UNIVERSITY OF CALGARY

Managerial and Executive Coaching:

A Phenomenological Inquiry of the Experience of Being Coached

by

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ABSTRACT

This research used a phenomenological method to understand how executives experience the process of being coached. The study provides the first rich Canadian description of the experience of being coached available in the academic literature. Six Caucasian executives (males and females) employed in six different organizations representing various organization-types, participated in an in-depth, unstructured, phenomenological interview. The results of this research show that the coachee experiences seven essential elements as they undergo coaching: (a) Embarking on the Coaching Relationship, (b) Co-creating the Coaching Relationship, (c) Learning to be Coached, (d) Healing Ruptures, (e) Valuing What the Coach Offers, (f) Experiencing the Impact, and (g) Deciding on the Future of the Relationship. A composite description of the experience of being coached is provided which also details the twenty nine related meaning units that were uncovered. This is followed by a discussion of the limitations, implications and applications of the research, and future research recommendations.

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The ability to undertake this research was a privilege. It is not often that someone is able to sit across from a relative stranger and, within minutes, be given access to their thoughts, feelings and beliefs about something that, for all other intents and purposes, is a private endeavor. I owe much gratitude to the coaches who willingly became curious alongside me. Each of you could have easily chosen to keep your work away from the scrutiny this study involved, but instead you openly, even courageously, recommended your clients for inclusion in the study. Without you, I don't believe this study would have come to pass. Thank you. In the same way, I am so very much indebted to the coachees. The mantle of leadership is no easy thing to wear. Like any mantle, it can cover and conceal, and yet in some ways the research interview served to strip away this protective cloak. I can not thank you enough for having the courage to allow this, and to share your experience so openly. I only hope the results of this research sufficiently honored your growth experience, and that it will be used in ways that make coaching more valuable and meaningful for others.

I also wish to thank Dr. Nancy Arthur. Thank you for being exactly the type of supervisor I most needed.

Lastly, I need to thank my family. To my children, Julian and Jordan: having you in my life has made me a better person, and there is no doubt some of what you taught me – wonder, curiosity, patience, persistence … and that there is perfection in imperfection-- is reflected in this research. To my husband, Keith: at moments where I wondered if my very full, sometimes challenging, life had room for this important work, you always reminded me how much it mattered, and that meant the world to me. Thank you. Finally, to my sister

Monica: you helped me immeasurably by letting me know it was okay to carve out things that start with me. Thank you for your unconditional encouragement of all my endeavors.

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

Managerial and executive coaching is a rapidly growing area of practice, with individuals who act as coaches coming from very diverse fields including human resources, management consulting, industrial/ organizational psychology and psychotherapy. The widespread adoption of executive coaching by management consulting firms began in the 1990's (Feldman and Lankau, 2005; Kampa-Koesch, 2001) with a focus on helping middle and senior level managers become more effective in their roles as leaders. According to the International Coaching Federation, (IICF) there are an estimated 10,000 – 15,000 coaches worldwide (Bennett 2006).

Defining Executive Coaching

There are a range of definitions of executive coaching that have been put forward by various authors. Kilberg (1996), a key writer in the area of leadership development and executive coaching, reviewed the existing literature and described executive coaching as:

> …a [one-on-one] helping relationship formed between a client who has managerial authority and responsibility in an organization and a consultant who uses a wide variety of behavioral techniques and methods to help the client achieve a mutually identified set of goals to improve the effectiveness of the client's organization within a formally defined coaching agreement. (p.67)

Bennett (2006) quotes the definition used in an unpublished doctoral dissertation by Wilkins (2000):

> ...a one-on-one relationship where a coach supports, collaborates with, and facilitates client learning my helping a client to identify and achieve future goals through assessment, discovery, reflection, goal setting and strategic action." (p.240-241)

Most recently, Joo (2005, p. 468) reviewed the definitions of coaching available in the literature, and offered the following comprehensive definition:

> ... executive coaching is defined as a process of a one-on-one relationship between a professional coach and an executive (coachee) for the purpose of enhancing the coachee's behavioral change through self-awareness and learning, and thus ultimately for the success of individual and organization.

Thus, we see that coaching is at its core a helping relationship, intended to have an impact first on the manager or executive [1], which in turn provides benefit to the organization in which the individual is employed.

There is a variety of reasons individuals and organizations seek out the services of a coach. In a recent review article, Feldman and Lankau (2005) summarized the literature about recipients of executive coaching (from here forward referred to as coachees) and noted that they fall into three categories. The first category is the previously successful executive who, for a variety of reason, is finding it difficult to meet the current role requirements. The second category is the managers who have been targeted as potential future executives in a succession plan, who require some development in order to fulfill that potential. The third

[1] The terms manager, executive, and coachee will be used interchangeably for the remainder of this thesis, and will refer to the direct recipient of the coaching services unless otherwise stated or implied.

category is professionals who are in entrepreneurial ventures and need to extend their competencies beyond their technical proficiencies.

Executives have access to various forms of helping relationships aside from what have defined as executive coaching. These include advising, career counseling, mentoring and therapy. Feldman and Lankau (2005) discussed and differentiated between these relationships, noting how they are distinct from coaching relationships. For the purposes of the present research, these other types of helping relationships are excluded from consideration and the focus is placed on executive coaching.

Recently, there have been efforts to further describe and delineate the newly emerging field of practice called managerial and executive coaching[2]. This includes the establishment of the International Coaching Federation that is developing worldwide standards of practice, ethical guidelines and a credentialing process. Involved in this is the offering of intensive training and practica, with curricula developed based on what are considered the key competencies and skills required of coaches. Given these developments in the practice of executive coaching, it is not surprising that there has also been increased and sustained attention to it in the literature over the past ten years (Criddle, 2007; Feldman & Lankau, 2005; Garman, Whiston & Zlatoper, 2000; Hart 2001; Jay, 2003; Joo, 2005; Kilberg, 1996, Laske, 1999; Peterson, 1996; Saporito, 1996; Witherspoon & White, 1996) . For example, the *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research* devoted the entire spring issue to the topic of executive coaching in 1996 and a two-part issue was devoted to the topic again in 2004 and 2005. A 2001 issue of this same journal included a

[2] The term coaching will be used to refer to managerial or executive coaching for the remainder of this thesis.

comprehensive review of executive coaching literature by Kampa-Kokesch and Anderson and it was 23 pages in length. Since then, two other literature reviews have been published (Feldman & Lankau, 2005; Joo, 2005;).

There are many books (for example: Daniels, 2007; Glaser, 2007; Hargrove, 2004;; Kilberg, 2006; Kilburg & Diedrich, 2007) and a plethora of trade-journal articles that focus on the topic of leadership and coaching. However, there are far fewer rigorous empirical studies published focusing on coaching in the academic research literature. Fortunately, that number does appear to be increasing over time. The highly comprehensive review published in 2001 (Kampa-Kokesch, 2001) noted that there were only seven empirical studies on coaching published prior to that date. In their 2005 review of the literature, Feldman and Lankau noted that fewer than 20 studies have systematically researched the topic using systematic qualitative or quantitative methods. The same, year, Joo determined in his review of the literature that of 78 articles appearing in the literature on coaching, only 15% appeared in academic journals. Of these, six were identified as quantitative, and 5 as qualitative studies, for an even smaller total of 11 empirical studies. Since the Joo and Feldman & Lankau reviews noted above, an additional 27 new peer reviewed articles have been published on the topic of executive coaching, excluding book reviews. Of these, the majority were loosely theoretical in nature, based on the experience and opinions of the authors and describing suggested coaching models, techniques, applications for, or approaches to coaching (e.g.: Bartlett, 2007; Foster and Lloyd, 2007). Two were quantitative studies (Jones, Rafferty, Alanna, Griffin, 2006 and Orenstein, 2006). The remainder were based on case study, survey, and semi-structured interview data.

In addition to the limited number of research studies undertaken in this field, of particular note is the fact that the majority of the academic work in this area is being undertaken by coaches (Joo, 2005), from the perspective of coaches, and sometimes using their own clients as participants (e.g., Stevens, 2005; Wasylyshyn, 2003). What appears to be most sparsely represented in the literature is the client's perspective on the process of coaching, what it was like to participate in it, and how it has affected them. In considering implications for future research, Joo (2005) noted:

> ...because executive coaching is still in its infancy and most case studies were based on the perspective of coaches, interpretive research using a phenomenological approach that examines the perspectives of executives being coached could add significantly to knowledge about executive coaching. (p. 483).

Drawing on a very broad palate of historical, philosophical and psychological constructs Kilberg noted in his recent book called Executive Wisdom: Coaching and the Emergence of Virtuous Leaders (2006):

> When any scholar attempts to add substance to a well-established discipline like leadership, he or she is faced with a monumental task. How can one create a different way of seeing something that every other scholar in the field knows so well? How does one offer a perspective that will be seen as at least useful, if not establishing a wholly new paradigm? (Kilberg, 2006, p. 12)

The nature of the research undertaken and described in the next chapters of this thesis meets Kilberg's challenge by giving primacy and voice to the client's experience, unfettered

by the constraints of a particular coaching paradigm. If we hope to fully understand coaching as it truly occurs, including coaching competencies and process, content and relationship factors, a broadened descriptive research agenda is called for. The present study contributes to our understanding of how the client perceives all of these domains. The focus of it is to describe the essence of a coaching relationship that is described as successful from the client's point of view. This research answers the broad question "What is it like to be coached?", and in so doing provides a foundational source of descriptive data upon which future theory and research can be based.

Arriving at the Research Question: Autobiographical Context

It was 1993 and I was in Boston attending a large conference called *Consulting Skills and Issues*. At the time, I was working as a Senior Organizational Development consultant for an Oil and Gas Exploration and Production company that operated worldwide. Only eight years into my career, I now had the good fortune of being able to hear and see many very respected and famous individuals in the world of leadership and organizational effectiveness. Amongst that stellar group, was a visionary named Margaret Wheatley. I recall vividly how captivated we all were by the speakers' abilities to look beyond the narrowest understanding of performance in the context of large organizations. Using a living systems model, rather than drawing on the western, mechanical paradigm that had been predominant for centuries, Margaret Wheatley sparked a new understanding in the audience, and most certainly within me. She proposed a new and compelling view of what truly makes organizations function effectively— by asking the question "How might we organize differently if we understood how natural life organizes? Part of her answer at that conference was to introduce what I will

now call the constructivist view of systems— that people make their own meaning. Imagine the idea that people organize *themselves*; create their own structures, regardless of how the senior executives and human resources department analytically and carefully designs it. Contemplate for a moment the notion that people engage *all* of themselves in their work, not just doing what is expected of them, and in so doing, they breathe life into the organizations that employ them.

Attending that conference was a watershed moment for me in that it was a catalyst for recognizing my own place in the equation, and that was not where I was situated at the time. I realized then that, fundamentally, my future work over time needed to be about affecting change in people, individually, rather than working at the macro-level with large organizational change initiatives as I had been doing up until then.

By the time I attended the Boston conference, the idea of Managerial and Executive coaching had already taken hold in the organization I was working in. The conference, amoung other influences, helped me to recognize and reflect further upon the real impact that coaching could have as part of leadership development. At that time, I was involved in helping develop and coordinate a series of leadership development programs. These were designed for individuals at more senior levels who displayed the potential to be promoted into Executive positions within the organization. I was also fortunate to be in attendance at these three-day training programs when they took place. Along with other facilitated exercises, part of this leadership development program was participation in a 360-degree feedback assessment followed by one-on-one coaching. In this way, I had my first exposures

to managerial and executive coaching. The experience was foundational to my interest in coaching.

In the course of my career in Human Resources, and continuing well after I was credentialed as a Certified Human Resources Professional in 1991, I increasingly found myself in the role of internal coach. I was often in situations where managers and executives were looking for help in their complex and often challenging roles as leaders. My internal coaching experience took the form of training in group contexts, as well as meetings with leaders at all levels. I was able to experience what it was like to work with a group of professionals in the project planning of a full-scale exploration effort in Nigeria. I had the wonderful experience of facilitating strategic planning sessions with engineers and accountants. I was able to coach Information Technology professionals who were struggling with personnel issues. In my role as Human Resource Manager in a major Canadian financial institution, I advised Executives on corporate culture issues in a business unit that was experiencing significant issues with employees. In my position as Manager, Program Design within the bank's corporate Talent Management group, I developed systems and processes that helped employees with their career progression. In facilitating these activities, I realized that a next natural progression was to be an advisor, but now outside the context of the organization. Even then I recognized the difference between providing business advice as a consultant might do, and the possibility of becoming an external coach. The latter intrigued me the more, because the notion of helping senior leaders in their efforts to be more effective in their complex, changing environments seemed so much more core to what could really make a difference.

Almost in parallel to the shift in my passion at work, changes and challenges in my personal life extended my interest in helping others well beyond the context of organizations. Now I saw myself in the role of counsellor or therapist, helping individuals undergoing life transitions. I wanted to be honoured by the opportunity to help individuals gather their strengths and harness their resources to overcome depression, anxiety and the like. Indeed, the more I contemplated the idea of affecting change one individual at a time, the more broadly I cast the net regarding my future work.

It was in the context of this broad exploration, and recognition of my personal passions and capabilities, that I contemplated research topics for this thesis. I attempted to create a bridge between where I had been—working in large organizations to make people more effective within them—to where I was heading—helping individuals make changes and achieve self fulfillment in both their personal and working lives. The topic of Executive and Managerial coaching seemed the perfect marriage between the two. Foundationally, I have always been interested in clients' perceptions and experiences. When I first entered the world of work, I was interested in my trainee's perceptions of the effectiveness of my training and paid very close attention to their evaluations. As a recruiter, the response of candidates to my interview strategy was also of interest, and I often sought feedback about their experience of the process. As an internal consultant, I always ensured that mechanisms were in place to receive feedback about my interventions. As I studied counselling, I was fascinated by the few accounts I had read of the client's perception of counselling. So for me it was a natural source of curiosity to consider the question: "What is it like to be coached?—the topic and research question which is the basis of this thesis.

Overview of the Research Paradigm

The research paradigm selected for this study was phenomenology. This research philosophy and methodology has been described by several notable authors including; Giorgi and Girogi (2003); Moustakas (1994); Polkinghorne (1989); and Polio, Graves and Arfken (2006). A detailed consideration of phenomenology will be considered in significant detail in the next chapter. What follows is the rationale for selecting phenomenology for this particular study.

When one considers the highly personal and individual nature of the coaching relationship and the resulting experience, it seems unusual that only two other rigorous phenomenological studies have attempted to address this important foundational question. The importance and contribution of qualitative research in this area is highlighted by Kilberg, in his comments about a special 2004/2005 edition of *Consulting Psychology Journal* on Executive coaching. Here, he notes the companionship of scientific and constructivist paradigms in helping us understand the field of executive coaching:

> *... our constructivist and narratively-oriented colleagues would also have us challenge ourselves to reflect on this journey, the purposes for which it is being made, the methods of meaning making that are used or not used, the findings and interpretations of the findings obtained, and the ultimate learnings derived. It would seem that the constructivists would also have us simultaneously consider collecting and validating information using more qualitative approaches such as narrative theory, participant observation, ethnographic research, and case studies. They would encourage us not to stray from maintaining reflective discipline on the forms and findings that the narrative and case approaches could shape in our ways of learning and knowing. So it would seem that as we consultants wait for the results of the correlations, analyses of variance, analyses of covariance, path analyses, and multiple regressions designed to test the efficacy of various forms of coaching to come rolling in to challenge and educate us, we could also curl up in front of our fires with some good stories of how our colleagues are entering into the worlds of their clients and trying to help them make sense and meaning of what they encounter*

> *along the roads they travel together. From such stories ... we can reasonably expect the modernist science branch of the field to generate more hypotheses and more empirical studies for us to consider. In the grip of this eternal dialectic between the narrative and paradigmatic modes of thought and study, we surely will continue to grow and hopefully prosper. (p. 210)*

Qualitative approaches stemming from a phenomenological paradigm are particularly well suited to a research inquiry that meaningfully and richly describes the experience of being coached. First, phenomenological methods arise from the constructivist stance noted above that believes that reality is not objective, but subjective and based on one's experiencing of it (Moustakas, 1994). Helping relationships, at their core, are personal and individual in this sense, so that it would be difficult to maintain that the experience of being coached is an objective reality. Second, phenomenological data gathering is broad, open-ended and iterative, and does not require a detailed prior knowledge of the topic at hand. It is, therefore, ideally suited for studying the newly emerging, and ill-defined field, of coaching. Third, a phenomenological study has the core requirement that the researcher suspend preconceptions and judgments about the phenomenon being researched while gathering and analyzing data. If we are to develop an unbiased understanding of the nature of the coaching experience, one that stands apart from the coach's intentions and perceptions of his or her practice, it would seem that a phenomenological approach undertaken by a third party is what is called for as we establish a body of knowledge about executive coaching. As noted by Lowman in his overview of the two-part 2004/05 *Consulting Psychology Journal* issue on coaching:

> Staying close to real life experience enhances the likelihood that theories will ultimately be developed that have practical utility. Adding the perspectives of the

> person being coached ... is especially useful because what interventionists think may be of importance to a process of change may not be what was viewed as being most helpful by the client. (Lowman, 2005, p.91)

Thesis Overview

This thesis is organized into five chapters. This introduction is the first chapter. Following the introduction are four additional chapters that, in order, are Chapter 2: Literature Review, Chapter 3: Methodology, Chapter 4: Explication; Chapter 5: Post-structural Analysis and Discussion. Each of these chapters is outlined below.

Chapter 2 highlights the existing research literature on the topic of executive coaching, with a particular focus on the empirical research that considers the topic from the coachee's point of view. Chapter 3 provides a detailed description of phenomenology as a research methodology, including how it has been specifically applied in the case of the present thesis research. Chapter 4 presents the results of the research by undertaking data analysis, which in phenomenological research is called explication. In this chapter, meaning units are established based on the interview transcripts. These meaning units are then clustered and transformed into psychologically sensitive expressions. The culmination of this fourth chapter will be the determination and presentation of the structure, providing the first-ever composite textural-structural description of the experience of being coached. In the fifth and final chapter, a post-structural analysis will be undertaken which includes a discussion of how the findings of the present research link to other research and to other psychological understandings about coaching. This chapter will consider the implications for professional practice, and invite future studies stemming from the present research.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

The focus of the present thesis is on describing the essence of the experience of being coached successfully, from the executive's perspective. The primary focus of this review of the literature will be on describing those studies in the academic literature that include the perspective of the coachee and their experience of being coached. However, the chapter will begin with a broader consideration of the literature in a discussion of the rationale for this research and the research question.

Rationale for the Research and the Research Question

Several authors repeatedly over the past ten years (most notably Kampa-Kokesch, 2001 Kilburg, 1996; Laske, 1999; Lowman, 2005; Whiston & Zlatoper, 2000) have expressed the need for a clearer understanding of the knowledge, skills and behaviour required to be an effective executive coach. Individuals who provide executive coaching services come from a range of educational backgrounds within business and social sciences, including management and psychology. One study found that the vast majority (90%) of coaches have at least a Master's degree (Judge & Cowell, 1997). In articles that mention the educational backgrounds of the coaches, psychology and business seem to be the most often cited (Garman, 2000), although most of the literature remains equivocal about the most suitable educational background, focusing instead on the importance of other factors leading to an effective coaching engagement.

In addition to the variation in educational and experiential backgrounds of coaches (Garman et al., 2000; Judge & Cowell, 1997,) there is also not as much agreement about the core competencies required by coaches, as one would expect. Psychologists who practice as

coaches claim, "Executive coaching requires the ability on the part of the coach to differentiate coaching from psychotherapy while using basic psychological skills and insights" (Levinson, p.155). Management consultants who do coaching suggest that business savvy and organizational understanding is paramount (Gorman et al., 2000). Interestingly, when executives were surveyed for their opinions, it was concluded that the top three credential and experience criteria for executives in choosing coaches were (a) graduate training in psychology (82%), (b) experience in/understanding of business (78%), and (c) an established reputation as a coach (25%) (Wasylyshyn, 2003).

In addition to the need to understand the core competencies of executive coaches, there has also been increased attention to the importance of the content and process of coaching, including the relationship between the coach and coachee. Most of the literature in this area is theoretical or conceptual in nature, and not empirically based. For example, Feldman and Lankau (2005) focus on the process of coaching when they summarize the literature, noting the phases of the coaching relationship as data gathering, feedback, periodic coaching sessions and evaluation. Kilburg (1996) also focuses on process when he discusses in detail a conceptual model for coaching that covers 17 different factors. These factors include psychological structures such as idealized self and rational self, and internal components of individual function such as cognition and conflict, highlighting the complexity and breadth of the coaching. Kampa-Kokesch notes that the "relationship has been identified by many as one of the most important tools in effecting change" (2001, p. 224), again focusing on the process of coaching and the importance of understanding it further. Quick & Frey (2004) integrate the content and process of coaching when they talk

about an approach to it that relies on "deep interpersonal communication". The theoretical treatment that these articles exemplify would benefit greatly by empirical data that speaks to the essence of the coaching experience. A full description of the coaching experience from the coachee's perspective would, by its nature, include perceptions of coaching skills, knowledge, process and content and, thereby, contribute a great deal to understanding executive coaching.

Scope of the Detailed Literature Review

Research included from this point forward is focused on peer reviewed scholarly journal articles found using the following article indexes and databases: PschINFO, Psychology and Behavioral Sciences Collection, ABI Inform Global, Business Source Premier and ProQuest Dissertations and Theses. The focus of the review was on those academic articles which explored the nature of the coaching relationship from the executive's perspective. Articles were excluded if they addressed coaching in general (for example life coaching or performance coaching with subordinates) as opposed to executive or managerial coaching[1] as defined in the introductory chapter.

As highlighted in the introductory chapter, there are many books and trade-journal articles that focus primarily on the topic of coaching, numbering in the thousands. However, the academic research literature is significantly more limited, with the number of rigorously designed empirical studies published on this topic increasing, but still very scarce. Bennett (2006) cites that Grant, in his keynote address to the Coaching Research Symposium in 2003,

[1] The term coach will be used from this point forward to refer to the individual providing managerial or executive coaching.

reported that 125 peer-reviewed articles and dissertations related to coaching had been published since 1973. In particular, *The Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research* appears to be including an increasing number of publications on the topic over the past ten years. Well designed studies using accepted research methodologies, whether quantitative or qualitative in nature, are still very few in the number. In his comments about the two-part 2004/05 issue on executive coaching, Lowman noted the need for more empirical, positivistic research, while at the same time agreeing that case study and narrative methodologies are helpful starting points for hypothesis generating and future research topics

> When, as in the case of coaching, practice is considerably ahead of research, [sic] there is the danger of self-assuredness and advocacy for particular methods and techniques [sic] and argument and experience being used as a basis for action (Lowman, 2005, p. 93).

One reason for the lack of rigorous research in this area could be what Bennett describes as "a general lack of perceived appreciation for research and the ability to understand and apply it to the practice of coaching by skill-focused trainers and practitioners" (p.244). However, it is promising that an increasing number of graduate students are attending to research in this field. Some of the most rigorous research being conducted appears to be found in this literature. Since 1997, 58 theses or dissertations have been written on the topic of executive coaching, with the most recent published in September, 2007. It is possible that this interest by graduate scholars will result in more high quality research in the future as they continue to research and, in many cases, work in the field of executive coaching.

Research Investigating Executive Perspectives

The available academic literature investigating executives' perspectives of executive coaching will be grouped here into three general categories. First are studies that focus directly on executives' perspectives of coaching as the primary research question. Second is the group of articles that include or attend to the executives' perspectives as part of a broader research query. Last is the group of research articles that are based on a case study methodology and provide details about a particular coaching engagement. Each of these categories of research will be reviewed in the following sections.

Primary Research Question

There are only four studies found in the literature that directly address the question of what it is like to be coached from the executive's point of view. Each of these will be described and considered in detail below, beginning with the most recent study.

A study very closely aligned with answering the research question of the present research is one recently undertaken by Stevens (2005). In this study, seven CEO's/ presidents were interviewed for the purpose of sharing "their views and perspectives regarding executive coaching" (p. 275). The interviews were conducted by telephone using a preconstructed questionnaire that was made available to the executives ahead of time. Three of the seven clients in this convenience sample were previous clients of the author and researcher, and all were male except one. The questions that were included in the preconstructed questionnaire were:

1. What is your definition of Executive Coaching?

2. What might prompt an Executive to engage in an Executive Coaching relationship?
3. What are two- three essential ingredients that underlie an effective Executive Coaching engagement?
4. For you what has been most useful (or valuable) from Executive Coaching?
5. What are the two-three pitfalls that Executives should keep in mind when considering whether or not to participate in the Executive Coaching relationship?
6. What is the nature and scope of confidentiality in an Executive Coaching engagement?
7. What should the nature and extent of feedback to the organization be when executives are engaged in Executive Coaching?
8. How important (or useful) is it for all members of an executive team to be simultaneously engaged in Executive Coaching? Why?
9. What parameters or conditions need to be considered when executives from the same team are engaged in Executive Coaching?
10. How important or relevant is it that an Executive Coach be trained in business? in Psychology? in Human Resources? In some other discipline? Why?

In the thematic summary provided by Stevens, two main conclusions were reached. First, it was noted, "To these seven CEOs and presidents, executive coaching is a helping process wherein something is done *with* them in a way that also *enables* them to better meet

their role obligations and responsibilities." (p. 283). Secondly, there was general agreement that "this process occurs within a unique and personalized relationship that is forged on the sacrosanct foundations of confidentiality, mutual interest, and mutual respect." (p.283). Finally, the key point was made that to these seven executives, "executive coaching is an intimate exchange of views and perspectives with a uniquely prepared and professionally anchored person that aims to strengthen an executive's ability to think and act in a clear-headed, well-considered way in the service of the mission and purpose of their organization." (p.283)

This study contributes to our understanding of executive's perspectives by including direct quotations from the interviews (which were audiotaped and transcribed). The conclusions above make some inroads into understanding the true nature of the coaching relationship. However, the limitations of this study are significant. First, there are issues related to the convenience sample included in this study. Almost half the sample of coachees had been coached by the author. One would expect that the responses of the executives in these cases would be affected by this fact, and may not be truly reflective of the executive's actual point of view. It is also not clear from the study how the remaining participants were recruited. Lastly, only one of the executives interviewed was female. The second limitation of this study is the preconstructed questionnaire. Most significantly, at least half of the questions (questions 7- 10) were somewhat leading rather than truly open ended questions. In addition, there is no description of how this questionnaire was designed, or how the questions were chosen. In reviewing them, one wonders whether these are questions primarily of interest to practitioners and coaches, rather than truly reflecting coachee's concerns.

Compounding this problem was the fact that there was no alLowmance made in the questionnaire for inclusion of an individual coachee's areas of interest and concern in the questions. For example, an open ended question such as "What other things would you like to share about your coaching experience?" might have allowed for this. The final limitation of the study is the thematic analysis. There is no description of how the author moved from the direct quotations to the themes eventually presented in table format.

Another study, a dissertation undertaken by the executive coach Carol Turner (2004) also looked directly at executives' perceptions of executive coaching. This descriptive study was premised on a positivistic paradigm, and used a survey containing both qualitative and quantitative questions. The survey contained a total of 12 items and was administered at the end of a two-week training program, and then again 45 days after the executive returned to work. The first ten items asked 45 male and 3 female executives to use a 5-point Likert scale ranging from strongly agree (5) to strongly disagree (1) to rate their level of agreement with ten statements (e.g.: my coach asked me provocative questions, I established a trusting relationship with the coach). The last two items were open-ended questions (How would you describe your coaching experience during the 2 week EP2 session? and How has your coaching experience with EP2 affected your life on the job?). The survey was designed to answer the following questions:

1. Does the executive being coached perceive the value from coaching behaviors during and after the EP2 [Executive Training Program 2], and is their a change in the perceived valued of coaching?

2. Does the executive being coached perceive coaching contributes to the transfer from learning to practical application to business goals?
3. Does the executive being coached perceive coaching contributes to the transfer from learning to practical application of business competencies?

