

A Work Behaviour Analysis of Executive Coaches

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Abstract

This study has three main purposes. First, it introduces the Executive Coaching Work Behaviour Survey and takes the initial steps in validating this instrument. It then explores the frequency of specific work Behaviours executive coaches use in their client interactions and examines the variability in these behaviours based on demographic factors. The Executive Coaching Work Behaviour Survey is shown to measure three factors: *Professional Coach Activities*, *Goal Setting and Attainment Activities*, and *Relationship Activities*. One hundred and thirty executive coaches affiliated with a major global leadership training and development organization were surveyed. Results indicate that the most frequent coaching behaviours are (1) establishing trust, honesty, and respect (2) using open-ended questions, and (3) clarifying and understanding client concerns and challenges. Significant differences in coaching behaviour occur based on some demographic variables measured. For example, women score higher than men in *Relationship Activities* behaviours, coaches with only a Bachelor's degree score higher than coaches with a doctoral degree in *Professional Coach Activities*, and coaches with business-related educations perform more *Professional Coach Activities* than coaches with counseling-related educations. An implication of this study is that competencies needed to achieve professional level performance as an executive coach are not derived from particular educational or work-related experiences.

Key words: Executive, Coaching, Coaches, Work-behaviours, Counseling

Introduction

Executive coaching has quickly become a popular intervention for businesses and other organizations interested in developing their employees (Feldman & Lankau, 2005; de Haan, Bertie, Day, & Sills, 2010; Quick & Macik-Frey, 2004). It has been estimated that nearly 60% of large U. S. companies are using executive coaches for employee development and that another 20% of these companies intend to hire executive coaches within the near future (Bacon & Spear, 2003; Diedrich, 2001; Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001).

Executive coaching as a stand-alone field has passed through its early stage and, perhaps, could be characterized as having entered the "teenage" years. Although the attention to executive coaching among businesses, training professionals, psychologists, and counselors is at an all-time high, few empirical studies exist that examine the professionals involved in executive coaching, the skills and competencies required to perform executive coaching, the process of executive coaching, or its impact on individuals and organizations who receive the service (Feldman & Lankau, 2005; Joo, 2005). Baron and Morin (2009) are one exception in that they performed an empirical study that examined the success of coaching interventions in an organizational setting.

Status of the Executive Coaching Field

Specialties within recognized service professions or fields usually develop in response to the needs and demands of those who use such services. Executive coaching is no exception and has emerged as a service to corporations, family businesses (Härtel, Bozer, & Levin, 2009), government, and non-profit organizations (Fischer & Beimers, 2009) who perceive the need for developmental attention for their employees (Michelman, 2005). The origin of the term “executive coaching” is unknown, but there is general agreement that consulting psychologists who began establishing themselves as useful personnel resources within companies in the 1960s probably began referring to themselves as “coaches” to be less threatening to employees who may have had negative associations with other terms (e.g., psychologist, counselor) (Tobias, 1996). Whatever the etiology, executive coaching is occurring in response to a need that exists within organizations to provide personal and career development to their employees (Hart, 2002).

To meet the demand for executive coaching, many professionals with varied backgrounds have begun identifying themselves as executive coaches (Gilmore, 2002; Wasylyshyn, 2003). However, the specific competencies needed to provide coaching services have not been fully determined and other professionals with non-counseling backgrounds also claim legitimacy as coaching providers (Gray, 2006). The result is that the competencies and work behaviours claimed by coaches and counselors seem to be overlapping. Very few studies other than de Haan (2008) have even considered what executive coaches can do to develop themselves. Jurisdictions are being established by bodies such as the International Coaching Federation (ICF), the Association for Coaching (AC) and the European Mentoring and Coaching Council (EMCC). The ICF was established in 1995, and with over 15,000 members, it claims to be a “voice for the coaching profession.” In spite of this claim, it seems that the voice of coaching is not yet a completely consistent one (Styrhe, 2008).

Of the few existing empirical coaching studies, most have examined the coaching process or outcomes of the executive coaching process without attention to coaching provider information (Susing, Green, & Grant, 2011; Dean & Meyer, 2002; Joo, 2005; Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001). It remains unclear what backgrounds executive coaches have and what skills they use in coaching. Interestingly, a significant portion of the executive coaching literature has emerged from counseling-related and consulting psychology sources, and arguments supporting the qualifications of psychologists and counselors as executive coaches abound (Gray, 2006; Arnaud, 2003; Brotman, et al., 1998; Hart et al., 2001; Levinson, 1996; Wasylyshyn, 2003; Winum, 2003).

