volume: How Executive Coaches Use Assessment Tools to Inform Their Learning in the Coaching Process

Researcher's Statement
We are asking you to take part in a research study. Before you decide to participate in this study, it is important that you understand why the research is being done and what it will involve. This form is designed to give you the information about the study so you can decide to be in the study or not. Please take the time to read the following information carefully. If needed, ask the researcher for clarification or more information. When all your questions have been answered, you can decide if you want to be in the study. This process is called *informed consent*. A copy of this form will be given to you. You must be 18 years of age or older to participate.

Co-Principal Investigator/Principal Investigator:
Rubina Malik (Ph.D. candidate)/Dr. Laura Bierema (supervising professor)
Department of Lifelong Education, Administration, and Policy

Purpose of the Study
The purpose of the study is to learn how executive coaches use assessment tools to inform the coaching process. You are being asked to participate because you have met the criteria to participate in the study. The criteria is: (a) currently practicing as a self-identified full time executive coach (b) minimum of six years executive coaching experience (c) uses assessment tools while working with clients (d) minimum of five years of supplementary professional work experience (e) self-reported evidence of higher education and participation in continuing education.

Study Procedures
If you agree to participate, you will be asked to participate in an interview of approximately 90 minutes between April 15 and May 30. The interview will:

- Focus on how you use assessment tools to inform your coaching process.
- Be structured as a professional conversation, I will have a list of questions to use as a guide, but our conversation will proceed naturally.
- Be audio-recorded to aid in recall and transcription.

After the interview, I will provide you with a transcript so that you can review your responses and make additional notes and comments as necessary to clarify.

The results of the interviews conducted as part of this study will be used to fulfill the requirements of a Doctorate of Philosophy (Ph.D.) and may be used as data for a dissertation study focused on how executive coaches use assessment tools to inform the coaching process.

Risks and Discomforts

- There may be minor discomfort associated with speaking openly about your experiences with the researcher, whom you do not know.
- You have been chosen to participate in this research because you were referred by International Federation (ICF), Sherpa Executive Coaching or by a member of these organizations and you were willing to speak openly about your experience. I will seek to further minimize any discomfort by reassuring participants that data is being gathered in order to better understand the impact of assessments in the executive coaching process.

Benefits

Participating in this research allows practitioners to:

- Reflect and engage in a process of continuous improvement.
- Share information to improve the field of executive coaching.

Incentives for Participation

Participants will

- Know that they are making an impact on further development of a new field.
- Feel appreciated by being thanked for their time.

Audio/Video Recording

The interviews will be audio-recorded and transcribed in order to aid the researcher in recall. The transcripts will be shared with the participants so that they can review them and add any clarifying remarks. Audio files of the interviews will be destroyed upon completion of transcription. Transcripts of interviews will be stored in a secure location indefinitely. Personally identifying information will not be included in the transcripts. Participants will be identified by role/position only and will be given pseudonyms.

Privacy/Confidentiality

The data collected through the interview process will not identify the participants directly. Instead, each participant will be given a pseudonym. The researcher cannot promise complete anonymity, but can attempt to protect the privacy of participants by using the following process:

- Interviews will be audio recorded, and when transcribed, no personally identifying information will be used.
- Participants will be referenced by their pseudonyms.
- Audio recordings will be destroyed after transcripts are finalized.
- Transcripts will be stored in a secure location indefinitely, and any published work resulting from this research will only reference comments based on the role/position and pseudonym of the participant.

The researcher will not release identifiable results of the study to anyone other than as required by the department at the University of Georgia responsible for regulatory and research oversight.

Taking Part Is Voluntary
Taking part in this research is voluntary, and you may refuse to participate before the study begins or discontinue at any time with no penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

If you decide to stop or withdraw from the study, the information that can be identified as yours will be kept as part of the study and may continue to be analyzed, unless you make a written request for me to remove, return, or destroy the information.

If You Have Questions
The main researcher conducting this study is Rubina Malik, a graduate student at the University of Georgia. Please ask any questions you have now. If you have questions later, you may contact Dr. Laura Bierema at XXX@uga.edu or at 706-XXX. If you have any questions or concerns regarding your rights as a research participant in this study, you may contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB) Chairperson at 706-XXX or XXX@uga.edu.

Research Subject's Consent to Participate in Research
To voluntarily agree to take part in this study, you must sign on the line below. Your signature below indicates that you have read or had read to you this entire consent form and have had all of your questions answered.

_________________________	_________________________	__________
Name of Researcher	Signature	Date
_________________________	_________________________	__________
Name of Participant	Signature	Date

Please sign both copies. Keep one, and return one to the researcher.