The findings from this research showed that 60% of executives rated the perceived coaching behaviours (asking questions, listening, giving feedback, building trust) a 4 or 5 on the Likert scale immediately after the coaching was completed. However, 60% rated transfer of learning to business goals and leadership competencies at less than a 4. Turner concludes by suggesting ways in which this transfer of learning could be increased, as well as suggesting topics for future research.

Turner's study relates to some extent to the present research as it captures executives' perspectives. This is done in a primarily quantitative fashion, although she does analyze the open-ended questions as well, and includes quotations from these in the results. However, this study focuses primarily on male recipients of very short-term coaching by internal coaches. It also focuses on the outcome, rather than process, of coaching. As a result of these limitations, it provides only limited insight into the nature of an external coaching relationship and the process associated with it.

Another study which included executives' perspectives of their coaching was undertaken by Bougae (2005). The purpose of this dissertation was to describe the impact of coaching as experienced and described by the participants. Using a descriptive case study methodology and purposeful sampling strategy, six coachees from the same

telecommunications company were interviewed using a structured interview protocol. The main questions from the interview protocol were:

1. What has been your experience with the executive coaching process?

2. What outcomes have been achieved as a result of your participation in the executive coaching program?

3. As you think about your experience with your coaching program, what do you consider the most the most important benefits?

4. Describe the impact that coaching has had upon you and your work? (p.146 & 147)

In addition to the interview, the same six executives also completed a questionnaire for the purposes of triangulation. The items in this questionnaire were used to validate and substantiate what was derived during the interview process, and probed areas that were similar to those probed in the interview, using a 4-point scale ranging from strongly agree to strongly disagree.

Using interpretational data analysis for the interviews, and a combination of numeric and interpretational analysis of the questionnaire, the data was eventually categorized into themes. The following themes emerged from the data:

1. Coaching was a positive experience

2. Coaching increased my self-awareness

3. My interpersonal skills have improved

4. Coaching impacted me personally

5. Coaching impacted my decision making

6. Being coached has the connotation that there is a performance problem

7. Feedback on my performance has improved

8. The executive focuses more on relationships and people

9. It is important for the coach to be external

10. The team/my organization is more effective

11. Learning occurred during the coaching process. (p.123-124.)

The conclusion drawn from this research was that executive coaching was a very effective leadership development tool for this organization.

This study relates very well to the topic of the present research. Giving importance and validity to the executive's perspective, it highlighted the effects of coaching from the perspective of the consumer of coaching services. However, there is a significant limitation in terms of the generalizability of this study. First, all of the participants were from the same organization. Second, the coaching in this case was part of an over-all leadership training intervention undertaken by a group of executives within that company, rather than a stand-alone coaching intervention undertaken by one or two individuals within the organization. These two limitations make it difficult to separate the effects of the group leadership training effort from the impact of the one-on-one coaching component of the intervention. It remains unclear whether the impact would have been the same under different circumstances.

The last study that studied Executive's experiences of being coached was a 2001 dissertation by Klara Sztucinski (2001), who is also a practicing executive coach. Like the present study, it uses a phenomenological research paradigm, and set out to provide an understanding of the meaning coachees make of their coaching experience. In-depth interviews were conducted with seven executives who were undergoing, or had undergone

coaching with an external coach for a minimum of three months. All participants were from for-profit Fortune 500 organizations. The study found there were seven essential elements that formed an executive's experience of being coached. These were: (1) Path to Achievement; (2) Unique to Self; (3) Ownership; (4) Confrontation with Self; (5) Array of Emotion; (6) Bond with Coach; and (7) Achievement. Using these seven elements, a description of the experience of being coached was developed (see pages 174-177, Sztucinski, 2001). This study is most directly related to the present research, since it stems from essentially the same research question, uses the same methodology, and also results in a description of the essence of the experience of being coached. The most meaningful differences have to do with the participant sample, which did not include not-for-profit organizations, and did not equally represent males and females. As a result, it replicates the present study in most important respects, and provides an interesting validation of it in the Canadian context.

Broader Research Query

There are ten academic research articles that attended to the executive's experience as part of a broader research inquiry about executive coaching. Each of these will be reviewed below, beginning with the most recent studies.

The most recent such study was a dissertation by Susan Alvey (2006). This study explored the development of trust between the coachee and coach, a central and essential component of effective coaching. Using a qualitative, ethnographic, grounded theory approach, Alvey was able to uncover the factors that contributed to the development of trust. She found that trust was highest when: (a) the client was willing to disclose honest feelings

and thoughts to the coach and was met with supportive, nonjudgmental reaction from the coach; (b) the organization was supportive of the positive leadership development that can occur in executive coaching; (c) the coach and client were clear about expectations of confidentiality and outcomes; and (d) the coach supportively confirmed the client's developmental needs, and challenged the client's leadership behaviors (Alvey, 2006).

Seamons also undertook to understand executive and other perspectives in his research on the most effective factors in executive coaching engagements (2006). Using a qualitative methodology, he interviewed eight coachees, along with each of their bosses and coaches. In looking for cross-case agreement, he was able to determine that the support of the coachee's boss was the single most important factor in the success of the coaching engagement. In addition, from the client's perspective, coachees also saw the reflective/developmental space provided, and coach challenges of the client as the most important factors for success.

A dissertation by Gidget Hopf published in 2005, also looked at the executive's perspective as part of a study on how followers perceived their leaders during and after coaching. This particular study used a qualitative descriptive case study methodology to look at the nature of one coaching engagement from several different perspectives: that of the coach, the executive's followers, the executive's boss, the Vice President of Human Resources of the company he worked for, as well as that of the executive. The purpose of the study was to investigate how followers perceived their leader, who was the executive being coached, and to understand what influenced coaching outcome. Data was collected using in-depth interviews, as well as direct observation with a total of 14 participants.

Hopf's conclusions coming from this case study were that as follows:

1) There are several factors that moderate executive coaching outcomes. These include the organizational context, the disposition of the leader, the organization's expectations, and the training and experience of the coach.

2) Others do not necessarily attribute behaviour changes to the executive coaching. Role, position, relationship to the leader, and the environment are factors.

3) The developmental work customary of executive coaching can be subverted by unconscious leader motives brought about by defensive reasoning and low emotional intelligence.

4) Followers do not perceive their leader as acting more transformational as a result of the executive coaching. (p. 181)

It is interesting to note that in these five conclusions drawn from this study, the executive's perspective is relatively absent. In fact, examples discussed and quotations included for each of these conclusions tended to place emphasis and validity on other's perceptions, rather than those of the executive. For example, conclusion number 3 above is stated largely from the perspective of the coach. An alternative perspective that favoured the executive's point of view might have been to consider how the executive perceived the developmental work, and how the coach's approach or the organizational factors may have impacted the developmental work required on the part of the executive. So, while this study adds to the knowledge base about perceptions of coaching, its' limitation for the purposes of this review is that it does not actually give voice to the executive experience. Part of the reason for this may be that the interview protocol with the executive, which was published as part of the

research, is geared towards assessing outcomes for followers, and does not effectively direct outcomes for the leader him or herself. While this suits the primary purpose of the study, it also limits the conclusions that can be drawn about what it is like for the executive to me coached.

Another dissertation published in 2005 by Luebbe also included executive's perspectives. The purpose of this study was to investigate executive coaching practices, coach behaviors, attributes, and skills that result in the most effective coaching outcomes. Three perspectives were included: the coachee's, the coach's, and the human resources representatives who brokered the services of the coach. The research was broad-based, involving a total of 77 participants, and combined quantitative and qualitative methodologies within a primarily positivistic paradigm. Thirteen people, including coaches, coachee's and human resource personnel were interviewed, and then 66 additional individuals representing these same groups were included through a survey.

The results of this research include individual textural descriptions for each of the 13 interviewees, representing each of the three perspectives highlighted above. While it is impossible, and not meaningful, to summarize these descriptions here, it is worth noting that they contain a wealth of data regarding perceptions of executive coaching. Most of the individual participants represent more than one perspective, having been coached, acted as coaches, and perhaps even brokered coaching services within the organizations that employed them. Participants came from a diverse range of organization types and industries and both male and female perspectives were represented, although not equally.

The key finding from this study was the importance of trust as the foundational attribute required for coaching effectiveness, as perceived by all three groups included in this study. Other key themes identified in this study included the importance of the coach's ability to:

- analyze, synthesize, and communicate valuable insights from assessment data
- to foster independence in the coachee by providing methods, techniques, and tools, that facilitate self-awareness and behaviour change beyond the initial engagement;
- to build partnerships with human resource brokers of coaching services inside the organization and
- for the coaching community to establish a universally agreed-to set of coaching competencies and practices. (Luebbe, 2004).

In 2004, Paul Dunn researched client's perceptions of change as a result of a professional coaching relationship. This study was premised on a scientific, positivistic framework, which hypothesized that coachees who had been coached for at least six months would perceive an overall positive change in several key areas of effectiveness. The study looked at the experiences of eighty participants in various roles and types of organizations (including not for profit) by using an open-ended questionnaire and Likert-scale survey methodology. The hypothesis was strongly supported, with a personal belief that a meaningful change had occurred in the coachee's problem solving abilities, sense of self-efficacy, and satisfaction with life. Participants revealed four common taken away experiences from being coached; (1) an increased ability to handle problems that occurred both in and out of work, (2) a deeper sense of self-awareness and an increased sense of self-

efficacy, (3) a positive relationship that encouraged personal growth, and (4) an increased feeling of satisfaction with life.

Another 2004 dissertation by Dawdy extended the question of perceived coaching effectiveness by considering whether an executive's personality would influence their perceptions of several factors in coaching specifically, (a) their view of the effectiveness of executive coaching and of particular methods of coaching, (b) the time periods before coaching was perceived to be effective, and (c) whether executive coaching had an impact on behavior change within various areas. The results showed no significant differences between the six personality-types (the leader-free spirit type, the leader-task type, the leader-people type, the free spirit-task type, the people-task type, and the people-free spirit type) other than of the time frame in which executive coaching was perceived as valuable. In that case, coaching was perceived to be valuable at about two months across all personality types with one exception. The *free spirit task type* participant perceived value after a longer time frame than this, rating this item lower than the other personality types. This study is significant in that it allows us to interpret qualitative research with leaders, regardless of personality types, as more likely to be representative of coachees in general.

Suzy Wales (2003) examined manager's experience of one-on-one coaching by an external coach in a UK study. After providing coaching to a senior manager and her team of 15 managers for over a year, she administered a self-report questionnaire to them. The questionnaire was based on six fundamental levels of learning and change. These included the environment or context of the work, the individual's behaviours; their beliefs and values; their capabilities; their role; and their vision and purpose. Using a phenomenological

approach, she conducted a thematic analysis of the results of the questionnaire. This analysis uncovered what managers found most useful about the coaching intervention: increased self-awareness, confidence, leadership and management ability, assertiveness, ability to understand difference, ability to manage stress, and work/life balance.

Once again, the questionnaire could be considered a limiting factor of this research. Perhaps even more that in the Stevens study, the structuring framework of the questionnaire (the fundamental levels of learning) may have been overly confining. Again, there is no mention made of whether there was opportunity for more open-ended input in the questionnaire. Despite these shortcomings, this study was a well-designed qualitative study, including a systematic and detailed analysis of results. Despite the small sample size, it generated meaningful results that could easily form the basis of follow-up studies.

In conclusion, Wales emphasizes the personal nature of the coaching experience, stating that "Coaching provides a space for profound *personal development* [italics added]; it enables managers to understand how to translate personal insights into improved effectiveness and ultimately organizational development (p.6)"

The other article that focused on client reports was Karol Wasylyshyn's study (2003) of executive's perspectives on coaching. Wasylyshyn surveyed the executives whom she had coached between 1985 and 2001, achieving a response rate of 82% (n=87). To achieve this high response rate, she followed-up the paper survey by "a persistent combination of written, phone, and e-mail" (p.94) correspondence. The survey asked executives to address numerous topics related to coaching, including coach selection criteria, responses to working with a coach, as well as the focus of executive coaching engagements. Concerning the experience of

being coached, this study touched the surface by simply categorizing executives' reactions to the idea of working with a coach as Positive (76%), Guarded (31%), Negative (6%), or Other (3%). (p.95).

With regards to the usefulness of various tools employed by coaches, on a 1–10 rating scale, the three highest-rated coaching tools were (a) coaching sessions (9.2), (b) 360 feedback (9.0), and (c) relationship with the coach (8.3). Over 50% of respondents also gave high ratings to testing (7.4) and readings on leadership (7.0) (p. 102).

In considering the focus of executive coaching engagements, results of this study showed that 59% of executives' key issues were focused on personal behavior change (such as tact, persuasiveness, and stress responses), 43% on enhancing leadership effectiveness, 40% on fostering stronger relationships, 17% on personal development (such as career management), and 7% on work-family integration.

A significant limitation of this research, noted by the author herself, is the non-random sampling strategy employed. All of the respondents were clients of the author, and thus, as with the Stevens study, the same concerns noted about false reporting of experience exists in this case. One also wonders if the respondents who chose not to participate were those whose experience differed significantly from that of the individuals who agreed to participate. Finally, the methodology used in this study could also be considered a limitation. The use of a preconstructed survey designed by the researcher that categorizes the data into discrete units provides an ideal example of the limitations of exploring this research question when a quantitative, positivistic paradigm is employed. Wasylyshn herself notes in her

conclusion that, "Probably more questions have been raised by this study than answered" (p. 105).

A dissertation in 2000 by Ballinger also included self-perceptions of coachees. This quantitative, positivistic study investigated the differences in perceptions of coaching effectiveness by two groups of executives: high performers who were participating in coaching for developmental purposes, and low performers who were participating for remedial purposes, according to their coaches. The study employed a survey method to sample senior managers who had participated in a 6-8 month executive coaching program offered by Personnel Decisions International. A total of 53 coachees completed the survey, which primarily involved the use of a 7-point Likert scale. Items related to overall change from coaching, causes of behaviour change from coaching, and value of the coaching in several areas of work and home life.

The results of Ballinger's study showed no significant difference between high performer and low performers who were coached in terms of their perceptions of effectiveness of the coaching. However, the study did find that female participants rated all items more highly over all than male participants, perceiving the coaching to be more effective on the items that were rated.

Hall, Otazo & Hollenbeck (1999) also conducted an often-cited study that included the perspectives of a large sample of coachees. This study presented the results of research sponsored by Boston University's Executive Development Roundtable. It was a qualitative study based on in-person interviews with over 75 executives in six Fortune 100 companies. Interviews with 15 executive coaches who were considered leaders in their field were also

included. The participants were randomly selected from a list of individuals (provided by the Human Resources professional responsible for executive coaching) who were receiving coaching. In particular, the study probed what both executives and coaches found helpful in the coaching relationship, the types of issues covered in executive coaching, the advantages and disadvantages of internal versus external coaches, the broad outcomes of executive coaching, and finally areas of concern for the coaching profession. In a table summary of their results, Hall et al. note what executives thought were the important factors for successful coaching. These included honest, realistic, challenging feedback (positive and negative), good listening (sounding board), good action ideas (pointers), clear objectives, no personal agenda, availability and competence, amoung other things. Less helpful aspects of coaching were when recommendations are self-serving for the coach, when feedback is all negative, when only feedback is provided, with no action items, and when feedback deals with others' feelings, and not results, and when recommended actions seem naïve or unrealistic.

The issues that were addressed in coaching for Hall et al.'s participants, based on coach and executive reports, "...range from relatively easy ones such as writing skills, setting priorities, and assessing staff needs, to more difficult problems such as improving relationships with bosses, improving interpersonal skills, and how to implement layoffs (p. 40)". The authors go on to state that, "coaches offer the greatest value for the most difficult issues— those involving the executive's relationship to the boss... and in implementing downsizing (p.40)."

The Hall et al. study had the potential of significantly demystifying the executive coaching process by classifying the general types of problems, challenges and development that is the work of the coach and executive. It also began to uncover the coachee's experience of being coached by soliciting opinions about what was more or less helpful. The most serious omission in this research article was a lack of a comprehensive description of the methodology being used. For example, the interview protocols were not published, nor was there any description of the interviews with coaches. In addition, Hall et al.'s analysis of the actual topics covered in coaching sessions was simplistic. For example, although he categorized the issues into four numbered "levels", these levels were never described, nor they seem significantly distinct from one another. For example, an exhibit in the study sites "listening, being more open, warm and open" as a level one topic and then "personal style, behaviours" as a level two issue (p.43). How these two areas actually differ is not described. Finally, no direct quotations from executives were included in the article, so that the executive's experience is provided to us in the form of lists and general comments and summary statements made by the researcher.

Despite these problems, the actual study that was the catalyst for Hall's article (1999) was effective and unique in four ways. First, it employed a version of random sampling, whereas most executive coaching studies use convenience samples. Second, it was based on a large sample size compared to other studies in this area. Third, it addressed issues of diversity, including gender and culture. Finally, as already noted, it did include both coach and executive's perspectives, as opposed to relying solely only on coach reports.

One study investigated the effects of a behavioural approach to executive coaching (Olivero, Bane, & Kopelman, 1997), using a primarily quantitative methodology. In this study, a managerial training program, which included a coaching component, was investigated for its impact and effectiveness. It included the senior managers' perspectives by asking for their reactions to being coached. Although the other variables in this study were assessed quantitatively using a Likert scale, the managers' reactions were assessed qualitatively, and were collapsed into two very broad general themes. Coaching was seen to be beneficial to them personally and also to the organization. This study has limited value for the purposes of the present study for several reasons. In this study, the coaching did not meet the definition of coaching as described in the introduction since the coaching provided was essentially performance management with subordinates. In addition to this the coaches were in fact trainees, not experienced executive coaches. Although it appears that the authors (who were experience coaches) provided coaching to the top level managers who were part of the training program, it is not clear whether their reactions to this coaching was solicited and included in the results. Lastly, the value of the qualitative analysis of coachee reactions is minimal, given its very general nature and the omission of direct quotations from coachees.

Case Studies

The other main source of research that includes the coachee's perspective includes the case studies published in the academic literature. Each draws on the actual experience of an executive coaching intervention to varying degrees, sometimes including direct quotations from the executive. These case studies will be considered below, beginning with the most recent. Case studies that did not include the executive's perspective were not included.

In an article titled "Coaching: The Successful Adventure of a Downwardly Mobile Executive", a case study of a client with a global corporation is presented (Blattner, 2005). In summary, this coachee, who was the president of a business unit for a global organization headquartered in Asia, was experiencing tension and anxiety due to significant organizational changes resulting in a new management structure and conflicting expectations. By the end of the two-year period of the coaching engagement, the author stated that his client was able to prosper and develop in ways that he might not have otherwise, and that he was able to move from a strictly fact-based style of leadership to one which took greater advantage of his emotional intelligence. For the purposes of this review of the literature, of particular note are the few paragraphs at the end of the twelve-page article, quoting the perspectives of this executive directly. Such quotes are absent from any of the other case study material found in the academic literature.

> Having a coach provided me with an unbiased third party to discuss difficult career- and work-related issues. Furthermore, as the trust and relationship was built over time, I was at ease discussing my work-related fears, problems, and possible resolutions that I would otherwise have been unable to explore with friends, colleagues, or family members. Over time, I often felt I had a private business tutor giving me a significant edge over my contemporaries.
>
> In our coaching sessions, I was given a much broader perspective on the possibilities that are available to me in my professional and personal life. I knew for a long time I was miscast in my earlier career and struggled with how to understand

and change it. By focusing on my strengths and the limitless opportunities available, raising my courage and self-esteem to effect positive change became reality.

I specifically struggled with fear and anxiety in certain aspects of my professional life. By continually visiting this issue during the coaching sessions, I am now much more satisfied with doing my best and accepting the outcome versus doing my best and worrying if it is good enough.

My personal life is now much more satisfying as I have energy left over to enjoy it. I've learned that energy drain is not synonymous with being responsible for a job or task. I've learned how to recognize energy drain and avoid it while getting the job done to a high standard. And if that is not good enough ... Tough Sh*t! (p. 13).

This case study is of particular interest because it records an actual coaching experience with one individual in some detail. Unfortunately, although the executive's voice is heard at the end of the article, very little of his experience of being coached is captured in the remainder of the paper, something which would have greatly enhanced the value of it from a qualitative perspective.

In another recent case study presentation, Schnell (2005) provides some rich descriptive material addressing the actual context and content of an executive coaching engagement undertaken by a coach that was internal to the organization. This occurred over a period of five years. This case study provides a detailed account of a coaching engagement between an internal coach (the author) and two senior leaders. This article is notable in two ways for the purposes of this literature review. First, the degree of detail provided is substantial, and flows in a narrative format. This allows the reader to become truly immersed

in a rich and thick description of the context, content and process of the coaching relationship. Second, Schnell's narrative is effective in providing sufficient detail to allow the reader to infer the coachees' perspectives. Here is a representative sample that demonstrates this:

> Over time, Eric observed that the pair were not coming to coaching prepared and did not complete homework between sessions. As the issues presented by the pair began to repeat from prior sessions, Eric would query the pair about a root cause, which usually created more theoretical discussion (often with the two sharply but Supportively disagreeing) about the state of the organization. Anne seemed to behave in the discussions as if the coaching sessions were more like graduate seminars. Gloria too remarked that the sessions were helping her to mentor and develop Anne. Although the sessions were intellectually stimulating for himself as well, Eric became concerned that they were captured by their own reflective process while ignoring their critical role as agents of action for the organization. (p.46)

This quote includes to some extent the perspective of each of the two coachees, as well as of the coach. One can infer from this that Anne experiences coaching as a learning opportunity with both personal and conceptual elements. Gloria, on the other hand, experienced the coaching as an opportunity to teach, or to transfer wisdom and knowledge to her colleague. What is interesting about this example is that both of these individuals were involved in coaching with the same coach, most often at the same time, and yet seemed to experience the coaching in different ways.

Another case study which focuses on the executive's experience of being coached is actually a detailed reflection by a coach and his coachee about a two-part coaching engagement. The study was published in 2005, and is actually co-authored by the coach David Peterson, and his client, Jennifer Miller. It includes narrative descriptions of each of five coaching sessions, along with comments and reflections about the coaching from both the coach and coachee. One of the key outcomes of this article is advice provided by the coachee and coach. In summary, the coachee advises coaches to, (a) take the long view, (b) go to the heart of things, (c) be totally committed to the person, (d) make it real- invite action, (e) do not sugar-coat things, and (f) make the person work. To coachees, she recommends being clear about what you want from your coach and from each session. The advice provided by the coach for coachees included: 1) balance skepticism and trust, 2) make learning a priority, 3) balance humility and confidence, 4) if you want to be coached, be coachable. To other coaches he noted the importance of not falling in love with your tools, and about being clear about your purpose. In general, this case study was valuable in the equal voice it gave to both the coach and coachee and in the way it provided reflective comments for the reader's consideration.

In another similar case study, Harry Levinson reported the example of his coaching engagement with a 60-year-old male CEO (1996). This case study was quite lengthy and descriptive, and provided significant detail about the scope and nature of what occurred during the coaching period. However, the author himself noted:

> I do not know how the client would evaluate the coaching sessions, except to note that he had referred other executives to talk with me who were interested in business issues similar to those we had discussed.

Once again, the researcher missed the opportunity to highlight the coachee's experience, and could have added significantly to the usefulness of this research article.

In another relatively descriptive case study article, executive coaches Witherspoon and White (1996) describe the key distinguishing features of the coaching situations they have encountered in their practice. They identify four distinct roles played by coaches, listing and describing them as follows: "...*coaching for skills* (learning sharply focused on a person's specific task), *coaching for performance* (learning focused more broadly on a person's present job), *coaching for development* (learning focused on a person's future job), and coaching for the executive's agenda (p. 4)." For each of the roles, the authors include a representative case example from their practice. In the category of *coaching for skills*, the example used in this study was of a managing partner in a professional services firm who needed to improve his presentation skills for an upcoming annual general meeting. In the category of *coaching for performance*, the example cited was of a CEO who wanted help setting visible measures for executive success and applying them to all top managers. The sample case used for *coaching for development* was of a 47-year-old executive who needed help addressing his interpersonal style in order to ensure his promotion to the management committee. Finally, in *coaching for the executive's agenda*, the example used was of an executive leading an organizational change in her business unit. This article succinctly describes and categorizes what actually occurs in executive coaching relationships from the

coach's perspective. However, unlike the other case study literature cited above, the author does not include the coachee's point of view directly, even though case study material is included. In addition, since the researcher summarized the examples only briefly, there is little of the richly descriptive material found in the Blattner and Levenson case studies reviewed above.

About the case study literature in general, two things can be said. First, case study material that is narrative in nature, rather than summative, may contribute more broadly to our understanding of executive coaching as a process and experience. Second, it would be "more helpful if the cases were anchored in a particular context other than the consultant's own perspectives" (Lowman, 2005, p. 93).

Chapter Summary

Thus we have seen how the existing research which includes executives' perspectives is very limited, and sometimes constrained by methodological limitations. A complete and rich description of the experience of being coached, from the coachee's perspective, would add greatly to the literature base by describing both coaching process and content. Learning about how coaching is perceived by the direct recipient of coaching services will allow us to step back and understand executive coaching in a fresh and insightful way. This chapter began with an overview of the executive coaching literature for the purpose of providing the rationale for the present study and also to set the context for a more detailed literature review. It then reviewed in detail the limited academic research about executive's perspectives, grouping then into three broad categories: Primary Research Question, Broader Research Query and Case Studies. Four academic research articles were summarized and reviewed that

addressed the executive's perspective about coaching. Ten articles where the executive's perspective was included as part of a broader research query where also reviewed. Finally, four case studies were discussed.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY

There are many approaches to research available in psychology and counseling. At the core, research involves "a process of systematic enquiry is that is designed to collect, analyze, interpret and *use* data to understand, describe, predict or control a... psychological phenomenon" (Mertens, 1998). In the social sciences, research methods are usually grouped into qualitative and quantitative methods, based largely on basic beliefs about the nature of reality (ontology), the nature of knowledge (epistemology) and the approach to inquiry (methodology). These basic beliefs have a significant influence on the purpose, nature and outcomes of research. Given the impact of one's research orientation on the research outcome, it is essential for anyone undertaking research to fully understand the nature of the approach they choose. As noted so eloquently by Fessler (1983):

> What is often overlooked is the relationship that exists between the research methodologies that we choose, the data that those research methodologies reveal, and the way in which our attempts to comprehend that data encourage a particular conceptual understanding of what we are researching. (p. 34)

The philosophical underpinnings of the present study can most closely be linked to phenomenology. There is considerable agreement that the purpose of phenomenological research is to "produce clear, precise, and systematic descriptions of meaning that constitute the activity of consciousness" (Polkinghorne, 1989). Polkinghorne (1989) makes the important distinction that "phenomenological psychology is not a subfield of philosophy, it is a psychology that draws on the philosophical insights of phenomenology" (p.43). As a result of this, it is helpful to understand the roots of phenomenology, the bridge between

phenomenology and psychology, as well as the distinction between phenomenology as a *philosophy*, and phenomenology as a *research method.* To this end, what follows is an overview of phenomenology as a philosophical foundation, its intersection with psychology, and its basis for research methodology. This will be followed by a detailed consideration of the phenomenological research methods that are consistent with a phenomenological approach, which formed the basis of this particular study. This overview will lead to a discussion of how this research method was applied in this particular study about managerial and executive coaching, with specific reference to the way the research process actually unfolded.

Phenomenology as a Philosophical Movement

The origination of phenomenology as a philosophical orientation has been credited to Edmund Husserl by a variety of sources (i.e. Camic, Rhones & Yardley, 2003; Cagan (2006); Flick, 2006; Moustakas, 1994). According to these writers, and many others, the beginnings of phenomenology are found in Husserl's work from the year 1900 called *Logical Investigations,* which was translated in 1970 by J.N. Findlay. It is no simple task to define phenomenology succinctly, for phenomenology is a sophisticated and sometimes subtle philosophical movement with a rich and somewhat complex history.