One important study that has explored the demographic variables of executive coaches is Bono, Purvanova, Towler, and Peterson (2009). These researchers compared the backgrounds and experiences of psychologists and non-psychologists working as executive coaches. Overall the differences were minor. Interestingly, they found as much variation within the different psychological disciplines (industrial-organizational, counseling, clinical, and personality/social) as there was between psychologists and non-psychologists. Bono, et al. (2009) did find several differences that reached statistical significance. They discovered that: “psychologists tended to charge more, were more likely to be licensed and less likely to be certified, more likely to carry liability insurance, and derived a smaller portion of their overall income from executive coaching” (p. 369), “nonpsychologists were *more* likely than psychologists to use behaviour modification, neurolinguistic programming, and psychoanalytic or psychodynamic techniques. There were no differences between the two types of coaches in their use of

cognitive-behavioural or goal-setting approaches” (p. 371), “psychologist coaches were more likely to focus on building rapport with the person being coached, more likely to assist clients with applying new skills at work, and more likely to set goals for behaviour change with their client” (p. 373), and “the top three topics addressed by psychologist coaches were leadership, interpersonal skills, and management style, whereas the top three topics addressed by nonpsychologist coaches were communication, leadership, and interpersonal skills” (p. 374).

The demand for individualized developmental attention for employees among organizations has pushed the practice of executive coaching well ahead of our understanding of executive coaching. The need for executive coaching services (and the lack of formal preparation or regulation) has encouraged individual and organizational providers with varied educational, training, and work experiences to claim that they possess the necessary qualifications to do the work well. Only recently have scholars begun to examine the variables that affect executive coaching, and desirable outcomes of a successful executive coaching experience remain unverified. The majority of the existing executive coaching literature consists of non-empirical descriptions, applications, and outcomes of executive coaching without attention to the necessary skills, competencies, and backgrounds of the providers (Franckeiss, 2009; Styhre, 2008; Feldman & Lankau, 2005; Joo, 2005).

This study, then, is designed with three main purposes. First, it establishes and introduces the Executive Coaching Work Behaviour Survey and takes the initial steps in validating this instrument. We then explore the frequency of specific work behaviours executive coaches use in their client interactions. Finally, it examines the variability in these behaviours based on demographic factors. Several authors have suggested that executive coaches have emerged from existing professional fields (Berman & Bradt, 2006; Brotman et al., 1998; Gilmore, 2002; Kilburg, 1996c; Wasylyshyn, 2003). This study helps to clarify the professional backgrounds of executive coaches and the prevalence of counseling professionals already engaged in the executive coaching process.

The number of published articles referring to executive coaching as a distinct practice reveals a dramatic increase in executive coaching as a subject of interest. Up until 1990, fewer than three published documents with the term executive coaching had been produced; however, by 1996 as many as 42 existed, and by 2011, well over 500 articles could be found that discussed executive coaching to some degree (Grant, 2011). Special issues of journals have now been devoted to the topic of executive coaching. These include a 1996 special issue of the *Consulting Psychology Journal* and a 2010 special issue of the *Journal of Management Development*.

Much of the increase in the written information available on executive coaching is related to the increased popularity and success of executive coaching as a viable resource for individuals and organizations. The appeal of executive coaching has been expounded upon throughout business periodicals and has become more prominent in the psychology and counseling literature (Visser, 2010; Frisch, 2001; Gilmore, 2002; Joo, 2005; Kilburg, 1996c, 1997; Laske, 1999; Peterson, 1996; Witherspoon & White, 1996;). Many have argued that organizations are recognizing the value of individually-tailored developmental opportunities for their most integral employees, and that competition for highly skilled and competent managers has encouraged organizations to seek developmental opportunities for their employees as a way to increase retention and improve performance (Moen & Allgood, 2009; Frisch, 2001; Gilmore, 2002; Kilburg, 1996c; Ting & Sisco, 2006; Wasylyshyn, 2003; Witherspoon & White, 1996).

Certainly, there is an expanding interest in leadership improvement within organizations; and many are taking action by increasing solicitations for executive coaching services for their employees. However, with the expanding marketplace for coaching also comes more concern and debate about the ethics and guidelines associated with the practice of executive coaching (Franckeiss, 2009; Sherman & Freas, 2004; Brotman, Liberi, & Wasylshyn, 1998; Filipczak, 1998; Harris, 1999; Kilburg, 1996b, 1996c, 1997; Saporito, 1996; Tobias, 1996). Anecdotally, many opinions exist about what defines executive coaching, how it is performed, and to whom it applies. Neither the emerging group of scholars nor executive coaching practitioners have reached consensus in defining the standards of practice within the executive coaching field, and the specific work behaviours and professional competencies which are associated with successful coaching are largely undetermined (Koortzen & Oosthuizen, 2010; Feldman & Lankau, 2005; Joo, 2005). So a number of questions remain: What exactly is executive coaching? How is it similar to or different from other established professional helping fields such as counseling? Who are the coaching practitioners? What work behaviours do they perform, and what experiences and competencies best prepare an executive coaching provider for practice?