APPENDIX D

Participant Demographic Questionnaire

Turning up the Volume: How Executive Coaches Use Assessment Tools to Inform Their Learning in the Coaching Process

Thank you for agreeing to take part in this research study. If you could please fill out this questionnaire prior to our interview. The information collected here will be confidential and used for informational purposes to categorize data and will not be released in a manner in which your identity will be compromised.

Name:	
Preferred pseudonym: (Pick a name you have always wanted to be called ☺)	
Age:	
Gender:	
Race/Ethnic background:	

Education Background

Degree (*mark all that apply*)	**Major** (*area of concentration*)
Bachelor's Degree	
Master's Degree	
Ph.D.	
Other	
Do you participate in continuing education?	
How often do you participate in continuing education?	
What kind of continuing education classes have you or do you participate in?	

Professional Background

Number of years of professional experience:	
Experience in what industry/s:	

Executive Coaching Background

Number of years practicing as an executive coach:	
Number of years owning your business or working as an executive coach:	
Did you participate in training to be an executive coach? If	

so where?	
Are you certified?	
Are you certified through International Coaching Federation (ICF) or through another organization? If so who?	

Assessment Tools Background

Number of years of using assessment tools experience:	
What assessment tools are you familiar with? (know about and may not have used)	
Are you certified and or trained to administer a particular assessment? If so please name:	

APPENDIX E

Individual Interview Guide

The purpose of this study is to understand how executive coaches learn from and use assessment tools in the coaching process. The following two research questions guide the study:

1. What do executive coaches learn from the use of assessment tools in their coaching process?
2. In what ways do executive coaches use the learning gained from assessment tools to navigate the coaching relationship?

Name of Participant: ____

Date of Interview: ____

Time of interview: Start_________________ End _______________________

Location of interview: ____

Review and Collect

- Signed consent form (two copies, one for participant, one for researcher)
- Completed demographic questionnaire

Discuss the Following with Participant

- Purpose of the research
- Use of a pseudonym to mask participant's identity and maintain confidentiality
- Logistics (length of interview, tape recording, transcribing, etc.)
- Monetary incentive is not provided for this study
- Final decision-making about this research project lies with the researcher and her doctoral advisor.
- There are no wrong answers, I request that you be open and authentic in your responses.

Questions: *Interview questions will be used as a guide and for probing participants for clarification. Not all questions may be asked.*

1. **Research Question #1** - What do executive coaches learn from the use of assessment tools in their coaching process?

a. Tell me about your journey to becoming an executive coach?

b. What assessment tools do you use? Why?

c. Why did you start using assessment tools?

d. Describe the process in how you use assessment tools?

e. How do these assessment tools affect your coaching process?

f. What assessment tools have you found are the most useful? Why?

g. What assessment tools have you found that are not useful? Why?

h. Tell me about your typical experience using an assessment tool.

i. Tell me about some outcomes that you have noticed with your clients when using assessment tools?

j. Tell me about a negative experience using assessment tools.

k. What you have learned from using assessment tools?

2. **Research Question #2** - In what ways do executive coaches use the learning gained from assessment tools to navigate the coaching relationship?

   a. How does the use of assessment tools help you in your coaching relationship?

   b. What ways have you found assessment tools to be useful in your coaching relationship?

   c. What have you learned from using assessment tools that has contributed to your performance as a coach?

Closing Questions

1. What else can you share with me that would help me understand how you use assessment tools in your coaching process?
2. Is there anything that you would like to discuss that I have not covered.

Thank you for allowing me to interview you. I have asked a lot of questions of you, what would you like to discuss that I have not discussed? Do you have any additional comments for me?