If we consider the dictionary definition of phenomenology is as a starting point for a consideration of phenomenology, the word *phenomenology* is described as "the study of the physical appearance of things" and the word *phenomenon* as "anything which may be seen and observed directly" (Weber, 1984, p.777). Moustakas extends this definition based on his in-depth study of Husserl, noting that from a philosophical perspective "what appears in

consciousness is the phenomenon" (p. 26) and emphasizing that an object exists only because it is

Phenomenology is often mistakenly treated as a unified philosophical underpinning in some textbooks on research methods (e.g.: Mertens, 1998). This appears to be done more for simplicity, since phenomenology, like many philosophical orientations, has undergone many iterations and formulations since the founder's seminal work. Husserl's own understanding and conceptualization of phenomenology, not surprisingly, evolved and became clearer over time, as he continued his analysis and responded to others, including Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, all of whom embraced phenomenology as an alternative to the predemoninant scientific epistemologies of the day. Cogan (2006) a scholar of Husserl, notes:

> ...it is generally conceded that Husserl's thought underwent a significant transformation from his early interests in logic and mathematics, as indicated in his "On the Concept of Number" and his *Philosophy of Arithmetic,* to his later transcendental interests, as indicated by *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology* (The Analysis That Disclosed the Need for the Reduction section, para. 1)

The fact that the founder's own formulations of phenomenological philosophy shifted significantly over time makes a historical study of phenomenology a complex undertaking well beyond the scope of the current chapter, It is however important to realize that phenomenology has been reformulated and defined differently by many scholars. For example, in one interpretation of the historical development of phenomenology Maura

Dowling (2004) identifies three schools of phenomenology (p.33), each arising from the work of different thought-leaders: 1) descriptive phenomenology (guided by the work of Husserl); 2) hermeneutics (guided by the work of Heidegger); and 3) combination of descriptive and interpretive phenomenology (guided by the Dutch school, including scholars such as van Manen). Osborne (1994) makes a simpler but similar distinction, one between Husserlian phenomenology and hermeneutic phenomenology. He calls these the two primary branches of phenomenology, which are distinguished by the degree to which knowing is achieved through intuition versus interpretation, respectively. Embree (1998) provides yet another taxonomy of the phenomenological movement, identifying four main tendencies

> ...'realistic phenomenology', which emphasizes the seeing and describing of universal essences; 'constitutive phenomenology', which emphasizes accounting for objects in terms of the consciousness of them; 'existential phenomenology', which emphasizes aspects of human existence within the world; and 'hermeneutical phenomenology', which emphasizes the role of interpretation in all spheres of life. (Phenomenological movement section, para. 2)

Thus, we see a shift in phenomenology away from a study of the object itself, as suggested by the dictionary definition and towards a study of a particular individual's experiencing of that object, and then focused on the meaning that a particular individual makes of his or her experience. In general, the goal of research in this orientation is to understand and describe how a particular thing is experienced by the participant, and does not assume any objective reality that is separate from the participant. As such, "phenomenology is the study of phenomenon as experienced by man. The primary emphasis

is on the phenomenon itself exactly as it reveals itself to the experiencing subject in all it concreteness and particularity" (Giorgi, Fischer & Von Eckartsberg, 1971). In this way, phenomenology "emphasizes subjectivity and discovery of the essences of experience" (p. 45). Osborne (1994) makes this point as well, noting the focus on eidetic structure of experiences in phenomenology. Mertens (1998) highlights that the distinguishing feature of phenomenological research in psychology is that it is the subjective experience which is at the center of inquiry. Using this methodology, the psychological researcher goes about determining "the underlying structures of an experience by interpreting the originally given descriptions of the situation in which the experience occurs" (Moustakas, 1994, p.13.). In the context of phenomenology as a foundation for human science investigation, it has been noted that Husserl's phenomenology is a "transcendental" phenomenology (Moustakas, 1994). As noted by Fink (1995), a noted Husserl scholar:

> ...the onlooker that comes to himself in the epoché reduces 'bracketed' human immanence by explicit inquiry back behind the acceptednesses in self-apperception that hold regarding humanness, that is, regarding one's belonging to the world; and thus he lays bare transcendental experiential life and the transcendental having of the world" (p.40)

The Intersection of Phenomenology and Psychology

The intersection of philosophy and psychology make understanding phenomenology particularly complex. Cloonan (1995) notes that the beginnings of a phenomenological psychology in America occurred as early as the 1930s. He describes the development of this

area as initially notable and non-programmatic in the 1960's, with subsequent development being more programmatic.

The implications of a phenomenology for psychology were far-reaching. Husserl is known to have taught a course on phenomenological psychology, and he believed that this approach could actually help to make clearer the main concepts in psychology (Camic et al., 2003). One of these core concepts was the understanding of consciousness. Consciousness has been a major topic in both psychology and phenomenology since their inception (Kendler, 2005). The way this topic is conceptualized and studied within psychology has evolved and changed considerably since Wundt first established psychology as an independent science in 1879. Wundt focused on a person's sensory experience after physical stimulation, and attempted to train people to separate out the influences of their past. William James, another key figure in psychology, departed from this approach, instead accepting consciousness as it appears. As noted by Kendler (2005), "Although Wundt and James were attempting to observe and report conscious experience as it appears, Husserl was observing consciousness from the perspective of human existence" (Psychology Versus Phenomenology section, para.6). The goal of phenomenology was to describe and uncover the essential features of human existence, features that are largely "operating silently and invisibly", through reflective study (Von Eckartsberg, 1983). In this sense, a phenomenological lens applied to psychological constructs actually fundamentally redefined the way in which these constructs could be understood. Giorgi, Barton and Maes (1983) express the implications of a new philosophy for psychology here:

> The postulates of realism, empiricism, and positivism block the very access to the psychological, which is presence." It is in this profound sense that psychology as a natural science fails. In taking nature as its point of departure, it forgets that nature is a reduction of "experienced world," a methodological achievement of the natural sciences which is defined precisely by the elimination of consciousness or experience. (p. 220)

Phenomenological Research Methods

It can be challenge for a researcher to move from the philosophical understanding of phenomenology, to an understanding of how to apply phenomenology to the study of human experience as a psychological endeavour. It is critical to understand that the concepts of phenomenology, as a philosophy, and phenomenology, as a research method, are two distinct things. In the movement from philosophy to method, there seems to occur some pragmatic "leaving behind" of the more subtle, or difficult, aspects of the philosophy. This is perhaps one reason why there are those who would say that there is not one correct way of doing phenomenological research (Keen, 1975), and indeed there is much variation in the way that research claiming to have phenomenological roots is actually carried out (e.g., Camic et al., 2003; Moustakas, 1994). Several authors have noted that phenomenological inquiry is still in the developmental stages, and continues to evolve.

The extent to which the methods ascribed to by various researchers in this tradition are faithful to the true philosophical roots of phenomenology is a point of ongoing debate. Despite this, several notable authors claim that their research methodologies are consistent with a phenomenological philosophic stance. For example, in a textbook on qualitative

research methods, Mertens (1998) states that ethnomethodology, conversational analysis and some types of feminist research have a phenomenological basis, without particularly ascribing the methods to one or another of the schools of phenomenology. Regardless of this, there is considerable agreement that the purpose of the methodologies that are employed is to "produce clear, precise, and systematic descriptions of meaning that constitute the activity of consciousness" (Polkinghorne, 1989).

The bridge between phenomenology as a philosophical movement and phenomenological research methods in psychology seem to have derived at least in part from the phenomenological concepts of epoche, transcendental-phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation. It was in *Ideas I* (as cited in Camic et al., 2003) that Husserl explicitly discussed three major processes of phenomenology. In summary, these were: *phenomenological reduction, free imaginative variation*; and finally *description of the essence of the object or state of affairs*. Moustakas (1994) also discusses these ideas, seeing them as core processes that facilitate derivation of knowledge. These ideas seems central to the majority of phenomenological research methods described in the psychology literature, and have a significant impact on how a researcher approaches the topic, undertakes the research and considers the data. Each of these will be considered below.

Epoche. In phenomenological research, the researcher begins with an attitude of openness to all that is possible, a kind of naive perspective that allows one to be surprised by what they hear and the meaning they attach to it. The epoche is accomplished through bracketing, a sort of preparation for the undertaking of research. Bracketing is the setting aside and letting go of judgments and presuppositions about the way things are. It is distinct

from what has been called the "natural attitude" (e.g., Moustakas, 1994), that is based on the idea of a subjective, constant reality which is greatly influenced by previous experience and prejudice.

The concept of Epoche as intended by Husserl has been examined by many scholars, and continues to be a point of debate in the philosophy literature. Many contend it is implausible to set aside the natural world, and to operate from a place that is outside our everyday assumptions about the world. This debate was a key point of departure for other phenomenological philosophers, including Heidegger, Sartre and Merleau-Ponty. These philosophers generally believed it was more plausible for one to simply accept that he or she has these preconceived notions about the world, so that they could be made transparent, examined and then be taken into account, during analysis. As a result of this debate, we see more or less adherence to bracketing as part of any methodology that is consistent with phenomenological philosophy. This will be discussed further in this chapter.

Transcendental-phenomenological Reduction. With this preparation, the phenomenological researcher is able to proceed with transcendental-phenomenological reduction, a process by which one pays complete attention to the phenomenon itself, as it is expressly described.

Moustakas (1994) eloquently describes this process in some detail and says it is "not only a way of seeing but a way of listening with a conscious and deliberate intention of opening ourselves to phenomena as phenomena, in their own right, with their own textures and meanings" (p. 92). Through this process "we derive a textural description of the meanings and essences of the phenomenon, the constituents that comprise the experience in

consciousness, from the vantage point of an open self" (p.34). The goal is to always be taken back to the experience itself in order to make meaning. In this sense, Osborne (1994) and others believe that true phenomenological research is not inductive but intuitive and reflective.

Imaginative Variation. Once the reduction has occurred, what follows is the imaginative variation. In this process, a textural, structural synthesis of meaning is derived, based on the phenomenological reduction. This is the stage at which the psychological essence of the phenomenon is revealed. This process strives to "seek possible meanings through the utilization of imagination, varying the frames of reference, employing polarities and reversals, and approaching the phenomenon from divergent perspectives, positions, roles or functions" (Moustakas, 1994, p. 98). In other words, a process is undertaken that allows the researcher to create a rich, meaningful description of the essence of the experience, based on the research question. Polkinghorne makes the important point that in psychological research, the focus is on "the level of structures that constitute psychological meanings in particular contexts or situations" (p.51), rather than on universal structures.

Amedeo Giorgi's Phenomenological Research Method. Cloonan (2006) attributes the development of a phenomenological psychological research method to Amedeo Giorgi. This method offered an empirically-oriented human science alternative to the natural science approach of research in psychology. Giorgi himself notes that he was the "American Psychologist who attempted a rigorous interpretation of how the phenomenological method... could be adapted and made useful for psychology" (2003, p 254). Giorgi helped institute a graduate program of phenomenological psychology at Duquesne University in

Pittsberg, Pennsylvania in the early 1960s. In 1970, Giorgi founded the Journal of Phenomenological Psychology. The present study was undertaken from a phenomenological frame of reference, using Giorgi and Giorgi's methodology as the starting point.

Giorgi and Giorgi (2003), note that the derivation of knowledge, following the steps described above, amounts to completing a philosophical analysis based on one's own experience. Since most research involves analysis of the experience of others, rather than oneself, a need arose in the development of a scientific phenomenological method that allowed for this. In this context, Giorgi and Girorgi (2003) discuss and detail a phenomenological approach to considering the data—a methodology they claim is more connected to psychological research. This methodology includes the following steps: (a) reading for a sense of the hole, (b) determination of parts: establishing meaning units, (c) transformation of meaning units into psychologically sensitive expressions, (d) determination of the structure and (e) post structural analysis. What follows is a detailed consideration of how this method was applied in the present study.

Application of the Phenomenological Approach in This Study

What follows is an overview of the research method employed in the present study, including a consideration of the specific preparation, data collection, and analysis techniques that were used in this particular study of executive coaching experiences.

The Research Question

The methods researchers use to prepare and to collect data have a significant effect on the data that is brought forward for consideration. As a starting point, the research question in phenomenological research must be carefully considered, for it is seminal to the focus and

nature of the data collection process. Moustakas (1994) very specifically outlines the nature of the phenomenological research question as follows:

1. It seeks to reveal more fully the essences and meanings of human experience;
2. It seeks to uncover the qualitative rather than the quantitative factors in behavior and experience;
3. It engages the total self of the research participant, and sustains personal and passionate involvement;
4. It does not seek to predict or to determine causal relationships;
5. It is illuminated through careful, comprehensive descriptions, vivid and accurate renderings of the experience, rather than measurements, ratings and scores. (p. 105)

Thus, the research question is engaging, interesting and vivid, and it is strongly felt as important and fascinating by the researcher and participant alike. This makes it qualitatively different from some research questions stemming from a positivistic paradigm that are seeking cause and effect relationships, or quantitative descriptions of clearly defined variables.

The purpose of this present study was to describe the nature of a successful Managerial or Executive coaching experience, from the client's perspective. As a result, the research question met the criteria above, and was broad and encompassing. Specifically the research question for this study was "What is the experience of being coached like, from the client's perspective" or put another way "What is it like to be coached?"

Participant Recruitment

The careful selection of participants for inclusion in phenomenological research is important. It could be said that one can contribute to the transferability of the structural description of an experience by carefully and specifically selecting participants (sometimes called co-researchers). As aptly noted by Polkinghorne (1989):

> The point of subject selection is to obtain richly varied descriptions, not to achieve statistical generalization. The error that phenomenological researchers can make in selection is to choose subjects that produce a narrow range of descriptions. The researcher needs to choose an array of individuals who provide of variety of specific experiences of the topic being explored. (p. 48)

Several authors discuss the importance of participant selection for phenomenological research, and offer more or less stringent criteria for their inclusion. For example, van Kamm (as cited in Polkinghorne, 1989) believes that participants must have six important skills: (a) the ability to express themselves linguistically with relative ease, (b) the ability to sense and to express inner feelings and emotions without shame and inhibition, (c) the ability to sense and to express the organic experiences that accompany these feelings, (d) the experience of the situation under investigation at a relatively recent date, (e) a spontaneous interest in their experience, and (f) the ability to report or write what was going on within themselves. In contrast to this comprehensive list, Pollio et al. consider only two very general principal criteria for eligibility; (a) that the participant has experienced the phenomenon of interest and, (b) that they are willing to talk about it. Similarly, Osborne (1994) suggests that criteria be held to a minimum, and explicitly notes that participants need not necessarily be verbally fluent.

It is important to note here that the quality of a phenomenological study does not rest solely with the number of participants, since "the purpose of phenomenological research is to describe the structure of an experience, not to describe the characteristics of a group who have had the experience" (Polkinghorne, p.48). The ability to the researcher to capture a rich and specific description of the participant's experience, setting aside their own presuppositions through imaginative variation and reduction, is vital. Theoretically, it is possible this end could be achieved through the intuiting of only one person's experience. It is similarly possible that one could sample hundreds of individuals, and still miss describing the essence of the experience faithfully. So while careful subject selection is a necessary element to consider, it is not sufficient to ensure transferability.

In general, Polio et al. consider an appropriate sample size to be from six to 12 persons, which can be adjusted as the study proceeds. On the other hand, some phenomenological studies have included as many as 50 people (e.g., Fischer, 1984), and Polkinghorne (1989) has noted a range of from three to 325 participants. In general, once complete redundancy is achieved, there is no need to continue with data collection. Ideally, as stated by Osborne "the phenomenologist stops when the phenomenon has been illuminated" (An inductive process section, para. 65).

Based on the discussion above, rather than randomly accessing a large representative pool of participants, the goal for this study was instead to find individuals who would participate in an in depth interview describing their experience of being coached. Ideally, there would be an equal number of male and female participants that met the following criteria:

1) The coaching experience was either very recent, or still ongoing, at the time the study was being done.
2) Participants were undergoing or had recently completed, some form of managerial or executive coaching, as opposed to strictly life coaching.
3) Participants could be first time clients, or have undergone coaching in the past.
4) Participants who had
    a) a spontaneous interest and curiosity in their experience of being coached;
    b) the ability to express themselves in an interview relatively easily;
    c) the ability to sense and to express their thoughts and feelings to another person;
    d) the ability to take a step back and report what was going on for them as they went through coaching

It became evident early in this study that it would be challenging to recruit individuals who have been coached. Coaching is a personal endeavor, not always disclosed to third parties, and a very wide range of organizations and individuals use it. Finally, individuals with a wide range of skills and abilities carry it out. As a result, it seemed most likely that participants would best be accessed through some secondary source. It was decided to recruit participants through the coaches who coached them for several reasons. First, it was the most targeted approach to the recruitment effort, quickly and easily identifying individuals who had been recently coached. Second, the involvement of the coaches in this way enhanced the value of the research to the coaching community (a core value of qualitative methods) by providing an opportunity to discuss the development of the research question with the coaches. Finally, the involvement of the coaches enhanced the credibility of the research, by

ensuring that the individuals participating in the study were in fact qualified coaches.

Using a combination of snowball and convenience sampling technique, four qualified coaches within the Calgary, Alberta community were approached and asked to recommend 2 -3 participants for the research. Two of these coaches were female and two were male. In all four cases, the coaches were involved with the Calgary Coaching Association, and were trained and/or accredited by a professional coaching program.

Coaches were provided with a set of guidelines to help guide their recommendations of clients (see Appendix A: *Guidelines for Coaches*). Coaches were asked to forward a recruitment notice by e-mail to the participants they selected using these guidelines (see Appendix B: *Invitation to Participate in Research).* This notice directed interested individuals to contact the researcher and author of this study directly by e-mail should they wish to accept the invitation to participate. In order to enhance anonymity and confidentiality, the notice sent to participants requested that participants not disclose this decision to their coaches. Using this approach enhanced the confidentiality of the participants. In particular, the coach did not know whether any of his or her referred clients had been selected for inclusion in the study, which made it more difficult to attribute any of the quotations made by their clients.

Based on the guidelines and procedure described above, four coaches referred a total of 10 clients. Of these 10 clients, two were considered ineligible because they were not currently in a managerial or executive position, and one was considered ineligible because this client was also an external coach. From this pool of seven eligible clients, three males clients were randomly selected from the pool of four male clients, and the three remaining

female clients were included in the study, for a total of six participants. All participants were over the age of 18, and participation was not in any way connected as a condition of their employment.

Participants who agreed to be included in the study were then contacted by the principal researcher, who made arrangements to receive the signed consent form, and to schedule the preliminary and in-depth interviews. Pseudonyms were either selected by participants or assigned by the researcher as part of the informed consent, and these pseudonyms were used to label their audio tapes and transcribed interviews. They are also used in explication of the data below, when required, for the inclusion of quotations.

As each of the six interviews were conducted, the researcher considered whether adding one more co-researcher would add significantly to the goal of describing the experience of being coached. It was determined that six co-researchers was an appropriate and sufficient number for inclusion in this study, given the nature of the research question and the redundancy in themes and concepts that was being noted during the 5th and 6th interviews.

Data Collection Method

Once the process of bracketing has begun and the research question has been discovered, the researcher turns his or her attention to the task of collecting data about this question. The primary data collection method used in phenomenological research is the one on one in-depth interview, which is designed to gather first-person reports of life experiences (Moustakas, 1994; Polkinhorne, 1989). The phenomenological interview has several salient features. First, it is relatively unstructured, and there is no express goal of standardizing

questions asked of each participant. In fact, some authors argue for keeping the number of questions to a minimum. Osborne (1994) highlights the focus on "making the interview process minimally intrusive and allowing the individual's experience to present itself as spontaneously as possible" (Phenomenological and Dramaturgical Interviewing section, para. 85). Although the researcher may begin the interview with some ideas for areas of exploration, these often change or evolve as the interview progresses. Giorgi et al. (1971) notes that the approach in phenomenology is "characterized by the attitude of openness to whatever is significant for the proper understanding of the phenomenon" (p. 9). This could be said to also describe the attitude necessary in the interview. Second, since the phenomenological interview attempts to uncover prereflective experience, it often focuses participants on their feelings. This requires that the researcher create a climate of empathy and attunement, and in this way this research interview shares some qualities of the counseling interview. Moustakas explicitly states the importance of the intersubjective relationship within a transpersonal methodology noting, "The method through which the Other becomes accessible to me is that of empathy, a there-ness for me of others" (Moustakas, 1994, p.37)". Third, the interviews are often longer in phenomenological research, generally lasting between an hour to an hour and a half.

Although the in-depth interview is the primary data source, other data collection methods have been described (Polkinghorne. 1989). These include data from self-reflection, and data from previously developed descriptions. In some regards, data gleaned from self-reflection could be considered to be the most true to Husserlian phenomenology, which holds that "knowledge of the structures of consciousness was not a matter of induction or

generalization from a sample but was the result of a 'direct grasp' of 'eidetic seeing' (Osborne, 1994, Phenomenological Research section, para.16). In most phenomenological psychological research, however, this self-reflective process becomes a starting point, rather than the end point. Data obtained from previous descriptions can also be a source of data. Previous descriptions can take many forms, including research literature, creative and non-academic literature, and nonliterary art forms such as poetry, plays and novels. In an introductory textbook on qualitative research, Flick (2006) devotes an entire chapter to "multi-focus data", which includes the use of photos, film and video as data sources. In a research paper firmly grounded in the philosophical underpinnings of phenomenology, Freydberg (2002) believes it to be "no surprise... to find that most contemporary phenomenologists regard art, rather than science, as the exemplary correlate of phenomenological thought" (p.220). As qualitative research methods continue to develop and increase in sophistication, these alternative data sources are likely to yield compelling psychological data.

Having said this, the method of data collections most appropriate and available for this study was an in-person in-depth one on one interview between the researcher and the participant or co-researcher. The in-depth one-on-one interview took an average of 75 minutes for this study. In addition to this, a preliminary telephone interview was also used in all but one case.

The purpose of this preliminary telephone interview was two-fold. First, it allowed for the beginning of the development of rapport between the researcher and participant, an element critical to the interview method. Second, it divided the time requirement into two

segments to make it less onerous on the participants, who were all working full time. Finally, it separated the collection of demographic and background data from the collection of more qualitative data. The telephone interviews took an average of 20 minutes. In the one case where a telephone interview was not used, the in-depth interview time was extended to include the questions from the preliminary telephone interview. The questions used during the preliminary interviews were:

1. Please tell me your age, gender, ethnicity, and the years of experience you have in a formal leadership role.
2. When did your coaching experience occur?
3. How long were you coached, or are you still participating in coaching with this coach?
4. Where did you find your coach? What role did the organization play in selecting your coach?
5. Generally, how long were your sessions?
6. Where did the sessions take place?
7. What is your educational and other relevant background?

The telephone interview was followed by the in person in-depth interview. The purpose of this in-depth interview is to gather a detailed account of the person's experience of being coached, including associated feelings, thoughts and impacts. As noted previously, the phenomenological interview is relatively unstructured. Although the researcher had some general areas to explore, the questions varied from interview to interview, with the goal of

attuning with the participant and attempting to tap into the essence of research question: the experience of being coached from the client's perspective. The guiding questions included:

1. Tell me about what it was like when you first learned about the possibility of being coached. What incidents or people stand out for you? What were you thinking at that time? How did you feel about it all?
2. I'm curious about how the process of being coached unfolded for you. Tell me about that.
3. I wonder if you might tell me more about how your relationship with your coach changed over time.
4. Perhaps you can think of one particular coaching moment that was particularly meaningful for you. Can you describe it for me and what it was like going through that?
5. How has being coached affected you?
6. If we had the people who are most in contact with you on a regular basis (your colleagues, subordinates, manager, significant other, friends) in the room here, how would they say coaching has affected you?
    a. Based on your experience, what advice would you give to coaches, or to people considering working with a coach?

Although these were guiding questions, for each interview, the researcher primarily attended to what seemed particularly meaningful to the participant, and asked questions to explore these areas in depth. In general, the in-depth interview took place one to two weeks after the telephone interview. However, in one case due to unforeseen scheduling difficulties, over a

month passed before the in-depth interview was undertaken.

For the first participant, the in-depth interview was tape recorded, while the researcher also took brief notes. The researcher made the decision after this first interview to discontinue taking notes, as this note taking appeared to have the effect of interfering with the rapport building and open communication that is essential to the phenomenological method. For example, the first interview was the shortest of the interviews, and there were often times when the participant would stop and wait for the researcher to finish her writing. Based on this experience, for the remaining five in-depth interviews, the tape recorder was used alone, and only the list of guiding questions was put to one side for reference, as required.

Before beginning the explication process, each tape recorded interview was transcribed. The transcripts of the interviews took note of significant pauses, and obvious emotions (such as laughter and crying) as well as the spoken word. This transcription process generated 138 pages of single-spaced text. John's interview was 19 pages in length, Darren's interview was 22 pages, Samuels's was 16, Maria's 29, Jeannie's 33, and Irene's was 19 pages. This wide range in the length of the individual interviews is to be an expected outcome of phenomenological interviewing, since each interview was unique, based on the areas considered meaningful by the co-researcher. In addition to this, each co-researcher described his/her experience in a personal way, with some being more verbal and descriptive, and others being more concise and direct. Some used metaphors, analogies, and examples, while other used these in a limited way or not at all. Finally, the rate of speech and degree of repetition of comments and ideas also varied, all contributing to the variety of outcomes in

the length of the interview transcripts. As part of explication, each of these transcribed interviews was read in its entirety by the principal researcher a total of three times as will be described more fully below.

Explication Methods

The term *data analysis* in the case of phenomenological research methods has been considered inappropriate by some (Giorgi, 1971), since it suggests a positivistic, linear, logical process that is not characteristic of the method. Giorgi argues convincingly for replacing the term *data analysis* with *explication.* Explication describes "the process of making explicit the locus of any given phenomenon within its horizon" (p.21). In qualitative research, the process is said to be recursive, "with findings being generated and systemically built as successive pieces of data are gathered" (Mertens, 1998, p. 348). Thus, in considering the phenomenological research method in particular, one is not required to complete all of the interviews before beginning the explication process. In fact, the data gathered during the first interview may be used to modify or enhance the questions used in the next, especially if the result will be to more richly and aptly describe the essence of the phenomenon in question. Osborne highlights that "data collection and interpretation follow a respiralling pattern where interpretation of extant data may influence subsequent data collection and analysis" (1994, Phenomenological and Ethnographic Research Practice section, para. 61). This is called the *hermeneutic circle*. In this research, the guiding questions were modified and added to as the interviews progressed, and the approach to the interview itself adapted according to the way the co-researchers responded.

Having clarified the unique non-sequential nature of the qualitative data collection in general, there is considerable variation in the way specific phenomenological explication methods are described in the literature. Often various terms are used to describe similar processes. As previously highlighted, Giorgi and Giorgi (2003) have described a five-step process for analyzing phenomenological data that includes: (a) *reading for a sense of the hole*, (b) *determination of parts: establishing meaning units*, (c) *transformation of meaning units into psychologically sensitive expressions*, (d), *determination of the structure* and (e) *post structural analysis.* This process clearly and directly relates to the philosophical underpinnings described earlier, with the steps being extensions and applications of the philosophical concepts of epoche, transcendental-phenomenological reduction, and imaginative variation. Giorgi and Giorgi's process is also one of the most recently described in the literature, and as such provides a contemporary view of the method. For these reasons, their methodology forms the basis for the research design of the current study. What follows first is a description of their methodology, and a discussion of how it relates and compares to other phenomenological approaches described in the literature. Again, for each component of the methodology, a detailed description of how the present study unfolded is also included.

Presentation and Organization of the Data. If the data collection method is the interview or some other verbal account of the experience, the first step of the Giorgi and Giorgi (2003) explication process in phenomenological research is to transcribe it in full, using the participant's exact words. Pollio et al. (2006) suggest that due consideration be given to also noting pauses, tone of voice and other nuances as notations in the transcription, if they will assist the researcher in capturing the essence of the experience at the explication

stage (p. 262). However, in general, transcribed spoken language is the root of most phenomenological data. This transcription is then read in its entirety. Giorgi and Giorgi call this *reading for a sense of the whole*. Moustaka's modification of the Stevick-Collizzi-Keen (MSCK) method of explication (Moustakas, 1994) refers to the transcription of the interview in other steps rather than separating this step out. Moustaka's modified version of van Kamm's (MvK) method (Moustakas, 1994) does not refer to the need for a full transcription of the interview as a starting point, but seems to imply it. In the case where the data collection method provides something that is already in written form, this is the form that is used at this stage. It is important that the researcher have access to the data in this written form in order to be able to grasp the description of the experience in its entirety and in all its complexity.