Method

The purpose of this study was to examine the following propositions:

- I. The Executive Coaching Work Behaviours Survey will reveal an interpretable underlying factor structure of work behaviours of executive coaches as measured by frequency ratings.¹
- II. Mean differences (main effects and interactions) among the dependent, factor-based scores for frequency exist with respect to demographic variables such as gender, level and type of education, type of work experience, and years of coaching experience. If such differences do appear, they will need to be examined in greater detail in a later study.

Instrumentation

A survey instrument identifying executive coaching work behaviours and a demographic questionnaire were created for this study because no existing survey was available. The survey development process comprised three phases: item generation, item and format refinement, and pilot-testing the survey. The goal of this process was to create an instrument that would accurately and reliably measure the types of work behaviours performed by executive coaches.

Initial item generation. Given the repeated suggestions within the executive coaching literature that counseling and coaching processes are similar, an initial list of relevant work behaviours was gathered from the counseling work behaviour analyses conducted by Loesch and Vacc (1993) and Sampson, Vacc, and Loesch (1998). In particular, many of the items identified as “fundamental counseling practices” and “career counseling practices” in these studies were similar to work behaviours described in the coaching literature. In some of the counseling work behaviour items, the wording was altered to more accurately represent coaching behaviours. Additional work behaviour items were generated from many of the repeated themes and suggested competencies within the executive coaching literature. This process resulted in an initial list of 125 work behaviour statements.

¹ The research design also analyzed the *importance* ratings on the Executive Coaching Work Behaviours Survey. These results, though, were similar enough to the *frequency* results that they are not replicated here.

Item refinement. As a way of refining the initial list of items, a focus group composed of five experts in the executive coaching field was convened. These experts were from varying coaching backgrounds averaging 22 years of experience working with business leaders and executives. Each of the experts has published within the executive coaching literature and all have maintained thriving executive coaching practices for more than ten years. The group met initially to help create a more accurate and precise item list. Since no extant, complete list of coaching behaviours existed, the purpose of the expert panel was to assist in generating such a list. They were told that the purpose of the focus group was to review the initial list of possible coaching work behaviour items, add items for consideration, eliminate redundant items, and/or reject items that were considered to be not applicable to the executive coaching process. The focus group met for one hour, but concluded before the group could reach complete agreement on all items. Therefore, the initial meeting was followed by multiple rounds of email correspondence whereby the experts independently reviewed and offered opinions for their support, modification, or deletion for each item. The experts also were able to provide suggestions for items needing adjustments and were able to suggest additional items during these rounds. This type of electronic rounding process has been supported as an appropriate method of item refinement in past studies (Cabaniss, 2002; Linstone, 1978). Two email rounds in total were needed to complete the process of item revision, resulting in a final item list that included 152 items.

Format refinement. The refined list of items was combined with Likert scale response options that then formed the initial executive coaching work behaviours survey. The survey used a five-point Likert scale format to measure frequency (1 = never, 2 = rarely, 3 = occasionally, 4 = frequently, and 5 = routinely).

Demographic survey. A brief demographic questionnaire also was created to assess important data related to each participant's background and experiences. Specifically, the questionnaire assessed participant's age, gender, years of coaching experience, undergraduate and graduate area of study, degrees earned, work history (by field and number of years working in that field), and hours of counseling related training. The content of this survey was created to inform the propositions of the study. The demographic questionnaire and the work behaviours survey were included in the pilot testing process.

Pilot testing of instrument. Given the global distribution of the identified research participants and the convenience of web-based surveys, it was decided that an online format would be appropriate for data collection. Therefore, the survey that evolved from the format refinement process was transposed into the online survey service SurveyMonkey.com for pilot testing. This service provider combined an appropriate level of electronic security with a user-friendly interface. An email was sent to 20 coaches from the target organization and they were asked to take the survey and provide feedback regarding format, content, and the time needed to complete both the demographic questionnaire and work behaviours survey. A total of 17 surveys were returned for a return rate of 85%. Based on these responses, appropriate refinements were made to procedures and logistics.