APPENDIX F

Participants Demographics

Participant	Aaden	Angie	Anne	Bella	Daisy	Darren	Jasmine	Jayden
Age	48	63	63	68	53	46	52	60
Gender	Male	Female	Female	Female	Female	Male	Female	Male
Ethnicity	Caucasian	Caucasian	Caucasian	Caucasian	Caucasian	Caucasian	Caucasian	Caucasian
Education								
Bachelor's Degree	Psychology; Communication	Psychology; Sociology	Psychology	Education	(Unknown)	Finance	International Studies	Psychology; Economics
Master's Degree		MBA - Management	Human Resources	Adult Education Program Management, Education and Business M.Ed.		Russian Language	Professional Counseling	
Ph.D.	Clinical Psychology/Systems Theory					Linguistics		
Other		Ed.S. – Executive Development						
Do you participate in continuing education? If so, how often?	Yes - Multiple times a year	Yes - 1 every year	Yes - Monthly	Yes - 6-10 times a year	Yes - Yearly for business sustainability	Ongoing	Ongoing	Ongoing
What kind of continuing education classes have you or do you participate in?	Business Development, Personal Development, Coaching Development, etc.	Webinars about coaching, Coaching Research, Coaching Skills, New research on favorite instrument used.	ICF meetings and industry-related webinars	ICF meetings, Tele-seminars, Advanced Coach Mentoring Coach Specific Training (examples)	MBTI, Everything DiSC, The Five Behaviors of a Cohesive Team, Conflict Dynamics Profile, Situational Leadership	Many	Leadership, Personal Development, Assessment Mastery	Reading, Research
Professional Background								
Years of professional experience:	25	35	30+	40+	30	25	20	30
Experience in what industry/s:	Sales, Psychology, Coaching	HRD, Pharmaceutical, Chemical	Not-for-profit, Training/HR, Career Services, Career Coaching/Consulting, Executive Coaching, Global Mobility	Education, Banking, Training and Development and OD	Healthcare (Pharmaceuticals, Consumer Care, Diagnostics), Staffing, Specialty Chemicals, Hi Tech, Education	Telecomm, Hotel, Real estate	Communication Marketing (Professional Services/Technology (20 years)), Human Development (Coaching, Leadership Development, Human Development (11 years))	Financial Services
Executive Coaching								
Years practicing as an executive coach:	8	12	15	15	15	7	11	15
Years owning your business or working as an executive coach:	8	12	21	20+	2	7	11	15
Participation in training for executive coaching. A) If so, where? B) Are you certified?	(Other); A) Not specifically in Exec. Coaching, but through various Continuing Education classes in the area, including Tony Robbins' Business Mastery training (2x), Executive Coach MBA virtual program (Jayne Warrilow/Ben Croft) B) Yes	Yes; A)Various locations B) Yes	Yes; A) Steinbrecher & Associates, Inc.; The Academies B) Yes	Yes; A) CTI and SECA B) Yes	Yes; A) World Coach Institute B) Yes	Yes; A) (Unknown) B) Yes	Yes; A) Managerial Coaching - Kennesaw State University, Registered Corporate Coach - WABC, Certification for various issues (Emotional Intelligence, Leadership Agility, Assessments, etc.) B) Yes	No
Certified through International Coaching Federation (ICF) or through another organization	Yes; PCC (ICF) and Coaches Training Institute (CPCC)	Yes - BCC (Board Certified Coach)	Yes; The Coaching Institute	Yes; PCC (ICF)	In Process	Yes; PCC (ICF)	No	No
Assessment Background								
Years of Assessment Experience	20	35	16	20+	20	10+	11	25
What assessment tools are you familiar with? (know about and may not have used)	DiSC, FIRO B, Thomas Kilman, 16 PF, Leadership Circle, MBTI, EQi 2.0	DiSC (Wiley/Inscape), 5 Behaviors of a Cohesive Team (Wiley/ Inscape), Leadership Effectiveness Analysis (Mgt Research Associates), Lominger, Hogan, MBTI, Strengthfinders, 360: 363 for Leaders (Wiley/Inscape), Benchmarks, Skillscope, Belbin	Myers Briggs (MBTI), Strengths Finder, DISC, Kiersey Temperament Sorter, Strong, Birkman	HBDI, Workplace Big Fice, Harrison Assessment, Resiliency Map, Leadership Styles Inventory, Firo-B, Custom Designed 360 Experience, MBTI, DISC, Most of the leading EI instruments, Birkman, Hogan, Leadership Circle, Many other 360s	MBTI, DiSC, The Five Behaviors of a Cohesive Team, Conflict Dynamics Profile, Situational Leadership	MBTI, strengths, enneagram, Saboteur, LH Step, Campbell Leadership Index, Emotional Competence Inventory	Genos Emotional Intelligence, Insights Discovery, Myers Briggs (MBTI), ChangeWorks, Thomas Kilmann, Leadership Agility/ Leadership Practices, DiSC, HBDI, Team Coaching International, Birkman	Myers Briggs (MBTI), Thomas Kilmann Psychometrics
Are you certified and or trained to administer a particular assessment? If so, please name:	Yes - DiSC, FIRO B, Thomas Kilman, 16 PF, Leadership Circle, MBTI, EQi 2.0	Yes - DiSC, Strengthfinders, Entrepreneurial Strengthfinders, Skillscope, 363 for Leaders, 5 Behviors of a Cohesive Team, LEA	No	Yes - Team Coaching International Assessment, Harrison Assessment, Genos International suite of EI assessments, Resiliency Map, EQ Map, Leadership Styles Inventory, Custom Designed 360 Experience, MBTI, DiSC, Insights (Not currently using - expired), ChangeGrid, 360 Instruments, MRG LEA 360, The Extraordinary Coach, Leadership Challenge	Yes - MBTI, DiSC, The Five Behaviors of a Cohesive Team, Conflict Dynamics Profile, Situational Leadership	Yes - MBTI, LH Step, Campbell Leadership Index, Emotional Competence Inventory	Yes - Genos Emotional Intelligence, Insights Discovery, Myers Briggs (MBTI), ChangeWorks, Thomas Kilmann, Leadership Agility/ Leadership Practices, DiSC, Team Coaching International	Yes - Myers Briggs (MBTI)