In the case of this research, each interview was transcribed in full, including both the researcher and co-researcher's comments. Included in this transcription were pauses, as well as obvious emotional responses (such as crying or laughter). Each line of text in the transcript was numbered, for ease of reference during the subsequent steps of explication. These transcripts formed the basis for the subsequent consideration of the data.

Reading for a Sense of the Whole. Based on the Giorgi and Giorgi methodology outlined above, the present study placed considerable and equal value on each co-researcher's experience, as they perceived and lived it. As a result, a considerable amount of time was spent in the consideration of each individual interview transcript in the beginning stages of the explication process, beginning with reading for a sense of the whole. It is during the first reading that the epoche was re-established for the purposes of explication, which the

reader will recall is openness to the data resulting from the letting go of preconceptions and judgements. During this first reading, no notations were made, rather the researcher attempted to re-live the experience of the interview itself, being reminded of its overall nature and content. This intuitive process of coming to know the data was undertaken for each interview sequentially.

Determination of the Parts. The next step in the explication process is the determination of parts. The goal is to break the text into meaningful and manageable units that "seem to express a self-contained meaning from a psychological perspective" (Polkinghorne, 1989, p.53). The MvK method (Moustakas, 1994) refers to this as *listing and preliminary grouping*— a process of *horizontalization* where each statement is treated as having equal value" (Moustakas, p. 97). At this stage, the researcher continues to work with the text as transcribed and "there is an attempt on the part of the researcher to allow the data to speak for itself in spite of the researcher's predispositions" (Osborne, 1994, An Inductive Process section, para. 62). The researcher is looking for shifts in meaning while reading the text, and makes notes when these shifts take place. The MvK method talks about this aspect of the process as including *reduction* and *elimination*, with the outcome being a listing of the invariant constituents of the experience. The MSCK method refers to the outcome as the invariant horizons or meaning units of experience. In general, there is a need to look for overlapping and repetitive descriptions during this stage, so that they can be eliminated, something referred to as clustering in both the MvK and MSCK methods. This process requires the use of judgment on the part of the researcher, and there really are no objectively correct meaning units that are derived. Giorgi and Giorgi (2003) note that "All researchers

would not have identical meaning units for the procedure to be valid. The method is judged by its outcome, not by intermediary stages" (p.252).

For this study, during the second reading of each transcript, the researcher highlighted points in the text where there was a significant shift in meaning, considering each statement or series of statements with respect to significance for describing the experience of being coached. In other words, a transcendental phenomenological reduction of the data was undertaken. This resulted in a natural clustering of each interview transcript according to the constituents of the experience for that particular co-researcher. Each statement was given equal weight or importance at this stage. These horizontalized statements were considered invariant constituents of the experience if they contained a moment of the experience that is a necessary and sufficient constituent for understanding it, and if was possible to abstract and label it (Moustakas, 1994, p. 122). Each of these invariant constituents was described, using short phrases which could be considered paraphrases of the co-researcher's own words. This resulted in a complete and cumulative listing of the invariant constituents of the experience of being coached, based on the lived experience of six coachees. During this stage the final step was the bringing together, or grouping, of any over lapping or repetitive constituents across co-researchers. The grouped, invariant constituents of the experience were the meaning units, and they were then labelled. The result of this phenomenological reduction was therefore a total of 30 meaning units.

Transformation of Meaning Units into Expressions. The next stage in explication is the transformation of meaning units into psychologically sensitive expressions. The transcription of the interview often results in text that is richly laden with meaning, but often

expressed in vernacular and every day language that sometimes does not go far enough in precisely describing psychological content. This step of the process is intended to render the text as meaningful as possible from a psychological perspective, now using the researcher's words. At this stage, the personal meanings are important but "not for their own sake, but for the value they have for clarifying the context in which psychological phenomenon manifest themselves" (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003, p.253). The MvK and MSCK methods differ in that they do not include this step in their methods but move instead from the determination of parts to the generating of themes. This difference will be discussed below, but to the extent that the themes are derivative of the meaning units and described in the researcher's language, there may be some overlap with Giorgi and Giorgi's transformation. Polkinghorne (1989) notes an additional variation in methodologies at this stage, with some researchers retaining the situational context of the description, and others moving directly away from that context. An important caution in this step is not to use theory-laden psychological terminology but rather "ordinary language twisted toward psychologically heightened revelations" (p.253).

In this particular study, the researcher grouped the labelled meaning units into psychologically sensitive clusters of meaning units, with the goal of coming closer to uncovering the underlying aspects of the experience.

Determination of the Structure. The next step in the explication of the data is the determination of structure. Recall that a key goal of phenomenological research is to arrive at the essential structure of an experience, based on the research question. New words and ways of describing the experience may arise, even at this point. The outcome is a "statement of

essential, nonredundant psychological meanings" (Polkinghorne, 1989, p.54). Both the MvK and MSCK methods describe two, rather than one, outcomes of this step: the *individual textural description* and the *individual structural description.* Textural descriptions are based on the themes and delimited horizons of experience, whereas structural descriptions provide a "vivid account of the underlying dynamics of the experience" (Moustakas, p. 135). Stated another way, textural descriptions focus on what is being experienced, and structural descriptions describe how that is being experienced. There is a range of formats and styles for these statements and descriptions. Some are written in the first person, as if written by the participant. For example, Sells, Topor, and Davidson (2004) propose that interview data be transformed into autobiographical narrative accounts, and provide an example of doing this in a study of the experience of recovering from severe mental illness with two participants. Othere descriptions are written in the third person, by the researcher. Some of these include direct quotations of the participant's language, and others describe what the participant said instead. Despite these differences, the goal is to understand the "underlying structure, or essential elements, that account for an experience being what it is" (Moustakas, p. 137).

For this particular study, in the last full reading of the transcripts, the researcher labelled and then described the constituents of the experience, or meaning units, uncovered in the previous step described above. This process of reducing the data by clustering meaning units helps us to understand the data in a way that springs from the co-researcher's experiences, and yet captures the underlying dynamic or core process at work in that experience. These dynamics include both a sense of "what" was experienced, and "how" it was experienced. The goal of the resulting expression was to describe both the textural and

structural descriptions—in other words *what* was being experienced by the coachee, as well as *how* that person experienced it.

As described in the methodology chapter, this process of reducing the data by clustering meaning units helps us to understand the data in a way that springs from the co-researcher's experiences, and yet captures the underlying dynamic or core process at work in that experience. These dynamics include both a sense of "what" was experienced, and "how" it was experienced.

Post Structural Analysis. The final step in explication, as described by Giorgi and Giorgi (2003), is post structural analysis. It is not the achievement of the structure that is the ultimate goal of phenomenological research but rather the "respect for the complexity of the experience and the refinement of psychological understanding" (Giorgi & Giorgi, 2003, p. 255). Other methodologies as currently described do not explicitly include this step, although Polkinghorne (1989) makes note of the need to include "the implication of the phenomenological finds for psychological theory and application" (p. 57) in the research report. This step in the process attempts to link the findings of the research to other research, and to other psychological understandings about the phenomenon in question, in order to make further meaning of the research outcome. For this study, the Post-Structural analysis was undertaken and will be reported in the Discussion chapter.

Additional Methodological Considerations

There are four significant components that are missing from the Giorgi and Giorgi (2003) methodology but included in others; (a) the phenomenological study of the researcher's own experience; (b) the generation of themes; (c) the development of composite

descriptions, and (d) the validation of descriptions by participants. Each of these will be discussed below since they were in fact included in the methodology for this particular study. There was also a need in this study to mitigate risk, which will also be discussed below.

Bracketing

The first step missing from the description of some of the methodologies described, including Giorgi and Giorgi's (2003), is the formal process of bracketing one's own experience of the phenomenon. It is not surprising that not all phenomenological research methods call for the undertaking of bracketing, since the plausibility of achieving epoche is still debated to this day. The methodologies that do include it discuss it in more general terms, departing from the strict Husslerian sense of the idea.

Despite this, in general, it is agreed by many that once the research question is considered, the phenomenological researcher should clearly bring into awareness their own understandings and suppositions about the experience in question. In the MSCK method, the researcher is required to formally analyse their own experience, using all of the same steps used with participant data. Pollio et al. (2006) also include the bracketing interview and interpretation as a first step in their methodology, and suggest that part of what must be bracketed at this stage is the consideration of the existing literature that helped to initially formulate the research question. They do not, however, provide a methodology for accomplishing this. The purpose of bracketing is to make the researcher's presuppositions and felt experience explicit.

In the case of the present research, the type of bracketing described above was undertaken in order to approach the research question from a fresh perspective, free from

preconceptions. In order to bring into awareness any presuppositions the researcher had, three important steps were taken. First, the researcher discussed the research topic and her preconceptions with a trusted and respected colleague, who essentially undertook an interview with the researcher to bring these into awareness. Second, the researcher subsequently made point form notes about her preconceptions based on the interview. These notes will be included with the presentation of the research findings in the next chapter. Finally, the importance of bracketing the literature review was highlighted by Polio et al. (2006). In this case, the researcher bracketed the knowledge of previous existing literature on the topic, by not writing about or reading literature on the topic during the period of time she was conducting the research interviews (a period of about three months). This three-step process of bracketing allowed the researcher to become more fully open to the experience and perspectives of the research participants by setting,

Results of the Bracketing Interview. At the beginning of this inquiry, I sat down with a respected college who happened also to be an executive coach. I shared my thoughts about executive coaching and the research I was undertaking. This conversation helped me to bracket my experience of coaching, as an important step in the phenomenological consideration of this thesis topic. Together we discussed some of my preconceived notions and beliefs about external coaching. Since I had never been coached by an external coach myself, these ideas where borne mostly out of a) my experience as an internal coach and facilitator, b) my experience helping develop and implement training programs that included a coaching component, and c) out of my own reading and interest in the field. The following

is a summary of the major themes I explored with my college during this bracketing interview.

1. A key presumption as I entered into this inquiry was that there would be many individuals for which coaching would be seen as a negative thing. I anticipated feelings of being singled-out, of inadequacy resulting from the idea that a coach might be needed. I recognized that coaching was often undertaken by individuals in organizations who have high potential, but I wondered to what extent the individuals themselves would perceive coaching in the developmental, positive, sense it was intended.
2. I expected most coachees to be surprised by what coaching was really like. My sense was that most coachees would be unfamiliar with the nature of coaching, what it entailed, and how it would actually play out.
3. I wondered to what extend coachees would be satisfied with what coaching provided them. My belief was that most coachees would be more familiar with business consultants, as opposed to coaches, and would therefore be seeking expertise about business from the coach. When they did not get that, I wondered to what extent this would create confusion or frustration.
4. Due to my training in Counselling Psychology, I contemplated at some length the relationship, similarities, and differences between coaching and counselling. While I was aware of the very distinct credentialing and training avenues that the two professions involved, I was also curious about the degree to which the skills employed were similar between the two professions. I saw very strong similarities

between Solution-focused methods of counselling, for example, and the coaching models that were used by executive coaches. I was very interested in the perceptions of coachees about this area. My interest was sufficiently great that, at one point, my thesis topic was going to focus solely on comparing coaching and counselling. Later I realized, however, that the more foundational question was how coachees experienced coaching. I did anticipate that coachees may naturally make comparisons between coaching and counselling. (In order to preclude what I felt was a relatively strong bias from entering into the interview process, I specifically chose not to inquire directly about this relationship between coaching and counselling, letting it arise instead naturally if it did.)

In general, what I came to recognize as we undertook this bracketing exercise was the evolution of a general open curiosity about the experience of being coached. Rather than any strongly held assumptions on my part, I would characterize my initial attitude as one of informed wonder, so that I was very much looking forward to learning from the participants and hearing their stories. At the core, I realized that I had never personally been coached, and so my own ideas and theories were perhaps even trivial in comparison to those of my research participants. In this way, I believe that by undertaking this bracketing exercise, I very much established a sense of openness to the phenomenon. Setting aside, inhibiting and then actively mitigating for the notions I discussed with my colleague, I then felt much more able to prepare the research questions and enter into the interview stage of the research with an open attitude.

Generation of Themes/Clusters

Another significant step missing from the Giorgi and Giorgi methodology (2003) is a description of how to move from the structure of one individual participant's experience towards developing the structure of the experience of more than one research participant. As already mentioned, Polkinghorne (1989) has noted that the number of participants used in phenomenological research varies, with a range is from three to 325. As a result, the researcher will need to consider more than one description of experience at the explication stage. Since Giorgi and Giorgi's method does not incorporate thematic analysis, this becomes even more problematic for arriving at a global structural description.

The establishing of themes or categories across participant experiences is another form of reduction, and it allows the researcher to render the data from many participants more manageable and ultimately more meaningful. It is not a part of the methodology put forward by Giorgi and Giorgi, but seems to be an important way of grouping related meaning units together. Specifically, the MvK method refers to the *clustering and thematizing of the invariant constituents*. In this step, the invariant constituents of the experience for all participants are categorized or grouped into several key themes in order to reduce the data further. Generally, these themes take the form of short phrases or labels. The reduction and elimination step also included in the MvK and MSCK methodologies is the start of the reduction process, and occurs at the individual participant level. Pollio et al.'s method (2006) also has a two-step process related to constructing themes; (a) the process of clustering for initial thematic meaning, and (b) the development of thematic structure. A key feature of the Pollio et al. method is that the thematic work is all done by what he calls an *interpretive research group*, rather than by an individual researcher.

The basis for the step of thematic analysis in phenomenological explication is not completely clear from the literature, however it has connections to the process of reduction and can seen to be an outcome of reflection. Osborne aptly notes, "There appears to be considerable metatheoretical ambiguity in analyzing phenomena in order to arrive at general essences", and that "the transition from particulars to essences seems to a grey area in phenomenological research literature" (1994, From Particulars to Essences section, para. 43). Yet, thematic analysis is also a common approach to data analysis in other types of qualitative research (Flick, 2006).

For the present study, the grouping of like the meaning units occurred when they were clustered into psychologically sensitive expressions. These took the form of short phrases or descriptors, as described in the MvK method.

Validation

A final step excluded from the Giorgi and Giorgi (2003) method is that of returning to the co-researchers for validation. The goal is to ensure that the final synthesis of results comes directly from the data itself, and is a true reflection of the participants' descriptions of their experience. Polkinghorne (1989) notes that this step of asking for feedback from the participants as a way of validating the structural description. Pollio et al. also include the step of returning to the participants with the thematic structure. They believe, however, that "the participant's evaluation is not the final word" (p. 258), since sometimes participants have trouble moving from their own experience to a consideration of a more comprehensive view of a group's experience. In the MvK method this validation occurs, but it is done by returning

to the original transcription of the interview and ensuring compatibility of the results against it.

In the present study, co-researchers were e-mailed the composite textural-structural description of the experience of being coached, and were asked to validate it. In the instructions included with the description, they were asked to indicate where the description either completely omitted, or perhaps poorly represented, any essential aspects of their experience of being coached. They were also advised that the goal was to develop a description of the experience that captured the essence of what it was like to be coached, one that transcended the particulars of their specific experience. All six co-researchers were able to review the description, and each made suggestions for additions or revisions. All of their suggestions were taken into account and incorporated in the final description.

Mitigation of Risk

This study employed a phenomenological research design while also giving strict consideration to the importance of confidentiality and anonymity. As a result, the research design for this study was phenomenological, while at the same time, building in elements to mitigate potential risks to the coaches and participants involved in the study. Specifically, it should be noted that the design built in several precautions to ensure that the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants was maintained throughout. For example, there was the potential for significant social risk (loss of status, reputation and/or privacy) for both the participants as well as the coaches who coached them, should the research protocol fail to safeguard anonymity and confidentiality adequately. As another example, the participants could have lost status or reputation should certain other individuals have learned of their need

for coaching, or the nature of that coaching, or should the coaching experience have been unsuccessful, or resulted in dismissal from their jobs. Finally, the coaches involved could have lost status or reputation should the participant have been critical of the coach's skills, techniques, or effectiveness, or should the participant disclose an approach to coaching that is not a generally accepted practice.

Chapter Summary

The purpose of this chapter was to describe in detail the research paradigm and methodology that was employed in the present study. It began by describing phenomenology as a philosophical movement, and how that related to phenomenological psychology and phenomenological method. It then provided a detailed consideration of phenomenological research methods, including generation of the research questions, recruitment of participants and data collection and analysis strategies. In particular, this chapter discussed specifically how the present study rigorously applied a phenomenological method while also mitigating any risk to the co-researchers/ participants.

CHAPTER 4: EXPLICATION

This chapter will provide a detailed description of the results of this research, using the phenomenological method of data analysis, also called explication. For contextual purposes, this description will begin with a presentation of the co-researcher demographics and coaching context gathered during the preliminary interview. This will be followed by the presentation of the results under the following five broad headings; (a) Reading For a Sense of The Whole; (b) Determination of the Parts: Establishing Meaning Units (including three examples of phenomenological reduction); (c) Transformation of Meaning Units into Expressions; (d) Determination of the Structure of the Experience of Being Coached; and finally a presentation of the (e) Composite Textural and Structural Description of Being Coached.

Co-Researcher Demographics and Coaching Context

The participants in this study, preferably referred to as co-researchers in phenomenological approaches, were selected for heterogeneity, as described in the methodology chapter. This goal was achieved, as will be highlighted below. This was important for the full representation of the essence of the experience of being coached--one that transcends, and yet takes into account, the particular context within which the coaching occurred (Polkinghorne, 1989). As it actually happened, the six co-researchers included in this study were coached by a total of three different coaches. Of these three coaches, two were male and one was female. Coincidentally, although not an intentional part of the study design, these three coach's clients were equally represented. In

particular, two co-researchers were included in this study for each coach.[1] As a result, it can be said that no one coach's clients were more represented that another.

Age, Educational Background, Leaderhip Experience, and Ethnicity of Co-Researchers

As noted earlier, a total of six co-researchers were selected from the initial pool referred by the coaches involved in the study. Of these six, three were male, and three were female, so that both genders were equally represented. In order to safeguard confidentiality each co-researcher was assigned, or selected, a pseudonym. The three males will hereafter be referred to as John, Darren, and Samuel, and the females as Maria, Jeannie, and Irene. They ranged in age from 32 to 57 years of age. Three of the co-researchers had PhD's, two had bachelor's degrees, and one had a technical diploma. In addition to their educational achievements, two of the co-researchers had professional designations. The range of experience the co-researchers had in leadership roles was broad, from a minimum of 5 years to a maximum of 21 years.

In order to protect anonymity, the ethnic background of the co-researchers will not be published here, although this information was requested during the preliminary interview. It can be said that all of the co-researchers were Caucasion.

Organization Types

The six co-researchers in this study came from a very broad range of organization types and industries, with three currently employed in for-profit organizations, and three employed in not-for-profit or public sector organizations. The for-profit industries

[1] In order to safeguard confidentiality, any demographic data that could link a co-researcher to a coach is not included.

represented were oil and gas, consulting, and financial services. The not-for-profit/ public organizations represented were health care, post-secondary education, and human service.

Basic Nature of the Coaching Engagements

At the time of the in-depth interviews, all co-researchers were still involved in being coached by the coach who referred them to this study, with the exception of one. This individual had recently entered into a new coaching agreement with a different coach. The duration of the coaching engagements ranged from six months to three years at the time when the in-depth interviews were conducted. Except in one case, where all the sessions were in-person, the coaching sessions were conducted both in person and by telephone, with the first meeting always being in person, but telephone being the more frequent modality. In two cases, after the initial meeting, a computer-based and audio-based communication tool called *Skype* (similar in most regards to using a telephone) was used for some of the coaching sessions. Regardless of medium, actual coaching sessions lasted an average of 75 minutes, ranging from 45 minutes to an hour and a half across all co-researchers.

Selection of Coaches by Co-Researchers

Co-researchers described selecting their coaches in one of three ways. In two cases, the coach was specifically referred to the co-researcher by a relative, friend or colleague who knew that coach. In one case, the coach was found via an on-line internet search. In the remaining three cases, co-researchers selected a coach from the recommendation of one, or a short-list of several, coaches put forward by the organization's Human Resources department. The majority of co-researchers in this case

accepted the recommendation of a particular coach made by the human resources department. Only in one such case did the co-researcher undertake a personal interview process with more than one candidate in order to select the coach.

Explication

As previously described in detail, the data analysis, or explication, process used for this research was that described by Giorgi and Giorgi (2003) with a few additions. This five-step process for analyzing phenomenological data includes: (a) reading for a sense of the whole, (b) determination of parts: establishing meaning units, (c) transformation of meaning units into psychologically sensitive expressions, (d), determination of the structure and (e) post structural analysis. To augment this methodology, this, bracketing, generation of themes (clusters of meaning units), and validation, as described in the methodology chapter, were also undertaken. The results of this process are presented below.

Using steps (a) to (c) above, a total of seven global expressions of the experience of being coached were derived intuitively from a consideration of the meaning units noted above. Please refer to Appendix C for examples of how the meaning unit clusters were derived from the transcript data. Table 1 summarizes the meaning units that were uncovered and their related clusters, capturing both a sense of "what" was experienced (the cluster label), and "how" it was experienced (the individual meaning units).

Table 1.0

Meaning Unit Clusters and Associated Meaning Units

Meaning Unit Cluster	Individual Meaning Units
A. Embarking on the Coaching Relationship	1. Responding to a Catalyst 2. Investing Indulgently 3. Trusting Intuition and Others in Coach Selection
B. Co-creating the Coaching Relationship	4. Developing Safe, Honest, Alliance 5. Planned and Spontaneous Objectives 6. Guardedness About Confidentiality 7. Trusting
C. Learning to be Coached	8. Selecting and Experiencing the Coaching Medium 9. Discovering Own Way and Own Answers 10. Developing Personal Responsibility for Outcomes 11. Linking to Known Paradigms 12. Making Comparisons with Counseling 13. Recognition of the Work and Time Commitment
D. Healing Ruptures in the Coaching Relationship	14. Struggling with Organizational Context 15. Grappling with Lack of Direction 16. Courageous Disagreement
E. Experiencing the Impact	17. Building Clarity 18. Engaging New Perspectives 19. Reducing Stress 20. Recognizing Self-worth 21. Recognizing Choice and Intention 22. Improved Skills and Abilities 23. Influencing Many Life Domains
F. Valuing What the Coach Offers	24. Indescribable, But Lived 25. Intuitive Connection

	26. Being Objective
	27. Understanding Me and My Reality
	28. Access to Wisdom and Knowledge
G. Deciding on Future of the Coaching Relationship	29. Contemplating the Future of the Coaching Relationship

Each of the seven clusters presented above, and their related meaning units, will be considered in detail below, with direct reference being made to the lived experiences of the co-researchers. Quotations directly taken from the interview transcripts will serve to exemplify each expression listed. This will lead ultimately to a presentation of the Composite Textural-Structural Description of the Experience of Being Coached provided at the end of this chapter.

A. Embarking on the Coaching Relationship

The initial salient marker of the experience of being coached was in fact the process that led up to the coaching engagement. The meaning units that were clustered and resulted in this expression were: Responding to a Catalyst, Trusting Others and Intuition in Coach Selection and Investing Indulgently.

Responding to a Catalyst

Co-researchers all described responding to a catalyst which caused them to seek out coaching. In one case, even though coaching had been made available for some time

in his organization, it took a recent promotion to act on that opportunity to be coached. This co-researcher[2] described it this way:

> *I had a specific issue I wanted to deal with at that time, and you know so it was attractive at that time and there had been-- you know-- I had seen emails about coaching in the past, but at that time it did not feel beneficial.*

Another co-researcher talked about the unique nature of a new role, and the challenges it was presenting as the catalyst for seeking out coaching:

> *[My business unit] can be a pretty challenging area to manage ... and it's hard to retain staff and there can be a lot of challenges with it. Also trying to report to a V.P. in a group in a second company when all of my customers are in my company was also presenting some unique challenges. It was like being stuck between a rock and a hard place all the time. Whichever group you were siding with, or not siding with, that's not the right word, but if you agreed with anyone from either group, the other group was taking umbrage. So I was a new manager in that role and finding some challenges, so he offered this to me and I was very pleased to take him up on it.*

In another co-researcher's case, running his own business had taken a toll:

> *When I think back I think it was essentially the fact that I had too much on my plate. And I'm not a very organized guy by trade, so I think I just needed some direction and somebody to keep me on track, because when you are wearing that many hats it's just kind of hard to try to keep focused on the actual end goal of the business.*

In one case, the co-researcher initially undertook coaching as part of her own coaching certification process, although the continuation of that coaching beyond the prescribed period of time was due to an on-going felt need by the co-researcher. Regardless of the reason, each co-researcher spoke about the importance of a marker that made coaching a priority in their lives.

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[2] The co-researcher's pseudonyms will not always be included. They are omitted in all cases where there is a high likelihood that the coaches who read the research may be able to identify the coachees.

Trusting Others and Intuition in Selecting a Coach.

Co-researchers were specifically asked about the process they used to select their coach. Most notable about this aspect of the experience was its seeming lack of importance once the relationship had been established and was proceeding well. In essence, the co-researchers trusted their intuition and the recommendation of others in selecting the coach. Most co-researchers proceeded with only a very general awareness of the coach's actual credentials. One co-researcher responded this way:

> *hm....at the time we selected her--- how on earth did I? I got her name from somebody.....*

and then later on said

> *So, but that's so long ago, I went through the process then but I immediately let go of that, because it's irrelevant, once I decided to that I was fine with it, I didn't need to retain any of that.*

Although one of the co-researchers did undergo an interview process, considering three candidates, he describes his final decision as resting on intuition:

> *So, you know I think yea just... in the interviews, probably it really came down to who, just a feeling, the person who I was going to find easiest to talk with, I did not want a coach who was too demanding but I did not want a coach that let me off the coach too easily either and that was just the feeling that I had.*

Another co-researcher talked about accepting the recommendation that was provided to her:

> *I saw a [senior executive] and they told me they had some names for me so she gave me one name and so I had a telephone conversation with the coach and it seemed to go fine and the [executive] told me if I wanted another name, I can give you one. But the telephone conversation seemed pretty reasonable and I didn't even really know how I would be accessing the coaching, and the first person I talked to seemed to be a reasonable person so I went with that. I didn't see any reason why I would not want to go with her.*

The first meeting with the coach generally seemed pivotal to establishing that intuitive sense of the right choice, as exemplified by this co-researcher's comment:

> *We had a conversation and something DID click... and I didn't have any warning flags going up that this is not going to work. So we did a sample session, and at the end of it I was asked—"Would you like to be my client?" and, everything that had happened in that discovery session said "yes".*

There was also a sense that co-researchers did not necessarily know enough about coaching and the process behind it to select a coach themselves. This co-researcher's comments exemplified this, as well as that intuitive selection process, very well:

> *Yea, because I didn't know what to expect from coaching or what coaching involved. I didn't know what coaching meant, I didn't know enough to interview or I did not know what to interview her about. I just figured if there was an initial sense that said I really don't like this person, I am really not very comfortable with them, that I would say I wanted somebody else. But I didn't know how to access her, because I did not know enough about coaching to decide what I needed out of it.*

In summary, the executives in this study selected the coach based largely on the recommendations of people they trusted, for example members of their Human Resources department, or other senior level executives.

Indulgent Investment

The researcher's initial presumption was that the need for a coach could be stigmatizing and viewed as a negative thing by co-researchers. However, the data instead reflected a felt sense that coaching was a privilege, a perk and ultimately also an investment. The opportunity to focus on one's self during coaching was often viewed as an indulgence. This is very well exemplified by Maria's comment:

> *M: I am new in the job and there is a lot going on, it is really busy and there is a lot happening, but having that coach as an option is a pretty desirable option*

> *to pursue. It sounded to me it would be potentially very indulgent (laughing) to talk to someone who has some background in coaching to help me and give me feedback, so it seemed like, perfect.*

Darren described coaching as a program targeted to promotable individuals who had a bright future with the company:

> *D: I found my boss was taking coaching through an old program and I guess that kind of legitimized it for me and made it feel like you know there was nothing negative about it and really when I started talking to my coach he very much emphasized the program is really designed to help people with potential and to develop that potential.*

Coaching as an investment with very little risk was described by John:

> *J: Anyways there was nothing really to lose and I knew that, you know, even though there was a commitment there, you know you pay out a little bit of money, but I mean I knew that, you know, I needed to, to get that organization in my life so I just decided to go for it.*

Thus we see that executives in this study viewed coaching as an opportunity that needed to be taken advantage of for the good of the company, and for their own careers.