Participants

Participants were executive coaches from a global leadership training and development organization employing executive coaches from a wide variety of backgrounds. Although this organization requires that their coaches be trained and certified through an internal training program, the coaches are also independent coaching providers and most maintain private coaching practices and professional relationships with other organizations. Nearly all of the executive coaches would have extensive prior training before being accepted into this global leadership training and development

organization. Consequently, it is assumed that although these coaches have an attraction to this organization's coaching philosophy, they would bring a broad range of coaching backgrounds and methodologies.

The sampling procedure used for this study involved obtaining a list of the e-mail addresses of potential participants affiliated with this organization. According to information provided, there were over 500 English speaking executive coaches worldwide who were available for this study. Of those solicited, 130 (26%) completed the Executive Coaching Work Behaviours Survey and these respondents served as the sample for this study.

Results of Data Analyses

Initially, descriptive statistics were used to describe the participants' age, race, gender, educational background, work history, and special training as an executive coach. In addition, descriptive analyses included the means and standard deviations for the frequencies for each of the items. Exploratory common factors factor analysis was used to determine the underlying factor structure of the frequencies within the Executive Coaching Work Behaviour Survey. An examination of scree plots and eigenvalues were used to determine the appropriate number of underlying factors for both dimensions. Once the number of factors was determined, rotation was used as necessary to achieve simple structure, beginning with orthogonal methods and moving to oblique methods. Items with loadings greater than .30 were retained on each factor.

Scales were then created according to the results of the factor analysis; scale scores were created by summing responses across the relevant items. Multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) was used to test for main effects of gender, education, work experience, and special training. Scales related to frequency of behaviours were examined using MANOVA techniques. If the omnibus F test was significant, additional analyses were conducted to determine the scales for which there are main effects.

To examine the second proposition, analysis of variance (ANOVA) procedures were used to determine if statistically significant differences existed between the frequency of shared work behaviour responses of executive coaches in this study and those same work behaviour items in the Loesch and Vacc (1993) study (counselor only sample). The ANOVA will include only items which are contained in both studies of work behaviours.

Demographic Data

Demographic information (gender, age, ethnicity, education, work experience, and coaching experience) was gathered as part of the Executive Work Behaviours Survey to provide information about the participants. Demographic data related to age, gender, and ethnicity is reported in Table 1. One noteworthy item is that the majority of the participants were over age 55. Anecdotal information suggests that the mean age of all people providing executive coaching services would be lower than that. The ages of the participants are likely older because of the seniority that is expected to be able to work within this particular global leadership and training development organization.

In addition, demographic information related to the educational backgrounds of executive coaches was gathered for this study. Education was measured by degree level and degree focus/major for those with graduate degrees. Results for degree type were gathered and categorized as undergraduate, master's, and/or doctoral. Results for graduate degree focus/major were gathered and categorized as "counseling related" (counseling, counseling psychology, clinical psychology, social work, human

development), “business related” (business administration, organizational development, industrial-organizational psychology), or “other” (education, ministry, law, classical studies, communication, information systems, psychology, political science, library sciences, other). The results are reported in Table 2. Note that nearly half of this sample has doctoral degrees. As with the older age, mentioned above, it is likely that this high level of education is not representative of the field of executive coaches generally, but more a factor of the requirements of this particular global leadership and training development organization.

Table 1 - Demographic Variables

Demographic Characteristics	Percentages	<u>N</u>
Age (years)		
26-30	.8	1
31-35	.8	1
36-40	5.4	7
41-45	12.3	16
46-50	10.8	14
51-55	13.1	17
56-60	30.0	39
61-65	21.5	28
66-70	5.4	7
Gender		
Male	32.3	42
Female	67.7	88
Ethnic Group		
African American/Black	3.1	4
American Indian or Alaska Native	0.0	0
Asian or Pacific Islander	0.0	0
Caucasian/White	85.4	111
Indian (origins of Indian subcontinent)	0.0	0
Latino/Latina/Hispanic	5.4	7
Middle Eastern	.8	1
Other	5.4	7

Table 2 - Additional Demographics from the Executive Coaching Work Behaviours Survey

Demographic	Percentage	<u>N</u>
Education (as terminal degree)		
Undergraduate	7.7	10
Master's	43.1	56
Doctoral	49.2	64
Graduate Field of Study		
Counseling Related	46.9	61
Business Related	31.5	41
Other	21.5	28

Demographic information related to the executive coaches' work experiences also were gathered. Work experience was categorized as "Counseling Related" (clinical psychology, counseling, social work), "Business Related" (business administration/management, sales/marketing, human resources, organizational development, industrial-organizational psychology), or "Other" (medical, technical field, academe, teaching/education, ministry/clergy). In addition, the number of years experience for each work history category was determined. Lastly, demographic information for those with Counseling and Business work experience, Counseling Only work experience, Business Only work experience, and Neither (counseling nor business) work experience were gathered. Results are reported in Table 3.