Participant	Jaylinn	Keirstein	Louis	Manual	Posha	Princess	Trixie
Age	67	67	69	57	65	75	54
Gender	Female	Female	Male	Male	Female	Female	Female
Ethnicity	Caucasian	Caucasian	Caucasian	Caucasian	Caucasian	Caucasian	Caucasian
Education							
Bachelor's Degree	International Relations	Education	Liberal Arts	Marketing	Communications	Education	Psychobiology
Master's Degree	Social Work/Group Dynamics		MBA; MFA			Counseling	
Ph.D.							
Other							Law (Juris Doctor)
Do you participate in continuing education? If so, how often?	Varies	Yearly	Yearly	2-3 times per year	Occasionally	Often	4-5x per year for Coaching, Law, HR
What kind of continuing education classes have you or do you participate in?	Wharton School of Business, Self Awareness, Coachville	Coach's Training, Assessment Certification	Professional Development	Assessment, Coaching, and Facilitation Oriented.	CCL, Certifications, Professional Associations	Personal Development	Employment Law, Human Resources, and Coaching Skills
Professional Background							
Years of professional experience:	28	15	46	30	30+	30+	25+
Experience in what industry/s:	Pharmaceutical, Chemical, Financial Services, Manufacturing, Health Care	Coaching, Education, Christian Education	Military, Finance, Technology, Visual Arts, Consulting	Insurance and Financial Services	Insurance & Financial Services, Pharmaceutical, Defense, Chemical, Manufacturing, Not-for-Profit, Food, etc	Training	Law, Human Resources, Coaching
Executive Coaching							
Years practicing as an executive coach:	28	14	8	6	20+	15	10+
Years owning your business or working as an executive coach:	17	14	8	6	14	30	5+
Participation in training for executive coaching. A) If so, where? B) Are you certified?	Yes; A) Coachville + management B) No	Yes; A) Coaches Training Institute, Gestalt Institute of Cleveland, Case Western Reserve University B) Yes	Yes; A) Baruch College, CUNY - New York B) Yes	Yes - A) Managerial Coaching Certification—Kennesaw State University B) Yes	Yes; A) Center for Creative Leadership, Lominger B) No	Yes; A) Registered Corporate Coach - WABC B) Yes	Yes; A) Coach U Core Essential Fast Track Program, Coach U Advanced Coaching Program, Global leadership coaching program B) Yes
Certified through International Coaching Federation (ICF) or through another organization	No	Yes - PCC (ICF); GPCC & Master Coach of EI Certification through Case Western Reserve University	No	Yes (Other) - GROW Certified through Inside-Out Coaching	No	Yes - WABC	Yes - ACC (ICF)
Assessment Background							
Years of Assessment Experience	28	14	8	30	25+	30	15+ years
What assessment tools are you familiar with? (know about and may not have used)	DiSC, MBTI, Stress Mgt, Leadership for Results, FIRO-B, Hogan, TeamAbility, Social Styles	Leadership Circle, Kolb's Learning Style Inventory	Myers Briggs (MBTI) Personality Type Indicator, Thomas Kilmann Conflict Mode Instrument	MBTI, Hogan, Birkman, Insights Discovery, DiSC, HBDI, TKI Instrument, LEA 360, Genos EI, Leadership Challenge 360, EQ Map, Harrison Assessment, TCI Team Diagnostic, Changeworks, Best Works Data, FIRO-B, Adele Lynn EQ Assessment, Change Style Indicator, DDI Manager Ready, DDI Leadership Mirror	Lominger Tools, Benchmarks 360° Tool, MBTI, Firo-B, DiSC, Situational Leadership, Teamability	Birkman, Talent Smart EQ, Harrison	DiSC, Predictive Index, StrengthsFinder 2.0, Emotional Intelligence 2.0 (book), MBTI, 360 assessments, Organizational Culture Inventory, Leadership Circle, Caliper, interest inventories, many others
Are you certified and or trained to administer a particular assessment? If so, please name:	Yes - DiSC, MBTI, Stress Mgt, Leadership for Results, FIRO-B	Yes - MBTI, ESCI, Hogan	Yes - Hogan	Yes - Hogan, Insights Discovery, LEA 360, Genos EI, Changeworks, DiSC, Change Style Indicator	No	Yes - DiSC	Yes - DiSC (Inscape Publishing), Predictive Index, MSAF 360 assessment tool