B. Co-Creating the Coaching Relationship

Co-researchers talked about the establishing of the relationship. The meaning units that were clustered and resulted in this expression were: Developing Safe, Honest, Alliance; Planned and Spontaneous Objectives; Guarded Trust about Confidentiality; and Trusting.

Developing Safe, Honest Alliance

The development of an alliance between the coach and the co-researcher was a key essential feature of the experience of being coached. Interestingly, co-researchers

described this process as occurring relatively quickly, sometimes instantly, based on a felt sense of connection. For example, Samuel described it this way:

> *S: I think right from the start we kind of made a connection and that's also because even though he told me at time I had asked him to be my coach that he'd was actually a carrying a full load and so I felt that he was a taking you know going to great lengths to accommodate me. And I think he did so because we had a kind of a connection.*

Irene talks about her coach connecting with her in this way:

> *I: So that's how the relationship has developed. ... Like, you learn from your client when they're lying, when they're not lying, when they are skirting the issue and telling you a story. And, they know what it sounds like, they know what it feels like, so they can call you on it.*
>
> *R So there's enough of a connection so that they intuitively understand when things are not right, or things are off track.*
>
> *I Both of us are open to each other. And both of us know that neither one of us is wrong, and that if he says something that doesn't land with me, then I'm gonna say that. So there is that openness and honesty. And he doesn't hang on to it. So if I say, no that's not landing... he says ok, what IS landing, what does it feel like? It's not saying, "nope you're wrong".*

Later on, Irene describes the sense of comfort she has in the relationship with the coach:

> *I The relationship between me and the coach and the alliance that we have created have been comfortable. And it's that comfort that has helped me open up and get to that intuitive level with him. Everything else has been shaken, but it's that place of safety and comfort that allows me to shake.*

The felt sense of connection seemed foundational for each of the co-researchers.

Planned and Spontaneous Objectives

The process of establishing the content of the coaching sessions was described as both planned and spontaneous. The planned objectives seemed to be foundational in the sense of providing a general direction. Darren's comments exemplify this:

D: .... the process really became a, you know we would check back on previous issue and see if it was resolved and if it was not, it would carry forward and then you know we typically had a new issue and you know I got this issue this week you know lets talk about it and then when we get together again we talk about the new ones.

At the same time, for most co-researchers, it was the emerging and salient issues arising naturally out of the process of coaching that were described as the most meaningful and as having the most impact. Jeannie described it this way:

J: I really wanted it to develop into a relationship or a structure whereby I didn't have to have a coaching appointment once a month because my schedule does tend to be crazy. I was much more looking forward to maybe doing some base, laying some ground work, and then getting to the point where it would be as needed.

Samuel talked about how a free-flowing approach to objective setting also suited him best:

S Usually our discussions were in two parts, but not in a formal agenda. Sometimes we would agree at one discussion to pursue things that might have cropped up that we didn't have time to explore in a future meeting. But usually the two parts was something along the line of the goals that we have set, and the things that we have spoken about before, and things that are on the table right now—the things that have happened since our last discussion... It was kind of discussing response to immediate incidents or things that are on my desk at that point. And then there are the things that we agreed to pursue over the longer term.

R I see

S But ordinarily isn't a really formal kind of agenda at all.

R And how did that work for you?

S It worked very well for me

R Hm, m

S Actually I think it's one of my weaknesses. I'm not a person that would make a list of things to do. I like a more free flowing environment.

R And that's how the coaching went, and so it suited you quite well.

Both John and Irene both described selection of coaching topics as emerging out of the session itself, based on what they called a "nagging" sensation. For example;

> *J: Yeah, no idea. But I know that I'm sure I can find something. And then we start talking and eventually just works itself out, comes out, and you know, maybe it takes me a while to start feeling comfortable in the conversation to bring it up, if its nagging me. But, I mean, you know, you always get off the phone with some intentions set or something as, moving forward. We never quit a session early before because I didn't have something to talk about at the beginning.*

Thus, we see that although some degree of planning is perceived as necessary by coachees, in most cases what seems to be most valued in the ability of goals to be revised and adapted as new issues arise for the executives.

Guardedness About Confidentiality

As the relationship was co-created, in most cases there was a very salient sense of guarded trust regarding the extent of the confidentiality of the sessions. Jeannie described it this way:

> *J: Because, my company's paying the coach, so sometimes it seemed as though things happened or were said that were strangely coincidental in timing. So it did make me wonder. Although, I'm not saying anyone was lying to me or anything. I absolutely believe my coach, because I know at one point she did have to hand in a report or something and she asked my permission and told me what she was going to say and so I was very comfortable with that concept. And she certainly never acted in any way that would suggest that she was giving any information back to my company. But it is always a little hard to trust that 100%.*

John said:

> *J: I mean, I was a little bit guarded because of it-- is a little bit of you, and you don't want to lay all your emotions out on the table or anything. But, you know, you're a little bit reluctant at first*

Maria talked about this as cautiousness:

M: ...with me feeling a little bit cautious with my coach, you know feeling like I had to give a good report or something.

In general, until the coachee had come to trust the coach, there was some degree of guardedness in terms of the nature and degree of disclosure to the coach.

Trusting

Part of the co-creation of the coaching relationship was the sense of coming to trust the coach in general. This is treated apart from the issue of confidentiality above, since it was experienced by the co-researchers as separate from those concerns. Some co-researchers developed trust over a longer period of time than others, but all talked about how critical it was. Jeannine and other co-researchers talked about this trust as a feeling that the coach was on their side, as exemplified by Jeannie's comment:

J: Yeah, I developed more trust, I developed more of a feeling as time went on that I could say things to her-- and, it's more of a feeling that she was on my side. You know, if you're looking for coaching or mentoring from a colleague, or a peer or your boss or another VP, maybe their on your side or maybe their not. But their not, they may always have a different viewpoint based on their own department or area.

Irene talked about the building of trust as an interactive process:

I: For me it is trust, it's honesty. I will know very quickly if I'm not going to trust this coach at all.

R So even that's intuitive...

I Yes it is, it is. And I'm learning to really trust that intuition. So, that and the willingness to give it a try. And if I'm noticing I'm getting some results and it's getting me... I'm being shaken and I might not like it but I like the results I'm getting. Then you know what, this is working. And if it's working, I'm going to keep trying and I'll give a little more on my end and he gives more on his end and that's how it works. That's how he gets to that space. It's a two-way street. But he comes in already open and accepting, and I don't get to be wrong. And that's so important because it's that nonjudgmental.

For some co-researchers, development of trust was almost instantaneous, occurring on their first meeting. Samuel described this very quickly coming to trust as a sense of his coach being a true confidante:

> *S: In the time he came down... we really developed a very comfortable relationship. So, I regarded him as a friend and a confidante..... Its up to me and him-- it's kind of a "we" situation ... Mmmm I also felt that he had my best interest at heart.*

However long the process of trust building took, it was clear from the interviews that, without trust, change through coaching would have been much less possible.

C. Learning to Be Coached

Many elements of the experience of being coached sprung from the underlying dynamic of needing to learn how to be coached, or how to be an effective coachee. The clusters of meaning units that relate to this underlying theme were: Selecting and Experiencing the Coaching Medium; Discovering Own Way and Own Answers; Making Comparisons with Counseling; Linking to Known Paradigms; Developing Personal Responsibility for Outcomes; and Recognition of the Work and Time Commitment.

Selecting and Experiencing the Coaching Medium

In all cases, coachees were given the option of having their sessions in person or by telephone. One coachee selected strictly in-person sessions. The majority of coachees selected the phone as the primary coaching medium, although some in-person meetings also occurred in these cases. Two coaches used *Skype*, an internet-based audio communication tool similar to a telephone in most respects. Some co-researchers came to

appreciate the phone medium, after having met the coach in person. Irene's comments exemplify the advantage of the telephone medium as compared to in-person:

> *I: I've done both. The majority of it is over the phone. A couple of instances we've had it face to face. The face to face gets a little bit nerve racking... because I'm watching the coach at the same time and then I get .... There's a funny conversation that goes on at the same time. It's like I'm trying to figure out the answer to this question, but at the same time I'm watching what he's doing because he's mirroring what I'm doing....and I'm going... "is that what I'm doing?"... so I almost get these two different conversations going on at the same time. Over the phone, I've got that space to really move into my self. And if I'm switching positions, or if I'm standing, I'll tell him that... over the phone... The last conversation—he said how are you doing—I said I just sat down and I rolled up my sleeves so I know there is something that's having to happen here and we'll go from there ... So I'm very much in tune with what's going on within me, and over the phone I let him have that information.*

Samuel appreciated the fact he was able to share drafts of documents and communication at the same time as he was communicating over *Skype*:

> *S: Then I bought myself one of these headsets, and when I have the headset on and my hands are free and I discuss things with him and I can more often than not I have a need to share with him things I have done, documents I have drafted, and I would sent it to him during the discussion. I think that not having a phone in my hand and doing things while discussing if you imagine brought him closer. It felt more interactive because we were making use of e-mail simultaneously and the phone. Sometimes it will take a couple of minutes before the email would arrive on his side, and I would start reading to him the document.... And then when it arrived we would continue to discuss it. Which I think enhanced the richness of the experience.*

In other cases, the telephone medium was viewed as efficient and effective, although it was not necessarily preferred.

Discovering Own Way and Own Answers

Part of the experience of being coached, and of learning how to be coached, was coming to understand the idea that, unlike business consulting for example, the coach is

not there to provide expertise, answers, or direct advice. This element of the experience was different than what will be described later in the context of healing ruptures, because it was more simply a felt recognition of the process of coaching, rather than something that was experienced negatively. Co-researchers all recognized this as a key feature of their experience that they found ultimately very beneficial, even though they often found it hard to describe. John's comment exemplified this:

> *J.: Yeah. So I mean, you know, he's not really telling me, he didn't really tell me anything I, he didn't tell me things I didn't know already. If he just was just like why don't you do that or why don't you do this, then you know, and it just helped me maybe come to a solution. It was stuff that I already knew already. It just was a matter of taking that little step and doing it.*

Darren experienced it as follows:

> *D: ...you know as I was in the first session or two with my coach, you know I quickly understood the role of the coach was not really to propose solutions, not to give you an answer but help you find an answer, try to ask leading questions, make suggestions, discuss possibilities, and really lead you to finding an answer yourself.*

Developing Personal Responsibility for Outcomes

As the coaching progressed, co-researchers all recognized the importance of taking personal accountability for outcomes. Irene described it this way:

> *I: But from the client side, the client needs to have some sort of drive and ambition and desire--- passion, about themselves, to move their life forward. Coaching is not, "well I've got a problem can you help me solve it?". This is your life we're talking about! And, how you want to create it. Where you want to go with it. If that passion about you is there.. there's nothing stopping you from going there. And the coach is there to help you along the way.*

John directly indicated this responsibility for outcomes noting:

> *J: For the most part, in the sessions that I've had, there are times when I'm like, hmmm, I didn't get as much out of that coaching session as I'd have liked. But I never asked anything of it in the first place. So, what do I expect?*

Co-researchers talked about the need to be receptive to coaching—the need to be coachable, in order to reap the benefits. Jeannie noted that:

> *j: I think I have a pretty good capacity to laugh at myself and to accept where I'm wrong and grow from it. And I think the coaching has really encouraged that as well. I don't know how successful it would be for people who aren't willing to do that. I would suspect it might be quite a painful experience. I don't know, but for me, I've always believed in that...*

The idea of personal accountability for outcomes was salient for all of the co-researchers who in some cases even felt a sense of guilt when they did not follow-through on agreed-upon homework activities, or when they caught themselves backsliding in some area of progress.

Linkage to Known Paradigms

Part of the experience of learning how to be coached saw co-researchers attempting to make sense of it by linking it to known experiences or learning and helping paradigms. For Maria, the linkage was to a student/ teacher paradigm, as she describes as follows:

> *M: Well my thinking of coaching was it would kind of be like a lecture except I would have her all to myself, so I was thinking I was going to have this teacher that was going to hangout with me and I was going to learn all this stuff.*
>
> *R: Ahh, like Plato... (laughing)*
>
> *M: (laughing) yea like Plato!*

Maria comes back to this later on in reference to the content of her coaching sessions:

> *M Usually [in a class] you have a curriculum and you know we know what's coming and, you kind of have the sense of what the whole package is going to look like-- and I didn't.*

Jeannie attempted to make sense of her coach's approach my making reference to her profession and area of practice:

> *j: Yeah, I kind of wonder about the connection because with [my field] you do analyze and troubleshoot and evaluate, and it's very important to get to the very essence of the problem and brush away all of the details and get them out of the way-- to go to what was the real cause. Just because it is very easy for people to mired in all the red herrings. So to me, it sounds very similar. You know, when I put it in those terms.*

This linkage to known paradigms allowed co-researchers to better understand the respective roles of coach and coachee, although in some cases this linkage also created moments of disconnection. In Maria's case, her expectation of a student/ teacher type of relationship causes frustration, since the coaching did not progress along those lines.

Comparisons to Counselling/ Therapy

A form of linkage to known paradigms that stood out as qualitatively different from those noted above was the comparisons co-researchers made between being coached and receiving therapy or counseling. This comparison was made without prompting by the researcher (who is trained in counseling psychology). Three of the co-researchers divulged having experienced both, and so made reference to the similarities and differences between them. Darren talked about it this way:

> D: *...you know I was a little familiar with like counselling process-- and counselling practices are very similar right, like a counsellor may make some suggestions, but not too often are they very prescriptive and "you must do that", right, so you know coaching and counseling, you know they are very similar.*
>
> *R: How would you describe how they are similar if you were to think about it?*
>
> *D: Well I think that in both cases you know the coach or the counsellor has to understand the problem and make... suggestions and discuss with you, with the client possible solutions and you know kind of pros and cons and also the work ability of the solution...*

Later on in the interview, Darren came back to this comparison:

> *D: You know I guess fundamentally I would see the difference as being, it is almost semantic and I would say counselling is dealing with people, you know, who more have a problem and coaching is more dealing with people who are trying to maximize potential. And you know if I would differentiate the role that would be why I differentiate it but I think, I think what the people actually do in process is actually pretty similar between both professions.*

John's reference to therapy was to distinguish it from coaching, and to describe coaching as a more comfortable process that had less vulnerability associated with it:

> *J: But, I just, you know, he just was very capable of just laying it all on the line and making sure that I was completely comfortable. You know, if you don't like what I do or whatever, tell me. This is a two-way thing, right. It's not me telling you how to run things or anything like else. He said I'm not a therapist or anything like that, its just I'm going to bounce ideas off you and make you think in a different way. And I don't know if those were his exact words-- but I mean that's how I interpreted it. And so I felt there was no, I didn't feel vulnerable in that situation. I didn't have, I just used him as a feed back mechanism, essentially. On a different level, and that's how I looked at it.*

Maria was clear that she did not want her coaching to be like counseling. Although she had no negative connotations about counseling per se, Maria knew that she was looking for something very different from coaching. She was explicit with her coach in this regard:

> *M: .. well when I told her that I felt the sessions felt a bit like therapy, like I am not liking where this is going.*

In essence, co-researchers seemed to make a natural almost intuitive connection between coaching and counseling, and each attempted to reconcile what they were doing in terms of what they knew, or assumed to be true about counseling.

Recognition of the Work and Time Commitment

As the co-researchers reflected on their experience of being coached, one of the salient aspects of the experience was the recognition of the time commitment and work required in order to benefit from it. Most experienced this as a sort of added stressor, recognition that they would have gotten more out of it, if only he or she was able to commit more time and energy to it. Samuel talked about it this way:

> *S ... sometimes I felt ill prepared for my sessions with [my coach]. Something I didn't reckon when I started off with coaching was the time commitment. It's not only the hour a week that you spend on the phone, it's also the time to think about what has been said. Even commitments given to draft documents or to do things, and all of that has to happen over and above your regular job. I sometimes felt I should have spent more time thinking about what we spoke about last time. Actually, I have a phone meeting with him tomorrow, and I have a list of things that we agreed upon that we should discuss with him tomorrow, and I need time to think about those. And they all pertain to goals for the following 14 months to the end of my term. I have three prints of the e-mail already, laying in various places, one at home, one at the office, one in the car, and sometimes I glance at them. I think if I can criticize myself, I think I would have had more benefit from the relationship had I devoted more time to preparing for our meetings.*

Both Maria and Irene talked about coaching adding a dimension of stress to their already busy schedules. Maria said:

> *M: There were some things that were helpful, absolutely. It just added more stress because there was already so much going on in my day, there is so much work to do and it is really hard to find the time. And I mean what are you going to give up? I mean yea it is really hard. ... So it absolutely added another dimension of stress.*

Irene's sense of coaching as hard work came across strongly in this comment:

> *I That one-week break [in the month] gives me enough to catch my breath because of all the homework, and all the challenges and requests I've been given to move myself forward. So that week gives me a bit of a breather and gets me a little settled to start up the next time. Because I always go in with an agenda of this is for me, and we're going to keep moving me forward somehow. And that takes work.*

The recognition of the work and time required as part of being coached was directly linked to the high level of personal accountability these co-researchers had for outcomes.

D. Healing Ruptures in the Coaching Relationship

Part of the over all experience of being coached included points of disconnection with the either the coach and/or with the process of coaching. In some cases these were minor, and in others more significant. These ruptures, and the subsequent impact on the coaching, fell into several clusters namely: Struggling with Organizational Context; Grappling with Lack of Direction; and Courageous Disagreement.

Struggling with Organizational Context

The sense that the coach perhaps did not understand the organizational context created some points of disconnection and struggle for Samuel:

> *S: So, and in trying to communicate to [my coach] what the culture was ... and the expectations ... we always kind of got bogged down in the area of responsibility and accountability.*

This disconnection was perceived by the co-researcher as resulting from the coach's lack of experience in his organizational context, and in the end this was Samuel's only source of discontentment with the coaching experience. It resulted in this advice being offered to coaches:

> *S Try to coach people in an environment that you are very very familiar with--- intimately familiar with. Because your answer and your view of life is by necessity colored. You look at it through glasses colored by your frame of reference. If you frame of reference is significantly different from the person you're coaching, you have to make a judgment for that. Well..... hm... .to rephrase that... I think a coach will be more effective if he, or she, is familiar intimately with the environment the coachee finds him or herself.*

For other co-researchers, the disconnection was more with the expectations about the nature and content of coaching. This was exemplified by John's comment:

> *J: The expectation was, is that maybe I would, you know, maybe I'd actually talk to somebody who would actually get to know my business more than I originally thought. I thought that perhaps if I had a business coach he would try to spend more time trying to figure out what my business was about. But it wasn't so much that.*

John indicates later in the interview his coming to learn that this knowledge about his business was not as relevant or important as he first thought:

> *J.: Yeah, right, yeah, that's the thing too you know, I thought, my expectations in the end, well it just wasn't what I expected coaching to be but I like-- anyways and its better than what I thought it would be. You know, rather than having somebody tell me maybe you should do this or maybe you should invest in this, you know, it wasn't so much that, it was more, what do you want to do, you know, what is your big life dream, essentially. And then helping me bring that to reality. And everything has come to reality since that point.*

In general, however, knowledge of the organizational context overall was perceived by co-researchers to be important, as is evident in this comment made by Darren:

> *D: ...because I wanted to make sure that I found somebody who had worked in organization, and I didn't want an academic who had spent their whole career coaching and had just approached things academically, I wanted somebody who had been in the trenches and had dealt with the problems (laughing) of working in an organization as a leader. So I thought that was really important.*

In general, all co-researchers spoke about the need for the coach to be aware of the context within which their issues and challenges played out.

Grappling with Lack of Direction

Co-researchers experienced moments during coaching where they needed to grapple with the lack of direct advice –giving which is a cornerstone of most coaching methods. Jeannie described this as a sense of aggravation with the process:

J ...she was never direct in saying, oh "maybe this was your responsibility". She would just ask questions that were very skilled in helping me to identify that.

R: Okay.

J: Which, from what I understand from her, is an important part of the coaching process to make the client see things on their own and to come to their own conclusions on the premise that most often the client knows the answer.

R: Mmmm.

J: Which sometimes that was aggravating. (Laughter)

R: Oh, okay.

J: Even though I laughed at myself for finding it aggravating. (Laughter) You know, because sometimes it would be nice to go in and have somebody say, Oh no, just do one two and three and that will be fixed. Okay great, thanks, that's what I was wondering. (Laughter)

This sense of aggravation was later resolved, when Jeannie was able to work through the concept in her own mind:

R: And at the end of it though, would you say that you would have said, "that might have been aggravating but it was the right path to take?"

J: Oh, absolutely. Yeah, because I don't think, I know for me I have a very hard time making changes or making decisions if I don't believe in them or see the logic in them. I always want to understand why and how this is going to, so I need to come to it myself. I'm not very good at someone else telling me the solution anyways, because then I'm not going to believe them so...

Maria's experience of the non-directive nature of coaching was more difficult, and her felt sense of it in the moment was to feel it to be inauthentic, and even somewhat manipulative:

M: I don't want to frame it as me expecting my coach to have all the answers, but I do think it was more time consuming than it needed to be to have me get to the answers because there was an answer she wanted to get to, and the problem with that is that you start to feel kind of manipulated, you know rather then an honest relationship with, like if she would just say "X", then we could have had an honest discussion. It felt more, "now lets lead you to discover where I am

> *supposed to take you." Well, if there is an end result that you already know, just tell me. You know like, I am a quick study!*

This sense of being manipulated took longer for Maria to resolve, and in some ways remained until the end of the coaching engagement:

> *M: So I think there has been some very useful learning, and as I am talking to you I am feeling that this sounds very negative, and it is not, I just think that it could have been better and that the things that would have made it better... if we could have taped into my coaches knowledge more than kind of waiting for me to come up with everything.*

In summary, most co-researchers expressed moments of frustration and irritation with the limited advise-giving provided by coaches, even while recognizing that advise-giving was not what was required in most cases.

Courageous Disagreement

At certain points in the coaching experience, co-researchers described a rupture in the relationship or the process of coaching that resulted from disagreeing with the coach's perspective. The particulars of this disagreement varied greatly, and included disagreement with an observation or area of feedback, with a comment made by the coach, and with the actual behaviour of the coach. Maria talked about a session she had during a particularly stressful point in time that did not go very well. Maria described the need to muster courage in order to voice her discontentment about how that session went in this way:

> *M: Then we visited that session-- when I should have had the courage to say to her just how busy my week had been and how I had been doing so much work that I wasn't getting enough sleep and what I needed from her was support. And it was not until later when we went back to talk about it-- I mean she knew something was wrong so I think she was trying to acknowledge it and I was not*

> *being courageous enough to say, "I cant now", you know 'cause I was feeling guilty.*

Later on in the interview Maria noted:

> *M: So part of it were those courageous conversations, you know me not wanting to hurt her feelings or offend her.*

Jeannie described an instance of rupture that was handled more immediately, but was still rooted in a sense she had to trust her coach:

> *j: There was one time that I took exception to something my coach said or did. I can't remember what it was. I'll try to think of it. She (Pause), I think she was disagreeing with me about something and it was odd because it was the first time she had done that. Or really pushing back at me hard on something and I couldn't quite figure out why she was doing that. And so, and if I hadn't had the trust relationship with her that I felt I had at that point, I suspect I wouldn't have said anything to her. But I did say something to her about it. And I just asked her, because I truly was confused. I didn't know what was going on. And so I just asked her. And she handled it very well I thought, and she recognized right away that yes she was doing that, whatever it was. And she apologized and thanked me...*

In some cases, co-researchers described a sense of power-differential with their coach, with the coach having a little bit more of it. This made the ability to confront their coaches more difficult in some cases.

E. Valuing What the Coach Offers

A thread woven through all of the interviews was a general sense of valuing the coach's unique skills, abilities, and contributions. The meaning units that resulted in this cluster were Indescribable, Intuitive Connection, Listening, Understanding Me and My Reality, Being Objective, Acting as a Sounding Board, Holistic, and Access to Wisdom and Knowledge.

Indescribable, But Lived

While co-researchers all described valuing what the coach was able to provide, they often had trouble describing *how* the coach was able to do what she or he did. This sense of indescribability was exemplified by John's comment:

> *J: Hmmm. I mean, he'd answer a lot of questions with questions. (Laughter) I don't know if that's... I mean, his approach, [inaudible] just kind of like...well, I don't know how to do this.... Help me, or something like that. It would be, he would just he would listen but at the same time, I think he just, I don't know how he does it. (Laughter) To be honest with you, I don't know how he did it. But, (pause) what was the exact question again? I kind of lost the train of thought.*

Jeannie also was at a loss for words to describe how the coach effectively coached her:

> *J: To pull out the threads that, from what you hear the person is saying and ask them a couple of questions ... But anyway, maybe it's something about being the objective listener and so I don't necessarily know, trying to answer your question here, I don't necessarily know what, or could analyze what the coach does.*

Despite being unable to describe the way in which coaches did their work, all co-researchers recognized there must be a set of skills and abilities that were necessary in order to be effective.

Intuitive Connection

A key aspect of the value of the coaching relationship was a sense of intuitive connection with the coach. For most co-researchers, this connection appeared to be the foundational element from which other benefits were derived from the coaching experience. Irene talked about it this way:

> *I: And what really caught me off guard, is, my coach was asking me questions and at one point I really felt—"god I'm sick and tired of you asking me all these questions!"... And just as I thought that -- I heard on the other end, "so why do I get the feeling that I've just been dismissed?" So the relationship has almost been built on that almost intuitive level.*
>
> *R Hmmm*

> *I It's like, I'm thinking the thought and there comes the question. It happened on Monday.. and every so often it just blows me away. So that's how the relationship has developed. It's that building of trust.. and over time he'll know my reactions and where... Like, you learn from your client when they're lying, when they're not lying, when they are skirting the issue and telling you a story... And, they know what it sounds like, they know what it feels like, so they can call you on it.*

Samuel also talked about this intuitive understanding that he felt from his coach, which he felt resulted in a feeling of personal closeness:

> *S: I don't think of him as being somebody remote. I think of him as being close by. He's just a phone call away.*

The sense of an intuitive connection between the coach and coachee, that two coachees actually called chemistry, was perceived to be very critical to positive outcomes.

Understanding Me and My Reality

A key aspect of the experience of being coached for the co-researchers was a feeling that the coach understood them personally as well as the context they operated in. John talked about this as follows:

> *J: You just kind of feel like, they really relate, or they try to relate to you right away and they understand where you are coming from. And they know that you are not out to get anyone. (Laughter) And they just basically, you know, that's basically it.*

For Darren, knowing that his coach had been in leadership positions within organizations helped him to trust that his coach could relate:

> *D: Yea, I wanted somebody who had, you know, dealt with the same problems I had dealt with, and someone who had worked in an organization-- because to me experience is good and you know people can have experience on the outside looking in or they can have experience doing the type of job and I think the person having experience doing the type of job is very valuable. Like my daughter figure skates and I can't skate at all so I would be a horrible coach for her, so I got to*

hire professionals who... you know I wouldn't want her to be coached by someone who can't skate.

Both Irene and John experienced this sense of their coach understanding reality and what really mattered to them. John noted:

J.: You know, he's not trying to look for things that don't exist or anything like that. It's just, you know, I can tell him what I am trying to work on or anything that actually makes me question to myself how much I've seriously looked into that or... and you know, it I don't follow through on something, if it loses its energy for me, he doesn't keep nagging me about it.-- go back to that-- or whatever. He can see the real, he's got a really good sense of essentially knowing, he knows when I'm actually gung ho about something or if it's just a little flipping thought that I want to explore. And once I explore it, well it's not for me, then we get back on track for something else.

Irene made a very similar comment (also quoted before above under a different theme) about her coach's ability to sense what was "real" for her:

I It's like, I'm thinking the thought and there comes the question. It happened on Monday.. and every so often it just blows me away. So that's how the relationship has developed. It's that building of trust.. and over time he'll know my reactions and where... Like, you learn from your client when they're lying, when they're not lying, when they are skirting the issue and telling you a story... And, they know what it sounds like, they know what it feels like, so they can call you on it.