Table 3 - Work-related Demographics from the Executive Coaching Work Behaviours Survey

Demographic	Percentage	N
Work Experience		
Counseling Related	53.8	70
0-1 years	.8	1
1-5 years	3.8	5
5-10 years	7.7	10
10-15 years	10.8	14
15-20 years	10.8	14
20-25 years	3.8	5
25-30 years	6.9	9
30+ years	9.2	12
Business Related	88.5	115
0-1 Years	0.0	0
1-5 years	16.2	21
5-10 years	13.8	18
10-15 years	16.2	21
15-20 years	13.8	18
20-25 years	16.2	21
25-30 years	8.5	11
30+ years	3.8	5
Other (at some point during career)	80.8	105
Counseling & Business Related	47.7	62
Counseling Related Only	6.2	8
Business Related Only	40.8	53
Neither Business nor Counseling	5.4	7

Demographic information related to the executive coaches' years of coaching work experience were also gathered as well as coaches self-reported "coaching orientation." Results are presented in Table 4.

Table 4 - Coaching Experience Demographics from the Executive Coaching Work Behaviours Survey

Demographic	Percentage	N
Years of Coaching Experience		
1-5	27.7	36
6-10	32.3	42
11-15	13.9	18
16-20	10.8	14
21-25	10.9	14
26-30	4.6	6
Primary Coaching Orientation		
Business	52.3	68
Counseling/Clinical	12.3	16
Other	24.6	32

Factor Analyses

The Executive Coaching Work Behaviours Survey participants completed for this study consisted of 152 items. Due to the relatively small sample size to variable ratio, the initial results of the factor analysis indicated the need to parcel some of the items within the survey by combining items that were similar in content. Items were reviewed to determine which items seemed redundant both descriptively and statistically (having very similar means and standard deviation scores). If items met the criteria for similarity, their scores were collapsed into a single item parcel and renamed. Item parceling is well supported as a reliable way to obtain better fitting factor solutions (Bandalos & Finney, 2001). The parceling process reduced the number of variables from 152 to 84. Ratings were averaged within each parcel.

For the 130 respondents, means, and standard deviations within the parceled data set are presented in the two right columns of Table 6. The means ranged from 1.28 to 4.93 on a 5-point Likert scale. Among the frequency data, the five items with the highest means were: Establish trust, honesty, and respect in the coaching relationship ($M = 4.93$; $SD = .20$), Use open-ended questions as a method for investigation ($M = 4.89$; $SD = .34$), Clarify and understanding of client concerns and challenges ($M = 4.82$; $SD = .39$), Provide direct, honest feedback to client ($M = 4.78$; $SD = .41$), and Use multi-rater/360 degree instruments ($M = 4.77$; $SD = .58$). The five executive coaching work behaviours performed least frequently were: Interview client's adult children ($M = 1.15$; $SD = .44$), Interview client's friends ($M = 1.25$; $SD = .54$), Interview client's significant other ($M = 1.43$; $SD = .67$), Write for publication in the area of coaching ($M = 1.58$; $SD = .91$), and Interview client's customers ($M = 1.65$; $SD = .84$). The five executive coaching work behaviours with the most variance were: Maintain a professional website/webpage ($M = 2.15$; $SD = 1.67$), Maintain membership in coaching-related professional associations ($M = 2.51$; $SD = 1.52$), Use computer-assisted assessment ($M = 3.32$; $SD = 1.52$), Select instruments appropriate to the client's characteristics and background ($M = 3.48$; $SD = 1.22$), and, Correspond by appointment with client ($M = 4.07$; $SD = 1.20$).

Before addressing each of the propositions, a maximum likelihood factor analysis (MLFA) for the parceled executive coaching work behaviour variables was performed in order to determine the underlying dimensions along which frequency for performing coaching work behaviours varied. The

MFLA of the parceled frequency ratings suggested seven factors, based on an initial evaluation of the eigenvalues. The eigenvalues are shown in Table 5.

Table 5 - Maximum Likelihood Factor Analysis (Eigenvalues for Unrotated Factors) for Coaching Work Behaviours

<u>Factor</u>	<u>Eigenvalues</u>
1	31.01
2	10.84
3	7.40
4	5.61
5	4.83
6	4.78
7	4.12

Of these seven factors, the first three accounted for 49.25% of the variance, and had eigenvalues of 31.01, 10.84, and 7.40 respectively. Because the remaining four factors explained proportionally far less variance, and due to the small number of parcels that would have loaded on those remaining factors, it was decided to retain only the three primary factors. An orthogonal transformation using a Varimax rotation was employed to obtain the patterns of loadings that generated the three factor structure used in the subsequent analyses. In the following tables only factor loadings of .30 or higher are listed. It is important to note that the sophistication of statistical tools exceeds the clarity of what is going on in a field at the stage of executive coaching. Consequently, there may be no theoretical explanation for why certain questions loaded on the same factor. It will be left to later studies to continue to hone the interpretive meaning of executive coaching activities.