The understanding of the coach's reality, and of what mattered to the executive, became essential as the coaching progressed and additional goals and objectives were jointly identified.

Being Objective

The value of the coach as someone who was unbiased, and not influenced by personal feelings, interpretations, or prejudice, was something very core to the experience of being coached for these co-researchers. The idea of the coach as an objective listener

arose repeatedly. John described the comfort level he felt knowing that his coach was neutral:

> *J.: You think you'd be talking to them about it [friends and family]. But they all have a stake in it. It would be much easier for me to just to, you know, tell this person who's actually almost anonymous but, at, its, you know, right away you know the trust level is there. So I mean it wasn't like this, but I mean I felt really confidant right off the hop. And so it was very easy for me for that relationship grow.*

The lack of personal stake in the outcomes was also part of this sense of objectivity. Samuel appreciated the lack of ego involvement on the part of his coach, and he talked about it this way:

> *S: Mmmm I also felt that he had my best interest at heart and I've expected for him not to continue given my present situation. I would have suspected that, if a coach had a big ego, he would have liked to have his coachee kind of, you know, blossom and exceed their expectations, or whatever. You know, too, it would have been a nice success story if a he could have told everybody about that he had this [coachee] who kept things from going bad, and you know-- turned things around today—Like he's now the president ... That would have been a spectacular success story! Mmmmm even though things didn't play that out that way.... I always had the impression that, mmmm, the realization that he always had my best interest at heart and that really kind of almost superseded anything else.*

Irene talked about the objectivity this way:

> *I: Its, its... yeah... it's it's kinda that neutral party that will allow me to speak my mind and help me figure it out what my brain has scrambled up so beautifully. And it's not the same as family, it's not the same as friends, because they all come with their own judgments and their own biases, whereas a coach comes in neutral and is there for you.*

The terms "neutral third party", "objective listener", and "anonymous person' were used almost synonymously with the word "coach", at various points in the research interviews.

Access to Wisdom and Knowledge

Part of the experience of being coached was a sense on the part of some co-researchers that they valued the access they had to the coach's wisdom and knowledge. For Samuel, this inherent belief in the usefulness of his coach's background, experience and wisdom, was paramount:

> *S: In the same breath, I could say that at the time that I needed a coach to help me bring clarity and to provide me with the support and the feedback that I needed from a person I believed in, and whose judgment that I valued. I had the need, and [my coach] filled that gap.*

Maria's wish to tap into her coach's wisdom was reflected in a recurring frustration she felt that she was not fully accessing her coach's knowledge and experience:

> *M: Yes, exactly. You are a coach right? So coaching must mean you know stuff, so what stuff do you know that I don't know that I could learn here? So there was a little bit of a student/ teacher relationship role that I wanted, and she wanted to be in the coaching role because that is what she was a coach, but for me a coach is... you know someone who knows more about the game then you do, and I didn't real that, I didn't feel like I was getting the stuff that she knew. And it was sort of coming out time to time...*

Darren talked about appreciating the experience and background of his coach when it came to bear on a specific issue he was having in the workplace:

> *D: Well it was just like, you know,* [referring here to an individual Darren had interviewed for a job] *"what gaps do you have in your experience required to fill this role", essentially, and again that was one of the ones where the coach had had specific experience and this was just a little trick question that he had developed that could help in that sort of situation. Yea, I mean the coach tries to draw all the answers out of you but also offers out their experience and their suggestions, so I think if you have someone with a lot of experience and a good background they can offer you those little suggestions to help in your situations.*

In general, it can be said that the executives in this study respected their coaches, something which allowed the coachees to place their trust in them.

F. Experiencing the Impact

A condition for the inclusion of individuals in the pool of possible co-researchers was that they viewed their coaching experience as positive over-all. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that all co-researchers experienced positive outcomes as a result of participating in coaching. The experience co-researchers had of the impact of coaching were wide-ranging, and could be grouped into the following clusters: Building Clarity; Engaging New Perspectives; Reducing Stress; Recognizing Self-worth; Recognizing Choice and Intentions; Improved Skills and Abilities; and Influencing Many Life Domains.

Building Clarity

Co-researchers felt strongly about the way coaching helped them achieve a sense of clarity. This was felt very passionately by several co-researchers, and is exemplified by Samuel's comment:

> *S He provided me, and I've told him more than once, he guided me in our discussions more than once to a moment of where I could see the future quite lucid. Almost, he would reveal the truth from within myself-- that I would come to almost a eureka kind of moment—but I feel I should have thought about that myself. But it was only apparent to me in my discussion with him. [quietly] And those kind of eureka moments were really quite precious. I find that to be, well, very much worthwhile.*

Jeannie also concluded that a key outcome of the coach's questioning techniques were to provide increased clarity:

> *j: I think the coach maybe listens to what you're saying and pulls out the parts from their experience and is able to ask you questions to help you see the clarity that's needed.*

John talked about how valuable his coach's ability to help him simplify things was for him:

J: Yeah, exactly. Yeah, that's what I ...You brought up that word clarity or clearing, yeah, clarity was one thing I was really seeking when I got into coaching. Because, you know, like I was saying before, my mind is a little bit out of place because I am trying to always think big picture all the time and I've got these big grand goals all the time and, you know, I'm sure everybody gets to know everything because I'm always looking at real estate, or doing this or doing that because I'm trying to set up the big picture all the time. But, you know, that's just part of-- that's just part of my make up. You know, and it's done me a lot of good to because I've grown things from nothing. You know, I've built this business from nothing and that's a quality I'm proud to have. But sometimes it gets a little chaotic in my mind so I need to have that clarity...

John said more about this later on in the interview:

J: You know, and then he breaks it down into its simplicity. And so it doesn't become so daunting. Maybe that's, and that's usually what it is. A guy can build something up in his mind and it becomes this insurmountable task that is impossible and he has to be in control all the way to the top. But it is just an illusion really that many people put in front of themselves. And, basically he just made it really real for me right away. And he would just kind of make things, well look, you achieved this. You know, things just happen for you because you do things this way, you know, It's not like I really go out and nose to the grindstone anymore and just things kind of fall into my lap now. He says I'm attracting it in one way or another, I think.

R: And he's made you observe that.

J: Yeah.

R: You might not have noticed that.

J: I might have been doing that in the past too, but I was taking the hard way around, right.

Irene described this impact of coaching in this way:

I: Its, its... yeah... it's it's kinda that neutral party that will allow me to speak my mind and help me figure it out what my brain has scrambled up so beautifully.

Thus we can see how coaching helped coachees develop a sense of clarity.

Engaging New Perspectives

Part of the impact of coaching on the co-researchers was the opportunity to engage with and consider new alternative perspectives on the areas they were struggling with. One co-researcher referred to this as follows:

> *And, you know, just challenge me a little bit when making me think outside the box, once and a while. You know I don't have to do it this way. The reason why I survived up to the point of last year is because I was so hardnosed and I had to, you know, that's the only way, you know, that kind of kept me going. So I figured that's the way I had to run my business for the next 20 years or what not. Wasn't the case.*

Two of the co-researchers used metaphors to describe what it was like to see things anew:

> *So those were very good. It was like, ah you know those kaleidoscope things, is that what they're called?*
>
> *R: Mmm hm!*
>
> *Yeah, you look through them and shift them a tiny bit and the picture looks different. That's what coaching is like.*
>
> *R: Very nice. I'm going to quote you on that one for sure. (Laughter) Make sure the transcriber got that down.*
>
> *Well it is, because it's a little bit like a paradigm shift. Sometimes you get so mired in the details that you neglect to stand back or are unable to or whatever, and sometimes there are situations you can't share with anyone, it's confidential information. But you're still trying to work it out, how to deal with that.*

Another co-researcher talked about this change of perspective in this way:

> *I think the life experience that he brought to the table was to some extent the ability to see things from the balcony. You've heard the expression of going up to the balcony? It's like having that—u see all the dancers on the floor beneath you, see big orchestras, and to see who's dancing where and what-not, but to have a birds eye-view of your immediate environment in which you operate—I think that's something that I suppose life has taught Rick that he impressed upon me. Try to elevate yourself out the situation and try to see it the dance floor—get that perspective. On the other hand I think it might because I had the tendency to look blindly at a specific problem and it would grow in my eyes—it was just an insurmountable obstacle. I mean to elevate myself to see other sides; it was something that I valued as well.*

R So helping you remove yourself from being right in the middle of it.

Thus, we see that the ability to engage new perspectives was key outcome of coaching.

Reducing Stress

Another key impact of the coaching experience for co-researchers was a felt and noticeable reduction of stress. This outcome was described as resulting from the building of clarity and the engagement of new perspectives. One co-researcher talked about this stress alleviation as follows:

> *Yeah, I think that is what it was. I mean, he did do that, like, he could sense that I had a lot of stress in my life at that point. But I realized that 90% of it was self inflicted. I mean the stress, yeah there's external factors, and it's how you manage it and how you look at it and look at what things you can control and what things you can't. I think that's one of the big, you know, that's a eureka moment, was realizing that while, you know, I was worrying about this thing and then that thing was like can you control that? Well no. Well then all things, it is really easy to let go of it at that point. And then all of a sudden the stress starts to evaporate and so, that's essentially my experience with me was learning to focus on the things that needed, you know, if I've done everything in my power, to influence this situation as much as possible, that's all I can really do. You know, and then, the rest will fall into place. And if not, then it's not meant to be, and move on. You know, and that's another big thing I have come away from in this experience.*

This same co-researcher believes that this reduced stress was noticed by significant others in his life as well:

> *J: oh I'm sure they would say that I am probably happier in terms of making this choice about running the business. Where as before I would say I always thought [my work] was a big sacrifice. And it can be if you choose it to be. But they probably see that I'm happier... Yeah, but it's, I'd say they'd say there has been a pretty big difference. I mean, Christmas 2 years ago, my father in law came up to me and said, "Are you alright?" Because, and they don't say anything like that anymore and they are just happy that the business is doing well. Everything's good on all fronts, and that's it. I think people can pick up on your stress quite quickly and quite easily. And they don't sense it as much anymore.*

Another co-researcher noted:

> *You know I think the coaching probably just helped in terms of, you know not stressing me out and helping me in times when I was struggling with problems. You know, defining, ok "I got this job, what am I going to do in this job", you know, instead of floundering with that for nine month. Having coaching helped me understand what to do and so it reduced my stress levels and of course if I am less stressed then that's good, when I get home (laughing)*
>
> *R: Yes absolutely! (laughing)*
>
> *Because you know I am happier and I am less likely to you know, snap.*

Yet another research participant described the reduced stress as a sense of calmness that even had a ripple effect to others around her:

> *My parents-- they said—"you're different", so there's more of calmness to you, there's more of centeredness. And all of the coaching has allowed me to get to that space. I can walk on the second floor and there's like a wave of calmness, everybody just settles down a bit.*
>
> *R: Is that new for you?*
>
> *Yes, it is. But I know that everybody that I've talked to on a one-to-one settles down very quickly--- because I don't offer a confrontation which is what coaching has helped me do. That nonjudgmental thing.*

The effective reduction of stress, given the very often stressful nature of leadership roles, is another key outcome of the coaching experience that has great value. This has the ability to make a difference across many work and life domains.

Recognizing Self-Worth

On some level, part of the impact of coaching for each of the co-researchers was to identify and become clearer about the strengths and capabilities they were bringing to their work and lives. One co-researcher talked about it this way:

> *You know, I think I'm pretty open and what not with my clients and people respond to that. But once I was coached I realized how important that is and, you*

> *know don't take that lightly. You know, and that's really, you know.... and then things just seem to be coming my way and I'm more aware of it.*

Another of the research participants had a strong belief that his coach provided just what he needed in order to value his strengths:

> *At the time that I [pause] that I realized that my situation is not healthy, that my quality of life is actually going down, because I'm stressed because I have these expectations which I am not living up to apparently... I started doubting myself—you know maybe something's the matter with me, maybe it's not my environment, maybe can I be maybe at fault? And in having those thoughts, I think [my coach] really helped me through that time—laying and considering my thoughts about myself and the way in which I'm performing, when my philosophies is not congruent with my working environment, but that's not to say that my philosophy is bad. In that way helping me maintain my self esteem. I think that was probably one of the biggest advantages.... I'm getting very personal now... but at the time that I was really despairing...it was really a bad time for me. And [my coach] just lifted me up—he provided me with that kind of sentiment which I felt I could maintain faith in myself and my self confidence.*

Other co-researchers mentioned their capabilities throughout their interviews. Their coach had helped them be more aware of them, but also helped them make use of these abilities more effectively.

Improved Skills and Abilities

A range of improved skills and abilities related to the co-researchers' work were discussed and reflected on during the interviews. Most of these were attributed to one or more of the impacts noted above, such as having better clarity and being able to engage new perspectives. Skills related to meeting management were one area of improvement. One co-researcher noted how her coaching helped her get more out of her meetings with other people:

> *It's something about, oh, okay, it's all coming back to me now. When I was going into meetings or any meeting or discussion, whether it was with one person or with more people. To think about, I can't remember the exact wording, but to ask*

myself what it was I wanted to achieve in the meeting. And it was particularly useful when I was dealing with difficult people.

R: Okay.

This must have been at the time, we had one or two staff who are gone now, who were particularly difficult to deal with. And I was finding it hard not to feel angry with them, although I tried very hard not to express my anger, sometimes I felt that it still affected our discussions. And so her suggestion was, or her homework was, before I went into any meeting, any meeting at all, to think about what I wanted to achieve out of it. And that was hugely powerful.

R: Hmmm.

Because it helped me to let go of whatever the anger was. Because the anger or whatever the frustration was is irrelevant. ... So I go into this discussion with you and if, as I go into the meeting, if that's what I'm feeling and focusing on is my anger then that's all I'm going to be focused on and I am going to be less able to hear what you are telling me or you know, or move forward. To let go of that and move forward. Where as if I ask myself before I go into the meeting, if I decide, "What is it I want to achieve out of this meeting?" ... Then I come into the room and I'm focusing on that aspect.

R: Right...

not how I felt about it. That is very powerful. I found that very useful.

R: Okay. And it really transfers to lots and lots of situations.

Many situations. I used it a lot.

For another co-researcher there was an improved ability to deal with issues one-on-one with others:

J: Oh yeah, I think so. I mean, yeah, for sure there would be. I mean, how I handle myself in a business situation now with people I work with is quite different now than it was then.

R: How so?

J: Probably just, you know, deal with things as they come and you know, it there's something that needs to be addressed, before I would have had a tendency to run away from it a little bit, maybe if it was something I was a little bit uncomfortable with. Now I just tell them and for the most part, and I find that the

> *stress is gone. It is always the anticipation of having to tell them or having to work through something that stresses the person out. So now I can deal with it and if it's dealt with then the load is off my chest right away.*

Another co-researcher gave an example of a situation where his coach helped him deal with a current issue; while at the same time prevent it from occurring in the future:

> *I think perhaps a situation where one of [the staff] asked for lieu time... It was kind of exceptional. And in the discussion with [my coach], um, I was thinking of calling the person on explain to me how you arrive at accumulating this much lieu time, or outright refusing—calling the person back to the office and say you can't have it. [My coach] helped me ... He said why don't you accept the situation as is, but try to create a framework in which to deal with the situation so that it doesn't reoccur. We established parameters for dealing with that situation in the future. So, it wasn't a call back, or just lie down and take—in a way maybe it was—but some action came out of it to ensure a better future for all of us. I think that's an example.*

For one research participant, the impact on her staff, and even the clients they work with, was attributed to her coaching experience:

> *I think it's also hit me to the core because I'm relating it back to the staff and how they feel when they are literally put to the challenge and they have the doubt as to whether or not they can do it. So, it's a bit of that empathy on that really intuitive level. Because the staff are really faced with a lot of challenges. That was an interesting moment. Because it just put everything back into perspective.*

In summary, all executives talked about the impact coaching had on helping them improve specific leadership skills and abilities, often citing specific examples as seen above.

Recognizing Choice and Intentions

As a result of their coaching, co-researchers readily and gladly came to recognize that there were always choices that could be made between alternatives, even when at first this did not seem to be the case. Part of this was the recognition that being aware of one's intentions made those choices more obvious. This recognition was very freeing,

and greatly affected the coachee's approach to their work and other situations. Samuel passionately noted:

> *S: Yeah, talking about freedom.... When I was faced with situations when I felt I had no choice—that I was in this kind of funneled into a specific direction and there was no way out... discussion with [my coach] resulted in, more often that not, resulted into the realization that I DO have a choice. I have a choice where I can decide whether I would come to the office tomorrow or not... theoretically.... [laughter]. Seriously as well I suppose, but you have to deal with the consequences very often. But just to bring home or explore the possibilities of having a choice. As soon as I realized I have a choice, things kind of lightened up. It was the times when I was being forced in a specific direction and I had to see things through. Then realizing in discussing with Rick I could do that, or I could do nothing at all... and again you would kind of have that – "Ah yeah there ARE options!"*

Jeannie described it succinctly this way:

> *J: And that was one thing that really came out of the coaching quite a bit--was more clarity about myself. You know, about what my responsibilities were and my choices were, which was a good thing.*

Maria embraced the concept of choicefulness as a direct result of the coaching she received (despite the fact that she found the approach to the related coaching sessions challenging):

> *M: Yes and I think, and the notion that really spoke to me was the notion of choice. As soon as my coach brought up that, then I just jumped right in, then I could sort of say, you know "what am I going to choose?. What do I want, what do I want to choose?", and if I choose to spend an hour from five to six because it makes my life easier, that is a choice I am going to make. So soon as she brought up the question of choice, and it was an issue that came back to intention, and I was in control, things that I could relate to, it was very valuable information.*

Most co-researchers felt very passionately about how freeing the concept of choice was for them.

Influencing Many Life Domains

Co-researchers all talked about the sense that the coaching they were receiving had directly and indirectly affected many aspects of their life, including their home lives. The areas of impact noted above were so fundamental that they touched relationships of all kinds, including those with their partners. Darren noted that:

> *D: How it has affected me... well you know the thing is it gives me somebody to talk to other than my wife at home in terms of the problems I have at work and you know, I mean frankly you know its probably not, like... [my wife] ... is pretty tired by the end of the day, and I am pretty tired by the end of the day, and that's not really something you want to spend much time talking about, so it is nice to actually have somebody who is formally dedicated to do that...*
>
> *R: So it actually takes some pressure off your home life?*
>
> *D: Yea, a little bit of a sounding board outside the home... yea and I think that's one of the really valuable things in having the coach.*

Irene passionately described the affect coaching had on her relationship with her husband, and after sharing a poignant story related to this she concluded by saying:

> *I: My husband met my challenge and I got what I wanted because I took the courage to ask for it.*
>
> *R That's all it took.*
>
> *I That's all it took- but it was huge! It was majorly huge. The relationship is more solid than ever, I'm having so much fun... there's humour that just catches me off guard—we're doing more things together. There is more spontaneity. Heck I even went golfing with him, which is something to say....*
>
> *R How do you attribute that to the coaching?*
>
> *I It's asking me the question what do I want, and every time I try to skirt the answer or come up with a rationalization, I was cut short. "What do you want?" Ask me that question long enough, and stop me from rationalizing or telling stories or giving examples-- I'll get there. So when that hit.... Damn... ask him for what you want!*
>
> *R And having the guts to do it.*

I And having the courage to do it.... You know it wasn't as tough as I thought. But I realized I had to be in the driver's seat to do that.

Three of the co-researchers felt strongly that coaching helped them work towards better work/ life balance. For John it was like this:

J: But, you know, with me, work was everything. Building this business is everything. I've sunk my education, 5 years of my education plus you know, 6 years or 7 years into this thing so far, right so I've got a lot riding on this. Basically everything. You know, up until a year and a bit ago, I was just coming to this crescendo. So eventually I just, he helped me just kind of get some clarity there and you know, spend some more time with my son because the opportunity is there and just enjoy it while you can.

R: Take it now.

J: Yeah, just take it. And it worked out great. Same with on the married, marriage front too. That's been good too, in terms of trying to, you know--- I get too excited about the business and so I always want to share that with everybody. But I have to realize that not everybody wants to know about (Laughter) everything, all the details all the time. So I've learned to just shut it off. And that's helped quite a bit too. But that's more of a recent....

R: Hmmm. So it sounds like even in that case it was a matter of him giving you permission to take time away from it.

J: Yeah, that's right. That's exactly it. Given permission. No one else would. My wife, would say, "take time away". You know, well you have a vested interest and you want to see me fail. (Laughter) you think this. It's not true but when you know somebody else doesn't have a stake in it, like I was saying before, you really take that advice to heart.

Maria talked about the impact on her decision making in the home context:

M: I mean she allowed me permission to put myself first, to be able to say, "well what do I want? What are we going to have for dinner or should I put in an extra hour of work at the end of the day?" and I was thinking, yes it is ok to put it out there, because if you put it out there then someone can put theirs out there and then you guys can have a conversation about it, and if the other person does not put there stuff out there then you cannot have this conversation. I mean often times my husband will say what time should I pick you up? And I will start thinking, well I don't want to be too late but I don't want to have to deal with all those emails tomorrow, and I can't decide! (laughing)

For Samuel, the impact was far-reaching, and included significant decisions about his career direction and path. He summarized this by saying:

> *S: But I'm not prepared to sacrifice myself.... That is something else that [my coach] played a role in. A small part. At the time that I felt that I .... That all my life revolved around my job and I was so tied up in the politics and the relationships and it was such a dominant aspect of my life that it swallowed up my life... [My coach] also contributed to realization of that life is about more than just your job. To bring that balance in your life.*

This notion that the coaching touched many aspects of the coachee's life thus seemed to stem from the somewhat personal nature of the changes that were affected by the coaching relationship. In most cases, the wide-ranging impact of the coaching came as a bit of a surprise to the coachees.

F. Deciding on the Future of the Relationship

An aspect of the experience of being coached was the recognition that a choice needed to be made about ending or continuing the coaching relationship. The *Contemplation of the Future of the Coaching Relationship* occurred at different stages for different co-researchers, and was viewed on a continuum. At the time of the research interviews, one individual had already chosen to discontinue the relationship with the coach all together. Another recognized that the need for a coach at the moment was dwindling, although it may resurface at some point in the future. Others viewed coaching as an ongoing relationship that had the potential to be helpful indefinitely. John put it this way:

> *J: Well, yes. ... like one of the guys who works for me, said, "So, how long is this coaching thing going to go for?" And I said that I'll probably get it for the rest of my life. (Laughter) You know, unless I retire early or take a break from business or what not, you know, as long as I'm a decision maker, I think you could always get benefits out of coaching. And I said, as long as the funds are*

there, if my business goes broke and everything else, I guess I couldn't afford coaching. But those are pretty rare situations. I mean, that's my take on it. I think it's indefinite.

R: So you could see getting the benefits from it indefinitely?

J: Yeah, and I mean, your goals are always constantly changing so, I mean, the skies the limit the way I look at it, so I can't see why you would need it at one point in your life and never again. So, I could see it being a very positive, long term thing in my life.

Darren, after some reflection commented that:

D: Yea. You know in terms of at some point in time we would probably decrease you know how frequently we meet... the actual kind of, "how do I know that I'm done?" *we haven't really talked about that because, I guess you could say your not really done until you know, your not working anymore, until your retired. These are career coaches really, so you could say as long as you're working maybe it is good to have a coach. I think probably at certain points in your career, like you said certain transitions or specific issues you want that coaching, you want it more frequently, and then there are times when your comfortable in your job and you don't really need the support day to day or week to week, maybe you could call that person once or twice a year if necessary, and just say hey, I got a problem, can we make some time to meet for an hour. It is almost like a retainer instead of a former coaching schedule, and I feel like I am close to moving to that sort of relationship because I feel like I have been helped with working through the transition and like I said sometimes its becoming, I will have to search for a topic for us to talk about when we get together. We fortunately are still working through the transition so associated with that transition there is usually a topic, but I am sure once this transition is worked through ... there will be less to talk about and the relationship will probably change at the point.*

Two of the co-researchers talked about being committed to the idea of on-going coaching, even if that coach may need to be someone different. Irene described it this way:

I Eventually, I think kind of... I just envision him getting a little bit more tougher with me, because I'm moving onto projects, I'm moving forward, taking a little bit more energy on my part, a little bit more conviction, little more guts that I think I have, that I know I have. I could see him getting a little more sterner, you know, saying to me "isn't that what you wanted—what are you waiting for?"

R Accountability.....

I Yeah, big accountability. And then eventually weaning off or taking a break from it for a while, coming back to it later on. But right now, right now I'm good--- its'... I'm still in that growing phase. I'm not ready to give it up yet.

And a bit later on in the interview, she continued by saying:

R Now, I wonder, let's say that the future [with your coach] doesn't look like that—that he doesn't hold me more accountable.... What might your response be?

I Find a new coach. Look for somebody who will hold me more accountable. But as I'm saying that I'm saying, but Irene, you can held yourself more accountable can't you? Its, its... yeah... it's it's kinda that neutral party that will allow me to speak my mind and help me figure it out what my brain has scrambled up so beautifully. And it's not the same as family, it's not the same as friends, because they all come with their own judgments and their own biases, whereas a coach comes in neutral and is there for you. So, if that's not going to happen, then I need to find a new coach, and I will do that.

R So very much a sense of knowing what you need from that relationship and and you know, you're not wed to the relationship so much as you are the outcome for you and how it impacts you.

I That's right, yeah.

Samuel noted the option of coaching on an as-required basis in the future.

However, his thoughts and feelings about ending the coaching relationship were quite different as he explains here:

S: But in bringing things to a close, I think it's time to move on. What I don't want to do, is I don't want to use [my coach] as a crutch.

R Okay

S I think he will always be there. And we talked about his availability to me on an ad-hoc basis, you know, his desire to do that. But I think coming to and guiding me to the point of clarity about my future, I think that kind of, almost rounded it off.

R Yeah, absolutely, yeah

S So I'm feeling good about our relationship. I think it's a good time to end it now. I think over all, I'm satisfied with the decisions, I'm sure it's the best ones for me at least.

Regardless of the decision made about the future of the coaching relationship, all coachees realized at some point in time that a choice needed to be made, and felt quite strongly about that choice and its implications for them.

Validation of the Draft Description

As noted in the methodology chapter, the description of the experience of what it is like to be coached was validated by the co-researchers. All of the six co-researchers were able to validate the draft description. Several of these executives began by saying in general how the description was very well written. For example, one co-researcher said "Your synopsis of the coaching experience is excellent" and another noted "You did a really good job of capturing the intent and the feeling of being coached. A lot of it resonated with me."

An interesting outcome that was brought to light during the validation process was the very positive impact that participating in the research had for some the co-researchers. This was exemplified by this comment, made by one of the participants: "Talking to you helped me deepen my understanding of the coaching experience. It was a kind of retrospective sense-making."

The resulting composite description, which follows, took into account all of the feedback that was provided by the co-researchers.

Composite Textural-Structural Description of the Experience of Being Coached

The data presented and analyzed above provides a rich and vivid account of the experience of being coached from the coachee's perspective. What follows is a synthesis of this data, brought together in an attempt to consider the essence of the experience of being coached. It is important to understand that this description is in no regard an end-point nor is it definitive. Rather, it is a starting point for future consideration of the experience. As noted by Moustakas (1994):

> The essences of any experience are never completely exhausted. The fundamental textural-structural synthesis represents the essences at particular time and place from the vantage point of an individual researcher following an exhaustive imaginative and reflective study of the phenomenon. (p. 100).

What follows, then, is a description of the essence of the experience of being coached, based on the results of the present inquiry undertaken with six very interesting, accomplished, and engaged co-researchers. This description was validated by all six co-researchers as being an accurate reflection of their experience.

The Description

The manager/ executive embarks on a coaching relationship, very consciously deciding to begin a journey that eventually impacts the executive and the executive's work, and even those close to him/her. The executive responds to a catalyst—perhaps a promotion, increasing stress levels or complexity on the job, or suggestions by others close to them that coaching may be helpful. Recognizing and sometimes having researched the potential value of coaching, the coachee makes a choice to invest in coaching with the purpose of improving his/her ability to be effective at work, also

recognizing the indulgent nature of being able to focus on one's self. He/ She usually does not expect the wide-ranging impact of this helping relationship. Trusting his /her intuition, and others who know perhaps more than the executive does about coaching, the coachee comes to select a trained coaching professional. The initial meeting with the coach is important in making the decision to continue.

In this way, starting from a sense of faith in the process of coaching, the executive begins the process of co-creating the coaching relationship with the coach. The coachee initially feels that this relationship is somehow easier to establish and maintain than most other relationships. The development of a safe, honest, alliance is made simpler by the sense that the coach is an unbiased professional with no vested interest, who can remain objective and who can be trusted from the outset. The executive comes to truly experience the relationship and the coaching as safe over time, in some cases more quickly than others. However, since the organization employs the coach, the executive sometimes feels an initial guardedness about the extent of the confidentiality of the coaching sessions, although not in every case. This apprehension or concern initially felt by some executives is slowly replaced by a sense of trust, which is developed, sometimes very quickly, as the coach and coachee begin working together. For some, coming to trust confidentiality came from recognition that, for the most part, there is very little worth hiding.

As a first step, the coachee and coach establish the parameters of the coaching arrangement, agreeing on how they will work together, and on the high-level objectives for the coaching. This objective-setting develops a life of its own over time, as new issues

emerge, new challenges are faced, and the executive develops a better sense of the potential benefits of the coaching experience. A more free-flowing intuitive coaching arrangement allows for flexibility and the coachee appreciates the coach's openness to her particular needs.

There is a mildly unsettling period of time during which the executive learns what it means to be coached. During this time, the coachee comes to develop a personal responsibility for the outcomes of the coaching, recognizing that when they derive little from a particular session, it is usually because the executive has not put the required energy and intention into it. Coachees also come to recognize early on that being an effective coachee is a time commitment that requires energy and hard work, but does pays off greatly. When provided a choice, many coachees select the telephone as the primary medium of coaching sessions. The executive becomes accustomed to, and sometimes comes to value, the use of the telephone, which is most often seen as convenient and effective. Some coaches find that the use of the telephone actually facilitates the work that needs to be done during coaching. Others like that the phone makes it easier to focus on him/herself, rather than the coach or other outside influences. Regardless, the coach is always seen as more than just "a voice at the other end of the line".

Slowly, sometimes reluctantly, the coachee becomes more comfortable with the need to discover one's own way, and to develop one's own answers, rather than relying on an expert to act in the role of teacher. The coachee draws upon known helping or learning paradigms in order to make sense of what they are experiencing. Sometimes

these paradigms get in the way and must be discarded. Their usefulness at that point is to help the coachee differentiate between coaching and other forms of helping with which they have more familiarity. For example, most often at some point the coachees draw connections between coaching and therapy or counseling. This occurs as the coachee experiences the open-ended questioning and reflection of the nonjudgmental coach, and what it is like to be truly listened to, and experiences the ability of the coach to make them more aware of both their behaviours and their belief systems. However, the coachee eventually also comes to terms with the distinctions between counseling and coaching. This has the effect of helping them better understand what coaching is all about.

The coaching relationship does not always proceed completely smoothly. There are times when the coachee senses the coach's struggle with the details of the executive's situation or organizational context. There are often times when the coachee becomes frustrated or irritated, wanting more advice, specific direction, and more knowledge being given by the coach. These moments of rupture in the relationship can be minor, or very significant, and sometimes require courage on the part of the coachee to address in order for healing to occur. In some cases, the rupture is significant enough that the coachee feels a need to discontinue with coaching, a feeling that the executive eventually acts upon.

The coachee becomes excited, energized and focused as the coachee begins to directly and indirectly experience the impact that the coaching is having on her work and life. The coachee experiences increased moments of clarity while engaging new perspectives. On a global level, the executive's response to stressors changes, as the

coachee embraces the idea that there are always choices and alternatives. The coachee also comes to realize that making these choices is easier when one's intentions are clear. The coachee comes to realize that preconceived notions about the right way to do things are sometimes unfounded, and this opens up choices as well. The coachee comes to recognize and appreciate his or her self-worth more readily and learns how to use strengths more effectively to accomplish goals. The executive is now better able to get what is needed out of meetings, whether these are one on one or in group settings. In the end, the coachee has a strongly felt belief that the coaching has impacted more than just his or her work, but has also had ripple effects into many life domains. Subordinates, colleagues, friends, and significant others begin to benefit indirectly from the benefits of coaching and sometimes comment on this.

Over time, the coachee learns to value the coach's skills, abilities and contributions. What the coach does in order to help the coachee affect change is very often elusive and indescribable to the coachee. An intuitive connection is very often established, partially resulting from the coach's ability to understand and respond to his /her reality. The coachee greatly values the coach's ability to be objective and help the coachee push past limits and challenge assumptions the way no one else in his or her life can. Most often indirectly, but sometimes directly, the coachee gains access to the wisdom and knowledge of the coach while working through practical solutions and ideas that the coachee can implement right away.

At some point later on in the coaching engagement, the coachee considers the future of the coaching relationship, attempting to situate it on a long-term basis. Since

this relationship is often felt as a close personal one, although always professional, this moment is generally strongly experienced. For some, it becomes clear that coaching is a career-long endeavor, with a potential to be beneficial far into the future. In other cases, the coachee comes to learn more about what he or she needs in a coach, and sometimes seeks out someone who better fits that need. In some cases, the coachee comes to feel that all needs have been met for now, and that, in effect, the excellent coach has coached him or herself out of a job. Finally, there are those coachees who feel a need to bring the coaching relationship to a distinct end in order to avoid a situation of dependency on the coach. Whichever the decision, the executive comes to be thankful for the changes brought about through the coaching experience. The coachee uses the valuable insights and strategies gained through coaching to more confidently and competently accomplish what they need to in the world of work. In the final analysis, there is also a strongly felt realization that the coaching has not only changed the way the executive work, but it has also changed them personally, in a very significant way.

Chapter Summary

This chapter provided the results of the current study. Through a process of phenomenological reduction, seven clusters of meaning units were derived intuitively and presented. These were used to describe the essence of the experience of being coached. The final result was a composite rich description of the experience of being coached.

CHAPTER 5: POST-STRUCTURAL ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of this chapter is to summarize and discuss the results of this research in several ways. First, the discussion in this chapter will highlight the research question, purpose and results of this study. Second, the strengths and possible limitations will be discussed. Third, the resulting description of the experience of being coached will be linked to the research discussed in the literature review chapter. Next, the outcomes of the inquiry will be discussed in terms of possible applications and implications for the Managerial and Executive Coaching profession. Finally, this chapter will uncover new areas of inquiry arising from this study. As with all phenomenological research, the results are not the end-point, but a new starting point for ongoing discovery.

Research Question, Purpose and Results of Study

The present research used a phenomenological paradigm and method to address the question of how managers and executives experience the process of being coached. The primary intention was to represent the client's perspective of being coached, in order to provide a foundational source of descriptive data upon which future theory and research can be based. In this way, it could provide insight into the knowledge, skills and behaviour required to be an effective executive coach. Particularly, it could provide a rich source of rich data regarding the content and process of coaching, including the relationship between the coach and coachee. The study achieved its purpose by providing the first Canadian research of the experience of being coached.

The composite description of the experience of being coached found at the end of the explication chapter is truly the best summary of the findings of this research, and the reader is encouraged to refer to it again. In summary, seven clusters of meaning units were derived based on 29 individual meaning units (refer to Table 1).

The results of this research show us that the coachee experiences several essential elements as they undergo coaching. First, the executive embarks on the coaching relationship. Then, the coachee co-creates the relationship with their coach, all the while learning to be coached. During this time, there may be moments when the executive must heal ruptures in the coaching relationship. However, over all, the executive comes to value what the coach offers. The coachee experiences the impact strongly across several life domains encompassing work and personal life. Eventually, the coachee makes decisions about the future of the coaching relationship. It is in the composite textural description provided in the Explication chapter that each of these essential elements come to life.

Thus, the present study captured the essential elements of the experience of being coached, and has resulted in a clearer understanding of how the process of executive coaching is experienced by the coachee.

Strengths and Limitations of the Research

There are strengths and limitations inherent to this study. These are important to take into account before we consider the application and implications of the results of this research, since they serve to contextualize the findings.

The strengths of the research are significant and make this research unique when compared to what already exists in the academic literature. First, it rigorously applied phenomenological quantitative research strategies in order to ensure the validity of the results, including bracketing, and validity checks. The majority of previous similar research, as we saw in the literature review chapter, used loosely applied case study and other qualitative methodologies with more limited adherence to rigorous research methods. This rigor allows us to have more confidence in the results and the implication of them.

A second strength, and a unique aspect of this research, is that it gave primacy and voice to the client's experience, unfettered by the constraints of a particular coaching paradigm. Participants in the study were not clients of the researcher, as was the case in many past studies that included coachee's perspectives. Rather, this research drew from a pool of clients that were coached by three different coaches, who were also of different genders. The researcher knew none of the research participants prior to the study. This allowed for the Epoche, or attitude of openness and curiosity, to be established much more readily—a key feature of good phenomenological research. This strength also sets this research apart from other research in the area of coaching, since none of the participants were clients of the researcher.

A third area of strength for this study was the number and diversity of the pool of participants. Phenomenological research calls for a heterogeneous sample of participants, as previously noted, something this study achieved very well. Six participants were

interviewed, and both male and female leaders participated. A wide range of ages (32-57), and organization types (including profit and not for profit), were included.
Lastly, participants were not all coached by the same coach, limiting the possibility that a coach's particular coaching style or method would have a significant impact on the results. This diversity in the pool of participants is uncommon in the academic research published to date.

There were four significant limitations to this study, and most were related primarily to the sample of participants that were eventually included in the study. First, the ethnic diversity of the coachees was very limited, with only Caucasian individuals being represented. This means that it is possible that the perceptions of coaching of individuals from other ethic backgrounds are substantially different from that of the current sample. Any attempts to extend the findings of this study to individuals with other ethnic backgrounds should be done with caution and a keen awareness of this limitation.

A second significant limitation is that participants in this study were highly educated as a group, with three of the co-researchers having completed PhD's two completing bachelor's degrees, and one having a technical diploma. Although leaders within organizations do tend to have higher levels of formal education than are found in the general population, not all leaders have advanced degrees. It is conceivable that coachees in leadership roles who have more limited formal education may have a substantially different experience of the coaching process and relationship.

A third limitation, and one that is true of any research endeavor, are the practical constraints of time. It is certainly possible although not certain that, had the unstructured in-depth interviews been allowed to take longer, other rich details about the experience would have been uncovered. Although the interviews were relatively lengthy, in one case taking as long as 2 hours, there is still always the possibility that continued probing would have resulted in new meaning units. For this reason, ongoing research (which will be recommended later in this chapter) is vital.

One area that could be considered both strength and a limitation was that the research participants were all being coached in Alberta, Canada by individuals who had received specific and significant training in executive/ managerial coaching. This was an intentional part of the study design. Thus, the coaches who provided the potential pool of research participants were all respected leaders in the field of coaching residing in the Calgary community. This could be viewed as a strength, as well, because one can expect a certain level of competence in the trained coaches. This means that the aspects of the experience of being coached described here could more easily be attributed to the essence of the experience, rather than the result of poor, ineffective, or incompetent coaching practices. This is the reason the use of trained coaches was built into the research design. However, it could also be considered a limitation because we cannot know what the experience of being coached by an untrained Executive Coach might be based on the present study, and we certainly cannot extend these findings to that situation. One might expect that such an experience could be substantially different from the one described here.

Within the limitations noted above, and also recognizing that phenomenological inquiry never ends, readers can feel confident that the description presented here begins to capture the essence of the phenomenon of being coached.

Poststructural Analysis and Discussion

The experience of being coached can be understood in a unique way when separated from the coach's perspective in a phenomenological inquiry. In other research methodologies reflected in the academic literature on coaching, the coachee's perspective, if it is sought at all, is often filtered through that of the researcher. The researcher chooses which items to include on a survey, or what question to ask and not ask in a semi-structured interview. A significant feature of phenomenological inquiry is that it puts the research participant, aptly called the co-researcher, in the position of setting the agenda and the focus in a way that most other research does not. The only point of constraint is the research questions itself, but even in this case, by definition it must be meaningful to the participants in the research. Most importantly, when something seems important or salient to the co-researcher, the effective phenomenological interviewer takes notice of this, and encourages further exploration by probing. Similarly, a question asked in the interview that has no life, or seems insignificant to the co-researcher is not explored.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the results of a phenomenological inquiry of coaching help us add to the body of knowledge in the field of executive coaching. The aim in this type of research is to uncover what an experience means for the people who have had it, and then looking for the underlying structures of that experience in order to generalize it

beyond the individual (Moustakas, 1994). The results, therefore, do not spring from any theoretical understanding of the phenomenon, or from some preconceived notion about what the important aspects of that phenomenon should be, but rather from the lived experience of it.

Thus, the results of the present research provide us with rich insight regarding the process of executive coaching, in a sort of way that most previous academic literature has not done. The relationship between the existing literature, discussed in the Literature Review Chapter, and the present study will be considered in detail below.

Connections to Other Research and Executive Coaching Literature

The present study has added significantly to our understanding of the experience of executive coaching, not only by validating the results of existing research, but even more so by adding to what we know about how the *process* of executive coaching is perceived by the coachee.

With the exception of Sztucinksi's study (2001), the research discussed in the literature review captured the process of coaching as experienced by the coaches in only a cursory fashion, if at all. Even the four studies that focused on executive's perspectives as the primary research query provided only limited insight into what the experience of being coached was like from a *process* perspective. What follows is a consideration of how the present research relates to each of the four studies that investigated coach's perspectives, and how the present study serves to augment each of their findings.

The Coachee's Perspective. The reader will recall the three key themes regarding executive's experiences that were uncovered by Stevens' recent research (2005). Consistent with these ideas, the present research uncovered the clusters of meaning units centered on C-*creating the Coaching Relationship*, V*aluing What the Coach Offers*, and E*xperiencing the Impact*. In particular, the present study corroborated the idea that coachees establish an intimate helping relationship with the coach. At the same time it brought this idea to life by providing some sense of what the creation of the relationship was like, including a felt sense by coachees that sometimes this relationship operates an almost an intuitive level. The present study validated the idea that the coaching relationship is founded on trust and respect, but also added a sense of how that trust and respect developed over time. This development included the idea that there can be threats or ruptures in the development of the relationship that require healing. Finally, the idea that the coaching helps the coachee fulfill their responsibilities was also reflected in the present study; however, the focus was not only on improved skills and abilities, but also on the personal change that occurred for each coachee.

The two studies that centered on coaching outcomes, and the coachee's perception of these (Bougae, 2005; Turner, 2004;) were only partially validated by the present study. In the case of the Turner study, coachee's strongly valued the coach's ability to ask questions, listen, give feedback and build trust, rating these survey items highly on a Likert scale. The present study, however, would suggest that at least some of these valuable coaching skills (in particular the ability to ask questions and give feedback) are almost transparent to the coachee. In an unstructured interview setting, these skills are primarily experienced

indirectly, through the impact they have on a coach's sense of clarity, building of self-worth, reduction of stress and improved skills and abilities, amongst other things. In essence, the present study revealed coachees are rarely able to describe how a coach does he or she does. The other primary finding from the Turner study, that transfer of learning was perceived as less effective was not supported by the present study. In an unstructured phenomenological interview, co-researchers consistently described a very strong transfer of learning to several life domains, especially work. What is notable about this is that the areas of change brought about by the coaching and discussed by the co-researchers in the present study were more global, with the opportunity to impact a broad range of leadership skills and abilities. For example, the increased self- awareness and the recognition of having choices brought about by coaching indirectly influenced the way these executive handling day to day issues, as well as how they approached meeting their organizational goals. Thus, the Turner study may have uncovered better transfer, had the unit of measurement been more fundamental, personal, change.

In the case of the Bougae study, the themes that were generated all focused on coaching outcomes, as perceived by the coach. Once again, these outcomes were partially validated by the present study. Specifically, increased self-awareness, and learning resulting from the coaching process were uncovered in both studies. Also, in both studies, coaching was perceived as an over all positive experience that impacted decision making skills. The importance of the coach being an objective third-party was also reflected in the results of this study as well as Bougae's. Once again, despite questions that might have tapped into how

coachees experience the process, the results of Bougae's thematic analysis do not address how the process of getting to these outcomes is experienced by the coachee. The present study augments Bougae's findings by surfacing what leads up to the increased self-awareness and to the positive experience of coaching. For example, the present study uncovers the idea that coaching, and the increased self-awareness that comes with it, is not always a completely comfortable, easy process. The coachee spends some energy on learning how to be coached, coming to terms with the idea that much of the responsibility rests with the coachee, and that the coach will not be providing direct advice or solutions. Similarly, the over all positive experience felt by coachees is often punctuated by important moments of rupture or disconnection, and by the realization of the hard work involved in achieving outcomes. The present study therefore fleshes out Bougae's findings in a very meaningful way.

The study most closely aligned with the nature and focus of the present research was Sztucinski's phenomenological inquiry regarding the meaning that coaches make of their coaching experience. There are very direct linkages between the results of her research, and the present study. Specifically, each of the seven essential elements presented by Sztucinski all appear in some way in the meaning units uncovered by the present research. The ideas that coaching is a process that is unique to the person, which involves a strong sense of ownership on the part of the coachee, is reflected in the meanings units *Understanding Me and My Reality* and *Developing Personal Responsibility for Outcomes,* respectively. The sense that coaching sometimes results in a confrontation with the self and an array of emotions is reflected across several meaning units including *Engaging New Perspectives*, and

Recognizing Self Worth, as well as those clustered around *Learning to be Coached* and *Healing Ruptures*. Finally, the concept that coaching is part of a path to achievement, and results in achievement, is included in the meaning unit cluster called *Experiencing the Impact*. As a result, the present study served to validate Sztucinski's research.

In considering Sztucinski's research in light of the present study's findings, it is particularly interesting to note the emotional meaning units that were clustered under the expression *Array of Emotions*. Specifically the emotions that were uncovered were relaxation, inadequacy, guilt, vulnerability, feeling energized, feeling uncomfortable and turbulence. Although the present study did not cluster these emotions together, or necessarily name them, there is no doubt that each of them was reflected in one or many of the interviews. As noted above, often these feelings where linked with specific elements of the coaching process. Feelings of discomfort and vulnerability, for example, were present as the coachee learned to be coached and experienced ruptures. Feelings of inadequacy, turbulence, and discomfort, along with feeling energize seemed to be a part of the process of experiencing the impact of coaching. For the present study, these felt emotions were not included as part of the meaning unit descriptions because the presence of these emotions varied greatly from individual to individual, and surfaced a different points in time for different people. Never the less, the co-researchers in this study experienced a wide array of emotions.

Overall, Sztucinski's research and the present study together present a relatively coherent picture of the experience of being coached. Indeed, a future article linking the

results of these two studies could be quite enlightening, and the result could be an even richer and all encompassing description of the experience of being coached.

Broader Connections. As highlighted in the Literature Review chapter, the majority of research only indirectly considers executives perspectives, generally focusing on coaching outcomes and content. Overall, it can be said that the current study generates new understanding about the both of these aspects of coaching as perceived by the coachee, sometimes corroborating findings from this broader research, and sometimes casting doubt on some of the conclusions drawn.

The research literature that focuses primarily on the outcomes of coaching, as perceived by various stakeholders, was generally validated by the present study. The ability to understand difference was the only one not uncovered by the present research.

The present study also confirms Wasylyshyn's (2003) findings regarding the relative importance and value placed by the coachee on the coach him or herself. Additionally, the key issues of focus in the coaching sessions were similar, in particular personal behaviour change, leadership effectiveness, relationships with others, personal development and work-family integration.

The present study was generally consistent with Hall's findings (1999). However, in Hall's study executives identified a preference for clear objectives, something that was viewed differently in the present study. Instead, coachees emphasized the flexible and moment-by-moment setting of objectives, appreciating that objectives set out at the beginning of coaching tend to change over time. The nature of the coaching topics and

issues was also different, with the present study uncovering more issues centered on personal change, addressing underlying issues such as stress, clarity, self-worth, and recognition of choice, along with the tactic-based issues noted in the Hall study. It is possible this difference is due to the particular way in which the interviews were conducted, which may not have allowed participants the freedom to discuss the more personal impacts of coaching.

Luebbe's (2004) key finding was the foundational importance of trust, something that the coachee's in the present study also described as critical to their experience. However, by focusing on the coachee's experience, the present study highlighted the unique nature of this trust building, given the involvement of the organization in paying for and sponsoring the coaching. Luebbe's study also cited the importance of a coach's ability to use a process, turn information into insight, foster independence, be accountable, build partnerships, and have appropriate experience and credentials. The present study, in representing only the coach's experience produced significantly different results. The aspects of the coach's skills set that was most felt to me meaningful was the ability of the coach to develop and intuitive connection, understand the coachee's reality, be objective, and provide access to wisdom and knowledge. This difference is meaningful, in so much as it suggests the factors that are valued most by the coachee may not be important at all to the coach or the employing organization's representatives.

Case Studies and Cross-Validation. The results of the present research are interesting when compared to the existing case study research, since they focus more on detailed descriptions of coaching experiences. In general, it can be said that in the few cases where

quotations from executives were included, there is agreement between the findings of the present research and their perspectives.

To exemplify this, let us consider Blattner's 2005 case study of the business unit president. It is possible to analyze the comments by the executive, noting for fits with the meaning units described in the present study. Note the italicized portions of the excerpted quote below. These correspond almost directly to one of the meaning units, or clusters of meaning units, presented in the explication chapter of this study, which have been inserted in all capital letters in square brackets:

> Having a coach provided me with an *unbiased third party* [BEING OBJECTIVE] to discuss difficult career- and work-related issues. Furthermore, as the *trust and relationship was built over time* [CO-CREATING THE COACHING RELATIONSHIP] I was at ease discussing my work-related fears, problems, and possible resolutions that *I would otherwise have been unable to explore with friends, colleagues, or family member* [BEING OBJECTIVE] Over time, I often felt I had a private business tutor giving me a *significant edge* [INDULGENT INVESTMENT] over my contemporaries.
>
> In our coaching sessions, I was given a much b*roader perspective on the possibilities* [ENGAGING NEW PERSPECTIVES] that are available to me in my professional and personal life. I knew for a long time I was miscast in my earlier career and struggled with how to understand and change it. By *focusing on my strengths* [RECOGNIZING SELF WORTH] and the limitless opportunities available,

> *raising my courage and self-esteem* [RECOGNIZING SELF-WORTH] to effect positive change became reality.
>
> I specifically struggled with fear and anxiety in certain aspects of my professional life. By continually visiting this issue during the coaching sessions, I am now much more satisfied with doing my best and accepting the outcome versus doing my best and not worrying if it is good enough.
>
> My *personal life is now much more satisfying* [INFLUENCING ENTIRE LIFE] as I have energy left over to enjoy it. I've learned that energy drain is not synonymous with being responsible for a job or task. I've learned how to *recognize energy drain* [REDUCING STRESS] and avoid it while getting the job done to a high standard. And if that is not good enough ... Tough Sh*t! (p. 13).

This example provides some validation for the present research findings. It also shows that future research using the existing case study literature could be used to validate and enhance the description of the experience resulting from the present study.

Finally, with regards to the case study literature Witherspoon and White (1996). Categorized coaching topics as coaching for skills, for performance, for development and for the executive's agenda. It is worth noting that only one meaning unit derived in the present study fits within this typology—specifically that of Improved Skills and Abilities. This meaning unit could be said to encompass much of what was meant by Witherspoon and White's typology. However, the remaining meaning units that were clustered under *Experiencing the Impact* in this study (for example, building clarity, recognizing self-worth,

recognizing choices) all fall outside of this typology. This suggests that a much broader definition of the distinguishing features of coaching relationships is called for. In particular, a category that addresses the over all personal effectiveness of the coachee in relating to him or herself and others would be clearly evidenced by the results of the present study.

Linkages to Recent Books on Leadership. It is beyond the scope of this thesis to consider in detail all of the recent books that have been written about leadership. However, it is worth contextualizing the results of the present research in this broader context, since coaching is in fact a leadership development tool. There are three recently written leadership books by three highly respected leadership authors, Richard Kilburg, Aubrey Daniel and Judith Glaser, all of which are worth considering in this context.

In his recent book Executive Wisdom (2006), Richard Kilburg notes eight elements supporting the emergence of wisdom in executives. The first four of these are:

1. Reflective space and time
2. Emotional and behavioural containment
3. Reflective processes: Deconstructive, polyvocal discourse with others
4. Reflective structures: Levels, types and foci for reflection. (p. 59).

Based on the results of the present study, we know that executives perceive coaching as an opportunity to learn or practice each of these four elements. Coaching sessions provide the space and time for reflection and consideration of issues and major decisions. They also seem to help reduce counterproductive emotional responses to stress. More over, the executive engages in deconstructive discourse with the coach, attending to the underlying

dynamics of his or her thought processes. Finally, the coach models the reflective structures that the executive can use when engaging with their leadership teams, as he or she sometimes directly confronts prevailing ideas and beliefs when necessary to produce positive change.

> Kilburg (2006) advocates the focus on reflection during coaching when he notes: Executive development activities, including coaching, not only need to be geared to helping leaders learn to take effective actions but also must provide opportunities or them to develop the ability to reflect on the actions that they take. (p.246).

A key aspect of the experience of being coached for research participants was that of being asked to consider new perspectives, challenge assumptions, and to recognize that choice between alternatives is always possible, all of which are elements of reflective practice. It would certainly seem that the coaching experienced by our research participants added the kind of value advocated by Kilburg.

In another recent book called The DNA of Leadership (2006), Judith Glaser organizes her thoughts about the building blocks of the effective leader into Leadership Principles and Leadership Steps. The steps she identifies and writes about in the book are:

- Recreate yourself first
- Embrace your humanity
- Aim to dream
- Never operate in a vacuum
- Keep growing
- Elevate dialogue

- Get into the spirit

Executive coaching, as the executives in this study experienced it, would seem to address these key steps. Through the experience of Learning to be Coached, Experiencing the Impact, and Valuing the Coach, the executive is assisting directly in accomplishing each of Glaser's steps. Several participants in the study talked about their coaching as a process of better understanding themselves and their capabilities. Several talked about the way coaching helped them to fulfill dreams and aspirations, and to grow. Certainly, by way of role modeling, coachees learned to elevate dialogue so that the focus is on capabilities and strengths. To the extent that these things are considered to foster effective leadership behaviour, the current research suggests that coaching is in fact one appropriate means to this end.

There may well be something missing from what executive coaching currently provides our leaders. Leadership guru Aubrey Daniel's most recent book, Measure of a Leader (2007), advocates for a focus on follower's behaviours in order to measure the success of a leader. He argues that the best leaders inspire their followers to work for a cause, not for them, and to go beyond what is minimally required to get a job done. To what extent does coaching help executives influence others around them in this way? The present research uncovered the importance of engaging new perspectives, something that would contribute to an executive's ability to see things from the follower's perspective. However, in general it could be said that the coaching experience for the participants of this study was far more focused on self-reflection and personal growth than it was on the idea of attending

to follower behaviour. The next step in the evolution of coaching may need to be more outward looking than it presently is, at least for the coaches represented in this study.

In considering how the present research relates to these recently written books by respected leadership authors, one can see the value of having a clear sense of how executives perceive their coaching experience. By blending theory and lived experience in this way, we can add greatly to our understanding of effective executive coaching. Regardless of the intentions of any coach, it is the actual impact on the executive that ultimately results in benefits to the executive and the organization in which they work. In many respects, coaching can only be effective when the coachee values what is offered and takes action on that basis. The present study helps us understand what coachee's value.

Applications and Implications of the Results of the Research

As we begin a discussion of how the present research can inform the professional practice of coaching, it must be emphasized that with any phenomenological inquiry:

> ...knowledge does not end with moments of connectedness, understanding, and meaning. Such journeys open vistas to new journeys for uncovering meaning, truth, and essence—journeys within journeys, within journeys. This is perhaps the most telling reality of all, [sic] that each stopping place is but a pause in arriving at knowledge. Satisfying as it is, it is but the inspiration for a new beginning. Knowledge of appearances and reasoned inquiry are not the end of knowing. No scientific discovery is ever complete. No experience is ever finished or exhausted. (Moustakas, 1994, p.65).