Proposition I. What is the underlying factor structure of work behaviours of executive coaches as measured by frequency ratings on the Executive Coaching Work Behaviours Survey?

The factor analysis for frequency ratings yielded a three factor structure of executive coaching work behaviours. It should be noted that any items that failed to reach the loading threshold of .30 for any factor were dropped from subsequent analyses. Nine items failed to load on any factor in the factor analysis for frequency ratings. The resulting three factor structure of executive coaching work behaviours as measured by frequency ratings is provided in Table 6.

Table 6 - Coaching Work Behaviours Factor Analysis with Varimax Rotation and Three Factor Solution: Frequency Ratings

<u>Items</u>	<u>Factor Loading</u>				
	1	2	3	M	SD
Provide coaching skill development training to others	0.69	-0.07	0.00	3.07	1.16
Promote/market own coaching business	0.69	-0.09	-0.04	2.29	0.99
Write for publication in the area of coaching	0.65	-0.19	0.03	1.58	0.91
Assess practice needs	0.63	0.24	0.05	3.13	0.90
Select instruments appropriate to the client's characteristics and background	0.61	0.06	-0.04	3.48	1.22
Use computer-assisted assessment	0.61	0.22	-0.11	3.32	1.52

Use knowledge of organizational development theories	0.59	0.24	0.14	3.48	1.13
Evaluate the impact of coaching experience with client	0.58	0.31	0.07	3.83	0.64
Give talks and speeches related to coaching	0.56	-0.09	-0.04	2.09	0.98
Identify client's support systems	0.56	0.36	0.14	4.14	0.72
Engage in administrative activities related to own coaching practice	0.56	-0.05	0.33	3.63	0.54
Correspond as needed with client	0.55	-0.06	0.18	3.98	1.05
Interview client co-workers.	0.55	0.00	-0.06	2.28	0.99
Observe client behaviours in person	0.52	0.08	0.08	3.36	0.70
Read current professional literature	0.51	0.09	0.06	3.70	0.87
Maintain a professional website/webpage	0.51	-0.03	-0.08	2.15	1.67
Maintain membership in coaching-related professional associations	0.50	0.26	-0.19	2.51	1.52
Discuss the confidential nature of the coaching relationship	0.50	0.21	0.08	3.86	0.83
Evaluate level of motivation for achieving goals	0.49	0.12	0.28	4.25	0.70
Use knowledge of group and team dynamics	0.49	0.17	0.40	4.11	0.69
Discuss coaching with other coaches	0.47	0.42	-0.02	3.01	0.65
Evaluate own coaching process	0.45	0.34	0.21	4.03	0.58
Engage in self-development training	0.45	0.43	-0.04	3.67	0.86
Discuss assessment results with client	0.44	0.19	0.08	3.84	0.53
Provide career guidance.	0.44	0.04	0.18	3.18	1.02
Identify, develop, and use record keeping methods	0.43	0.14	0.06	3.37	1.03
Observe other coaches	0.43	0.19	0.07	2.62	0.74
Supervise staff	0.41	0.16	-0.12	1.72	1.15
Provide coaching via the telephone	0.41	-0.08	0.23	3.31	0.77
Identify coaching goals with client	0.40	0.39	0.26	4.51	0.44
Challenge clients to stretch themselves beyond their comfort zone	0.40	0.25	0.11	4.42	0.51
Use print and other media in coaching	0.39	0.19	0.05	3.44	0.94
Facilitate client's development of decision-making skills	0.39	0.20	0.07	3.74	0.75
Engage in role playing with client	0.37	0.16	0.21	3.07	0.70
Participate in coaching face-to-face	0.36	0.11	0.13	4.38	0.70
Use structured activities or exercises for client development	0.35	0.22	-0.20	3.15	1.06
Model self-awareness	0.32	0.32	0.07	4.22	0.72
Provide multicultural training/education	0.32	0.31	0.13	2.34	1.00
Discuss work-life balance issues	0.03	0.68	0.09	3.63	0.68
Use understanding of human development norms and trends	0.17	0.68	-0.07	3.27	0.89
Share understanding of wellness	0.09	0.68	0.15	3.79	0.80
Review client history and biographical information	0.01	0.58	0.10	4.09	0.57
Use cognitive oriented coaching techniques	0.01	0.56	0.07	3.80	0.76
Discuss ethical or legal aspects of coaching	0.25	0.54	0.06	2.61	0.72
Inform client about ethical standards and practice	0.41	0.50	-0.07	3.42	1.15
Challenge client to test assumptions and personal biases	0.21	0.48	0.34	4.30	0.62
Use knowledge of modern economic trends	0.13	0.48	0.12	3.10	0.95
Assess client's appropriateness for coaching	0.05	0.47	-0.03	3.12	0.71
Use knowledge of current business trends	0.26	0.46	0.17	3.62	0.88
Provide/discuss continuing education options for client	0.43	0.44	0.19	3.79	0.63
Discuss obstacles for client progress/development	0.15	0.44	0.31	4.37	0.46