In other words, regardless then of how rigorous, well-planned and carefully carried-out this research may have been, it does not purport to be the final word or final description of what the experience of being coached is like for leaders. Instead, it offers a synthesis of the experience of six accomplished, respected senior managers and executives who are dealing with the work of being effective leaders in their organizations. In doing this, it brings into the open an experience that is personal, meaningful and highly important, and in so doing allows us to talk about that experience in a new way.

Implications for the Professional Practice of Coaching

Definition of Coaching

In light of the findings of this study, it is useful to revisit the definition of executive coaching. In general, it can be said that coachee's experiences of being coached support the definitions of what coaching is intended to achieve and how. If we reconsider Joo's very recent (2005) comprehensive definition, resulting from a review of the literature, we see that the findings of this study support it.

> ... executive coaching is defined as a process of a one-on-one relationship between a professional coach and an executive (coachee) for the purpose of enhancing the coachee's behavioral change through self-awareness and learning, and thus ultimately for the success of individual and organization. (p.468)

Some key elements of this definition—the idea of a relationship, of developing self-awareness and learning—came across strongly in the meaning units in the present study. The current findings also support the definition put forward by the International Coaching

Federation (ICF), which the reader will recall is a nonprofit, individual membership organization formed by professionals worldwide who practice business and personal coaching.

> Coaching is partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential. Professional coaches provide an ongoing partnership designed to help clients produce fulfilling results in their personal and professional lives. Coaches help people improve their performances and enhance the quality of their lives.
>
> Coaches are trained to listen, to observe and to customize their approach to individual client needs. They seek to elicit solutions and strategies from the client; they believe the client is naturally creative and resourceful. The coach's job is to provide support to enhance the skills, resources, and creativity that the client already has.

There is a very clear correspondence between the clusters of meaning units derived from this study, and the main elements of both the ICF and Joo definitions. There is no doubt that the coachees in this study perceived the experience as a partnership and relationship that developed over time (cluster: Co-creating the relationship) and that they considered it to be thought provoking and creative, and to create changes in their behaviour (cluster: Experiencing the Impact). Coachees also agreed that their coaching influenced their entire life on some level, not just their work life (cluster: Influencing Whole Life). Finally, the coachees in this study first recognized, and then learned to work within, what they described as a non-directive approach to coaching (Learning to be Coached). Coachees also

experienced an increase sense of self-worth and clarity (cluster: Experiencing the Impact), supporting the notion that coaching helps clients build from their strengths and knowledge.

Similar correspondence can be found between the other definitions of coaching and the results of this study. What is perhaps missing from the definitions that are quoted in the academic literature is a reflection of the process of the coaching experience. There may be some value in including a process description as part of the working definition of executive coaching.

Coaching Competencies and Training

The International Coaching Federation has put forward the following core competencies for coaches, all of which are required in order to become a certified coach through their organization. These competencies are required in order to be credentialed as a certified coach, and they form the basis upon which training curriculum is developed or assessed by the ICF.

A. Setting the Foundation

1. Meeting Ethical Guidelines and Professional Standards
2. Establishing the Coaching Agreement

B. Co-creating the Relationship

3. Establishing Trust and Intimacy with the Client
4. Coaching Presence

C. Communicating Effectively

5. Active Listening

6. Powerful Questioning

7. Direct Communication

D. Facilitating Learning and Results

8. Creating Awareness

9. Designing Actions

10. Planning and Goal Setting

11. Managing Process and Accountability

There is certainly clear correspondence between the recommended core competencies of coaches, and the results of the present study. All of the coaches in this study were trained, so it would have been surprising if this correspondence were absent. In fact, many of the competencies directly map across to the meaning unit clusters from this study. For example, the coach is expected to help co-create the relationship by building trust and intimacy and by having presence. The results of the present research reflected the coachee's experience of these competencies, including the sometimes-cautious nature of the initial trust building, and the way that presence was felt as a sometimes-intuitive connection. Similarly, the coach is expected to use effective communication skills, including active listening, powerful questions, and direct communication. The results of this study show how the coachee values these communication skills, seeing the coach as an objective third party and that the coach understands the coachee's reality. In summary, even though the competencies are largely

transparent to the coachee, the results of this study reflect the impact that the core competences can have on the coachee.

It should be noted that this list of core competencies was not referred to or studied by the principal researcher prior to undertaking this study. This was done intentionally, as part of the process of epoche, or clearing of assumptions, that is required by phenomenological research. Thus, any relationship between the competencies and the meaning units arose independently.

The results of the present study do suggest there are two areas of coaching competency that should be investigated further. In essence, the meaning unit cluster called "Learning to be coached" suggests that coachees could use support in order to be become better coachees. There may be some value in coaches consciously and actively helping their clients be more coachable, by addressing the concepts noted in this cluster, for example linkage to known paradigms and recognition of the work and time commitment. Such a core competency might be called something like "Facilitating Understanding about Coaching". Similarly, the meaning unit cluster Healing Ruptures requires a unique corresponding competency in the coach. If coachees note that sometimes things do not always sit well with them, or that sessions are not always helpful, then coaches need the capability to be self-reflective and to consider, and perhaps even to solicit, feedback from their clients to ensure optimal results.

Coach Selection

Coachees in the present study relied on intuition, and on others, for coach selection. This has several implications for coaches. First, there must be continued recognition that, although the coachee may make the final decision, the real choice of coaches often rests with someone other than the coachee him or herself. The education of human resource professionals, for example, should continue to be a priority for coaches and for coaching organizations. Second, there must be on-going efforts to ensure the quality and standardization of the executive coaching field. Since coachees admit to not understanding the basis for assessing a coach, the profession itself has an increased responsibility to ensure the public understand the required competencies. Finally, coachees may in the future recommend coaching services to others, so the education of coachees about coaching credentials and competencies should be seen as an important aspect of negotiating the coaching relationship.

Implications for the Coach and Coachee

Perhaps the most notable contribution the present study has made to our understanding of executive coaching is to develop a more intimate awareness of how the process of coaching unfolds for the coachee. Indeed, the seven clusters of meaning unit also each represent major elements of the process of coaching, from its inception to its conclusion.

For the coach, this new awareness of the nature of the coaching process, as the coachee sees it-- sometimes smooth and comfortable, sometimes challenging—is useful. The effective coach will maintain an awareness of how the coachee progresses through the

coaching process, allowing for its natural progression. For example, when the coachee seems to struggle with wanting answers and advise, the coach understands this is part of the process of learning to be coached, and allows the coach to go through this struggle. When the coachee seems to want to disagree and confront the coach, the coach will find the space and time to allow for this, perhaps even solicit it, in order to move past points of difficulty. In summary, by seeing things from the coachee's perspective, the coach can not help but become a better coach.

For the coachee, learning about how other coachee's experience the process can have a very validating effect. This was exemplified during the validation process that was part of this study. After reading the draft description of the experience, two of the co-researchers specifically noted how normalizing it was to know that others had appreciated, and struggled with, various aspects of the process in the same way. This commonness of experience allowed the coachees to understand their coaching in a new and helpful way.

Recommendations for Future Research

Moustakas noted very aptly that "New and fresh meanings are forever in the world and in us. … There is no limit to our understanding or sense of fulfillment, no limit to our knowledge or experience of any idea, thing or person" (p.65) Thus, there is no limit to our knowledge about the experience of being coached. The research study presented here is thus only part of an on-going discovery of the phenomenon. One of the outcomes of the research is in fact to generate curiosity and thereby open up new possibilities for research. What

follows is the researchers sense of the most interesting and beneficial new inquiry that could result from this research.

There are several ways in which the present research could be replicated in order to illuminate further the experience of being coached. The present study focused on the experience of being coached with individuals who would consider their coaching to have been successful over all. What is absent from this research, but equally interesting, valid and useful, is what the experience of being coached is like when that experience was not successful. A replication of this study, using a similar methodology, but with executives who generally did not find the experience helpful would be valuable research. Understanding the differences and similarities between these two cases would prove very enlightening. It may provide valuable insight into the key elements of effective, versus ineffective coaching from the client's perspective.

Along similar lines, another valuable replication of this research would be to interview executives who were being coached by either untrained or very novice coaches. A comparison of the resulting description of the experience with the description from the current research would be useful. It could shed some light on the competencies coach's gain through being trained, or with experience.

This study could also be replicated with a view to understanding the cultural diversity of the experience of being coached. The present study provided a thick, rich description of the experience of being coached from a Canadian perspective. The study by Sztucinksi's (2001) provided the American perspective. Another area of future inquiry would be to

replicate this study in other countries where coaching has become more common. For example, interviewing a sample of executives from the U.K., and/or from the various parts of Asia, and/or from Europe could serve to determine in which ways, if any, the experience of being coached is impacted by cultural factors.

A final suggestion for replication of this current research is to consider coach's perspectives using a similar methodology. Coach's points of view are often reflected in the academic research they undertake and publish. However, there are very few studies that rigorously apply phenomenological methods to understand what the experience of *being a coach* is actually like. In other words, rarely is the coach a subject or participant in the research. The methodology in the present research could easily be extended to a population of executive coaches. The resulting descriptions would meaningfully augment the results of the present research by truly describing the process of being coached from the two most involved parties: the coach and the coachee.

Aside from replication of this research with different populations, this research could be extended other ways. In the Literature Review chapter, several case studies were presented which included the perspectives of coaches. A useful study would be to do a meta-analysis of the case study literature that could be guided by the clusters of meaning units in this research. By sorting the available data into meaning units, and adding them to the clusters presented here, we may also uncover other essential elements of the experience that were not captured by the present sample of coachees.

In-depth research into specific clusters of meaning units would also be a rich area for consideration. Much like Alvey's recent dissertation (2006) about the development of trust between a coach and their coachee, each of the clusters could have been further explored and defined. For example, the cluster that certainly deserved more attention than it received in the present research was *Healing Ruptures.* Particularly in this area, the researcher was unable to probe to the full extent possible for a two reasons. Most importantly, since the co-researchers had often long since moved past the ruptures, this aspect of the experience seemed less relevant to them at the time of the research interview. As a result, less time was spent on it. A related reason is that the interviews were already lengthy (an average of 75 minutes), and continued probing would not have been practical. So, additional attention to this aspect of the experience would be warranted. The reader will recall that the *Healing Ruptures* cluster included *Struggling with Organizational Context*; *Grappling with Lack of Direction*; and *Courageous Disagreement.* Further research probing into the experience of what happens when the coach and the coachee disconnect would be rich and meaningful. Each of the meaning units within this cluster could be more fully explored and yield valuable insight. The results would directly inform coaches about how their interventions and approaches may need to be handled in order to be most effective. Another cluster of meaning units that would be worthwhile exploring further is that of *Embarking on the Coaching Relationship.* For the similar reasons noted above, the researcher's sense is that this cluster was not as fully captured as it could have been. In particular, the catalysts for initiating coaching could be more fully explored and described in future research.

Thus, we see that future research is prompted by the current study. The replication of the current phenomenological study with diverse and targeted populations, meta-analytic work with existing case studies, and further qualitative inquiry about specific aspects of the experience of being coached would be beneficial and make the composite description provided in this study thicker, richer and ultimately even more reflective of the essence of the experience of being coached.

Chapter Summary

This chapter began by reviewing the purpose and findings of the present study. showing how the present study captured the essential elements of the experience of being coached successfully, and resulted in a clearer understanding of how the process of executive coaching is experienced by the coachee. This was followed by a discussion of the strengths and limitations of the study. Strengths included the rigorously-applied phenomenological quantitative research strategies, the voice it gave to the client's experience, and the diversity of the pool of co-researchers. Limitations were the limited ethnic diversity of co-researchers, the high level of education of the participants, and the constraints of time on the in-depth interviews. The fact that all co-researchers were coached by trained coaches was noted as both a strength and potential limitation. Next, a post-structural analysis and discussion were presented, including linkages to the existing research on executive perspectives of coaching. While some results of previous research were validated in the present study, important areas of divergence and new findings were also uncovered. After this, implications for professional practice and recommendations for future research where discussed.. Here

reference was made to the International Coaching Federation's core competencies. The chapter will end below with concluding personal remarks by the researcher.

Personal Concluding Remarks: A Privileged Journey

Undertaking research from a phenomenological perspective is a journey of privilege. I realized very early in my research endeavor that, by virtue of being a Masters student affiliated with a respected University and supervisor, I was in a privileged position. It is not often that someone is able to sit across from a relative stranger and , within minutes, be given access to their thoughts, feelings and beliefs about something that for all other intents and purposes is a private endeavor. For this reason, remaining very aware of this privilege throughout my research, I made every attempt not to take it for granted. I believe any researcher, but especially researchers that work in a phenomenological paradigm, must do the same.

The nature of the privileged position I was in surfaced after initial meetings with the coaches. These highly respected and accomplished individuals, which I also had the good fortune to have in my circle of colleagues, were the most essential element in making this research possible. Without their cooperation, I personally would not have felt I had the right to move forward with my research, and this thesis would never have come to pass. Here I found myself humbly asking them to suggest clients who they believed might be good candidates for my study. Their response could easily have been to back away, keeping their relationships with their coachees to themselves, and away from scrutiny. Instead, each of them openly, and I believe, very courageously, offered up their clients for inclusion in the

study. In doing this, they were consummate professionals who understood the value of what was being proposed to them and to the coachees and client organizations they served.

I was privileged again when I received e-mails from the coachees agreeing to participate in my study. Here were very busy, accomplished individuals in very senior roles, who had been undergoing a process of personal growth and development, who willing agreed to share that experience with me. Each time I sat beside a co-researcher and began listening to the stories of their experience, I felt humbled and honoured. The mantle of leadership is no easy thing to wear. This mantle can cover and conceal, while in many ways my interview served to strip away this protective cloak. There were moments in my interviews with each of my co-researchers that were very emotional, and sometimes the co-researchers cried in recalling various aspects of their growth. Being a witness to this, I felt a heavy weight of responsibility. There were moments in the writing of this thesis where I felt hesitant about sharing what seemed to me to be very their very personal perspectives, despite the detailed process of informed consent that was in place. In the end, I realized that by including the true voice of the co-researchers, I was honouring and valuing their experience. I also felt certain that the coaches of these individuals would feel precisely as I did.

The other privileged aspect of this research was the realization that, as a potential future managerial/ executive life coach and counselor, the co-researchers were providing me with first-hand knowledge that would directly contribute to my practice. The insight I gained from the process of coming to understand the essence of the coaching experience is reflected

in this written thesis, but it will also live through me as I move on to do the work. I know that this will serve me well, and I am thankful for it.

So, in some important ways, the privilege and honor of being able to undertake this research mirrors the privilege and honor of being a coach. When a coach embarks on a journey that has a potential to significantly affect change in another human being, and how they operate in the organizations that employ them, it comes with significant responsibility—and it must be undertaken with the highest ethical standards possible. It is my hope that this research ultimately contributes to this goal.

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APPENDIX A: GUIDELINES FOR COACHES

Managerial & Executive Coaching Experiences Study

University of Calgary

Here are some general guidelines to help you suggest possible research participants. Your involvement is sincerely appreciated.

- ☑ **Coaching Time-frame:** looking for individuals with recent experience being coached; must either be a current coaching client, or (ideally) have very recently completed their coaching, when the research interview is done (in October/ November)
- ☑ **Type of coaching:** any type of managerial/ executive coaching; excluding coaching that would be considered strictly "life coaching".
- ☑ **Range of Experience:** am looking for a broad range of experiences, so clients can be of all types, as long as the client views their involvement as voluntary and not strictly/clearly remedial. Clients may have had other previous coaching experience, or be first-time clients.
- ☑ **Gender:** both males and females—need both genders to be included
- ☑ **Personal Characteristics of Participants:** individuals who seem to enjoy being involved in this type of research have:
    1. a spontaneous interest and curiosity in their experience of being coached;
    2. the ability to express themselves in an interview relatively easily;
    3. the ability to sense and to express their thoughts and feelings to another person;
    4. the ability to take a step back and report what was going on for them as they went through coaching

Other helpful information includes:

1. Participants will be asked to participate in:
    a. an orientation and introduction meeting (30 minutes)
    b. an in-depth interview (1 - 1 ½ hours)
    c. a final validation interview (30 minutes—could be by telephone)
2. Participation in this research, as well as any information gathered during the meetings and interviews will be held in strict confidence and remain anonymous. Information Gathered will be destroyed upon successful completion of the thesis. Participants are free to withdraw at any time, and have the opportunity to revise their input at the validation meeting.
3. The meetings and interview will be conducted at a location convenient to the participant that respects the participant's privacy, and at a mutually convenient time.

APPENDIX C: EXAMPLES OF PHENOMENOLOGICAL REDUCTION

Example 1

Derivation of the Meaning Unit Cluster Called Planned and Spontaneous Objectives

Verbatim Transcript	**Derived Meaning Unit**	**Cluster Label for these Meaning Units**
J: And that's where the coach comes in too. And lots of times we'll start the session and he'll say, "What do you want to be coached on today?" and I'll have no idea. It's almost every coaching session started out like that. R: Interesting. J: Yeah, no idea. But I know that I'm sure I can find something. And then we start talking and eventually just works itself out, comes out, and you know, maybe it takes me a while to start feeling comfortable in the conversation to bring it up, if its nagging me. But, I mean, you know, you always get off the phone with some intentions set or something as, moving forward. We never quit a session early before because I didn't have something to talk about at the beginning.	Sense of having no idea what he will be coached on in almost every instance. Begin talking and if something is nagging at him, once he's comfortable, they work it out.	**Planned and Spontaneous Objectives for Coaching**
S Usually our discussions were in two parts, but not in a formal agenda. Sometimes we would agree, at one discussion, to pursue things that might have cropped up that we didn't have time to explore, in a future meeting. But usually the two parts was something along the line of the goals that we have set, and the things that we have spoken about before, and things that are on the table right now—the things that have happened since our last discussion. It was kind of	Sessions were two-part discussions which included goals and then happenings since last discussion, which suited him well because he enjoys a free-flowing approach.	

discussing responses to immediate incidents or things that are on my desk at that point. And then there are the things that we agreed to pursue over the longer term. R I see S But ordinarily isn't a really formal kind of agenda at all. R And how did that work for you? S It worked very well for me R Hm, m S Actually I think it's one of my weaknesses. I'm not a person that would make a list of things to do. I like a more free flowing environment. R And that's how the coaching went, and so it suited you quite well.		
D: Yea I think in the first few sessions we, we sort of tried to set up some specific objectives and my coach developed this list of objective things that we would work on together and they were pretty broad, but that formed the basis of the coaching relationship. That is in a lot of ways related the comfort in the [new] role, and then that kind of got behind me and I felt more comfortable and effective in that position. The coaching really became more dealing with specific issues, like [my coach] would come in and you know we would be more like "ok-- what has been happening in the last few weeks" and if there's anything you want to talk about and he would provide help.	Initially they set up some objectives and things they were going to do together, but also dealt with specific issues and anything that Darren wished to talk about at the time.	
J: And so usually what I would do when	Something she was	

I was typing up that part of it is just ask myself, "Okay, is there anything in particular that is, that I'm serious about or I don't know how to approach, that I want to talk to [my coach] about and that's how I would choose. R: Okay. J: So it was pretty much up to, it was …. R: It was time by time. It's not like you'd set it all up in advance. J: No, R: Like these are my key goals, or that approach. J: No. R: And how does that work for you? J: Very well. I don't know, I wasn't working towards learning how to paint a picture or so I have to do it in five lessons. R: Right. J: So, I think that the random, spontaneous approach worked well for me. *And much later on in the interview:* J: You know what I mean? Sometimes it's a lot easier to discuss these things as they come up.	serious about, and didn't know how to approach, she would discuss with her coach. Not set out in advance Random, spontaneous approach worked well for what she wanted to achieve through coaching.	
I: And with my own coaching, and my own coach, it's pretty much whatever the flavour of the day is. It is my responsibility to come up with the coaching topic… and sometimes it won't be there until five minutes before I	Responsibility for picking own topics for coaching based on flavour of the day and sometimes at the last	

make that phone call. R Hm I But it's always been something, I always bring something.... That was either... about... usually it's based in emotion. I can feel off-key or off-kilter, and I don't know what it is. So I need some help exploring what's going on. *And later on in the interview:* I Then I bring the topic to the table. I might know only five minutes before I pick up the phone but at least I have something to talk about.. because it's been nagging me, or it's something I've been wondering about, or something I want to explore, or something I want to discuss. *And later still in the interview:* I: I bring whatever I want to the table. I'm doing this for me because I know what I want.	minute. Emotion-based selection of her topics... feeling off kilter perhaps. Topic emerges as something that has been nagging her, something she's wondering about, wanting to explore or discuss. Any topic is possible.	

Example 2

Derivation of the Meaning Unit Cluster Called Trusting Intuition and Others in Coach Selection

Verbatim Transcript	**Derived Meaning Unit**	**Cluster Label for these Meaning Units**
D: Well you know, like I don't know, I am assuming they are all people who are practicing and they are qualified and you know, so I am sure we I could have developed a way of working with about any of them but a you know its just… R: Do you have any idea how, you know since you brought it up, how was that short list of coaches, do you know what the process was to get those D: No I don't, I know they have had coaching programs for years, like I said I was a little surprised my boss had had a coach, previously… I guess you know its not uncommon, I found out that other people had had coaches for a number of years through other programs and I don't know how they select, like I don't know if those people were mostly coaches who had already worked with employees of our company and there had been positive feedback…	Over riding assumption that coaches were practicing and qualified, although not clear on how short list of coaches was developed. Assumption that others in the organization had used similar if not the same coaches that were referred to him, so must be qualified.	**Trusting Intuition and Others in Coach Selection**
M: Umm I saw a [senior executive] and they told me they had some names for me so she gave me one name and so I had a telephone conversation with the coach and it seemed to go fine and the VP told me if I wanted another name, I can give you one. But the telephone conversation seemed pretty reasonable and I didn't even really know how I would be assessing the coaching, and the first person I talked to seemed to be a	Choosing coach was pragmatic, trusted the person who referred her coach, also spoke to a friend who knew coach—sense of being ok with it until proven otherwise	

reasonable person so I went with that. I didn't see any reason why I would not want to go with her. R: Ok. So you were quite pleased with how that first contact went-- Are you familiar at all with what screening the candidate went through, do you have any insight on that? M : No idea. I did use someone who had worked with [another department] and I did phone to speak with her and asked what she knew about her and my friend said, "Well I think she [...] she did do one seminar for us and she seemed ok." So she seemed like a good person to have.		
And later in the interview: R: So it as not as if in that first conversation it was an interview where you were detecting her skills and qualifications to see whether she had something to offer, you kind of accepted that going into it? M: Yea because I didn't know what to expect from coaching or what coaching involved. I didn't know what coaching meant. I didn't know enough to interview or I did not know what to interview her about. I just figured if there was an initial sense that said I really don't like this person, I am really not very comfortable with them, that I would say I wanted somebody else. But I didn't know how to assess her, because I did not know enough about coaching to decide what I needed out of it.	Belief that Maria did not know enough to choose a coach—didn't know what to interview her about—sense of not really knowing what she might need out of it and so how to select the coach Primarily went with her intial sense of comfort with the coach on first meeting with them.	
J: I know at the time we selected her, how on earth did I?? mm... I got her name from somebody. Nobody in my company knew of any coaches. R: Okay. J: So I think somebody that I knew of, I know it came from me, but I got her name from somebody. R: Okay. J: And we contacted her and got their	Sense of irrelevance how how she came to meet and pick her coach, but recalls getting her name from somebody.	

information or whatever and… R: Who's we? You and you're boss… J: The VP of HR and my boss. R: And your boss, okay. J: And we all met with her and liked her and in the absence, my boss was [not in the same city] so he didn't know anybody local. And the VP of HR didn't know anybody so we went forward. And I think that they were impressed with her as well. So, but that's so long ago, I went through the process then but I immediately let go of that, because it's irrelevant. Once I decided to that I was fine with it, I didn't need to retain any of that.		
R: And so, [the coach] basically landed on your doorstep and… what happened after that, what was that experience like of deciding whether you wanted to go with [that coach] or not? I We had a conversation and something DID click… and I didn't have any warning flags going up that this is not going to work. So we did a sample session, and at the end of it I was asked—"Would you like to be my client?" and, everything that had happened in that discovery session said "yes".	After experiencing a sample session with the coach, did not see any warning flags, and then intuitively decided that it was a good fit.	
S: Also at the time, because of [employee-related issues the consultant we had hired] mentioned, that she was a member of the coaching association, or whatever …. it's called … and suggested that may be an avenue that I might like to explore. Mentioned [coach's name] and I think it went … from there. *And later in the interview:* S: I think right from the start we kind of made a connection and that's also because even tough he told me at time I had asked him to be my coach that he'd was actually a carrying a full load and so I felt that he was a taking you know going to great lengths to	Consultant provided the name of the coach to him and he met with him. Sense of connection between them made Samuel feel it was a good choice.	

accommodate me. R: Mmmm hmmm. S: And I think he did so because we had a kind of a connection.		

Example 3

Derivation of the Meaning Unit Cluster Called Contemplating Future of the Relationship

Verbatim Transcript	Derived Meaning Unit	Cluster Label for these Meaning Units
D: You know I guess just being … it probably, um, you know having a relationship knowing you can go to that person as you need to but maybe also knowing at some point you might not really need that support anymore and, you know, you might go away for a few years, you know, without coaching and, you know, come back again and say you got some new issues. R: At some other transition point in your life D: Yea *And later in the interview:* D: Yea. You know, in terms of, at some point in time we would probably decrease, you know, how frequently we meet… the actual kind of, "how do I know what I've done?" we haven't really talked about that because, I guess you could say you're not really done until you know, you're not working anymore, until you're retired. These are career coaches really, so you could say as long as you're working maybe it is good to have a coach. I think probably at certain points in your career, like you said certain transitions or specific issues you want that coaching, you want it more frequently, and then there are times when your comfortable in your job and you don't really need the support day to day or week to week, maybe you could call that person once or twice a	Know you may discontinue coaching for a few years, but that a coach is always there and available for you to go back to when you might need it. Possiblity of using a coach throughout your career—a career coach—but understanding that the relationship with them will change over time. There will be periods of transition where that coach will be required more frequently.	Contemplating the Future of the Coaching Relationship

year if necessary, and just say hey, I got a problem, can we make some time to meet for an hour. It is almost like a retainer instead of a formal coaching schedule, and I feel like I am close to moving to that sort of relationship because I feel like I have been helped with working through the transition and like I said sometimes its becoming hmm.... well, I will have to search for a topic for us to talk about when we get together. We fortunately are still working through the transition so associated with that transition there is usually a topic, but I am sure once this transition is worked through ... there will be less to talk about and the relationship will probably change at the point.		
J.: Well, yes. .... one of the guys who works for me, said, "So, how long is this coaching thing going to go for?" And I said that I'll probably get it for the rest of my life. (Laughter) You know, unless I retire early or take a break from business or what not, you know, as long as I'm a decision maker, I think you could always get benefits out of coaching. And I said, as long as the funds are there, if my business goes broke and everything else, I guess I couldn't afford coaching. But those are pretty rare situations. I mean, that's my take on it. I think it's indefinite. *And later in the interview:* J: Yeah, and I mean, your goals are always constantly changing so, I mean, the skies the limit the way I look at it, so I can't see why you would need it at one point in your life and never again. So, I could see it being a very positive, long term thing in my	Sense that coaching will always provide benefits, and therefore will always be part of his life.	

life.		
S Um, yeah. It's said that there's a time to come and a time to go *And later in the interview:* S So I'm feeling good about our relationship. I think it's a good time to end it now. I think over all, I'm satisfied with the decisions, I'm sure it's the best ones for me at least.	Sense of a natural ending to the relationship with the coach, tied to good decisions he has made as a result of it.	

In the transcripts, only the first initial of the pseudonym was used to identify each co-researcher (for example, J for John, j for Jeannie). Also, in order to protect anonymity for both the co-researcher and the client, certain portions of the transcript have either been removed (indicated by elipses) or rephrased (as noted in square brackets). These changes do not have any meaningful effect on the quotation being referred to.