Reframe client's problems or challenges	0.17	0.43	0.13	4.44	0.58
Help client seek alignment between individual goals and organizational goals	0.28	0.43	0.31	4.22	0.64
Model effective interpersonal communication	0.21	0.37	0.22	3.92	0.60
Use knowledge of business management practices	0.26	0.34	0.23	4.16	0.77
Provide concrete, actionable ideas for clients to implement	0.06	0.32	0.31	4.34	0.74
Clarify an understanding of client concerns and challenges	-0.07	0.06	0.64	4.82	0.39
Establish trust, honesty, and respect in relationship	-0.12	0.07	0.63	4.93	0.20
Assess client strengths and development needs	0.02	0.11	0.61	4.73	0.39
Use/model effective non-verbal communication	-0.19	0.25	0.53	4.74	0.33
Discuss client challenges	-0.10	0.09	0.49	4.61	0.39
Share expertise related to social/interpersonal skills	0.23	0.45	0.48	3.95	0.63
Use open-ended questions as a method for investigation	0.15	-0.08	0.45	4.89	0.34
Select techniques appropriate to help a client	0.38	0.10	0.44	4.43	0.66
Help client develop an action plan	0.11	0.19	0.43	4.29	0.41
Assess goal progress	0.14	0.04	0.42	4.42	0.63
Challenge client to identify insights from experiences	0.12	0.22	0.42	4.46	0.61
Discuss client employer/organizational context	0.12	0.14	0.41	4.27	0.64
Use knowledge of leadership theories	0.27	0.01	0.39	4.10	0.87
Review client's educational preparations	0.05	0.20	0.38	4.16	0.78
Correspond by appointment with client	0.08	-0.11	0.36	4.07	1.20
Provide direct, honest feedback to client	0.26	0.03	0.33	4.78	0.41
Discuss personal change with client	-0.06	0.24	0.33	3.93	0.77
Use multi-rater/360 degree instruments	-0.02	0.01	0.32	4.77	0.58
Use knowledge of counseling theories and techniques	-0.14	0.17	0.32	3.70	1.10

Although not every item fits perfectly into its category based on content interpretation, the general theme of each factor can be plausibly deduced for purposes of naming the factors – subject to the obvious caveat of not assuming that factor naming involves anything more than a subjective interpretation of content. For frequency, factor one was labeled *Professional Coach Activities* and contains items such as Assess practice needs; Promote/market own coaching business; Evaluate own coaching process; and Engage in self-development training. Future research can help determine why both behaviours related to coaching and those that relate to coaching practice management loaded on the first factor. Factor two was labeled *Goal Setting and Attainment Activities* and includes directives aimed at behaviour change that the coach employs in the one-on-one coaching process. These interventions were seen to occur later in the coaching process to more primary interventions such as those in the next factor. Items for *Goal Setting and Attainment Activities* include Discuss work-life balance issues; Share an understanding of wellness; Use knowledge of current business trends; and Discuss obstacles for client progress development. Factor three was labeled *Relationship Activities* and includes items that focus on initial interventions and the coach/client relationship. Items for *Relationship Activities* include: Clarify an understanding of client concerns and challenges; Establish trust, honesty, and respect in relationship; Assess client strengths and development needs; and Use knowledge of counseling theories and techniques. The number of respondents, means, and standard deviations for frequency items within the parceled data set are presented in Table 7.

Table 7 - Means and Standard Deviations for Demographic Variables by Factor

	<u>Factor 1</u>			<u>Factor 2</u>		<u>Factor 3</u>	
	<u>N</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>
Overall Frequency	130	3.24	.51	3.61	.46	4.44	.28
Gender							
Male	42	3.31	.53	3.51	.52	4.38	.33
Female	88	3.17	.50	3.69	.41	4.49	.26
Educational Level							
Bachelors	10	3.54	.42	3.95	.58	4.52	.32
Masters	56	3.30	.51	3.71	.42	4.41	.29
Doctorate	64	3.09	.50	3.51	.43	4.48	.28
Educational Focus							
Counseling Related	61	3.10	.51	3.59	.44	4.47	.26
Business Related	41	3.39	.45	3.63	.52	4.37	.34
Other	28	3.22	.54	3.72	.40	4.53	.24
Work Experience							
Counseling Only	8	3.08	.48	3.54	.23	4.42	.29
Business Only	53	3.38	.53	3.62	.53	4.43	.28
Counseling & Business	62	3.11	.49	3.67	.42	4.47	.30
Neither	7	3.10	.36	3.36	.17	4.44	.30
Years of Coaching Experience							
1-5 Years	36	3.17	.44	3.43	.36	4.40	.30
5-15 Years	60	3.29	.57	3.72	.51	4.47	.27
15 + Years	34	3.13	.46	3.68	.39	4.47	.31

Factor 1 = *Professional Coach Activities*, Factor 2 = *Goal Setting and Attainment Activities*,
 Factor 3 = *Relationship Activities*

Proposition II. Are there mean differences (main effects and interactions) among the dependent, factor-based scores with respect to demographic variables such as gender, level and type of education, type of work experience, and years of coaching experience?

To address proposition two, the factor scores calculated from the means of each factor for each respondent were used to perform a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA). The three factor-based scores for frequency were used as the dependent variables. Gender, Level of Education, Type of Education, Type of Work Experience, and Years of Coaching Experience were used as the independent variables. Results of the MANOVA's for frequency are reported in Table 8.

Table 8 - Differences in Demographic Main Effects

F Statistic				
Source	Wilks' Lambda	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Gender	.90	2.13	4.49*	4.62*
Educational Level (terminal degree)	.84	4.87*	6.31*	1.13
Educational Focus (Area of study/major)	.87	4.17*	.85	2.96
Work Experience	.88	3.27*	1.12	.20
Years of Coaching Experience	.91	1.24	5.37*	.71

* $p < .05$

There were significant main effects for Gender, Education Level, Educational Focus, Work Experience, and Years of Coaching. Follow-up analyses using Tukey's HSD (Honestly Significant Difference) post-hoc comparisons were conducted to examine the main effects in detail for the individual factor-based frequency score variables. For Gender, women rated frequency for performing work behaviours in Factor 2 - *Goal Setting and Attainment Activities* and Factor-3 - *Relationship Activities* significantly higher than men ($p < .05$). For Education Level, those with Bachelor's degrees rated frequency for performing Factor 1 - *Professional Coach Activities* and Factor 2 - *Goal Setting and Attainment Activities* behaviours significantly higher than those with Doctoral Degrees ($p < .05$). For Educational Focus, those with business-related graduate education rated their frequency for performing work behaviours in Factor 1 - *Professional Coach Activities* significantly higher than those with counseling-related graduate educations ($p < .05$). For Work Experience, those with business only work experiences rated frequency for performing Factor 1 - *Professional Coach Activities* work behaviours significantly higher than those with Business and Counseling combined work experiences ($p < .05$). For Years Coaching Experience, those with five or more years of experience rated their frequency for performing Factor 2 - *Goal Setting and Attainment Activities* work behaviours significantly higher than those with less than five years of coaching experience ($p < .05$).

A significant interaction was found for Education Level by Educational Focus across Factor 2 - *Goal Setting and Attainment Activities* behaviours; however, due to the small number of respondents ($N = 2$) who held the demographic criteria included in this interaction, the results are not considered valid. No significant interaction effects were found among any of the other demographic variables. Results for interaction effects for frequency are reported in Table 9.

Table 9 - Differences in Demographic Interaction Effects

F Statistic				
Source	Wilks' Lambda	Factor 1	Factor 2	Factor 3
Gender X Educational Level	.62	.68	.34	.71
Gender X Educational Focus	.93	.07	2.83	1.53
Gender X Work Experience	1.82	2.25	1.37	.15
Gender X Years Coaching Experience	.71	.36	.28	1.08
Educational Level X Educational Focus	1.66	.76	3.48* +	1.69
Educational Level X Work Experience	1.57	.19	2.05	.95
Educational Level X Years Coaching Experience	1.44	.99	2.10	1.41
Educational Focus X Work Experience	.90	.87	.44	1.33
Educational Focus X Years Coaching Experience	1.03	1.27	2.07	.89
Work Experience X Years Coaching Experience	1.44	1.22	1.07	1.76

* $p < .05$

+ Due to the small number of respondents who fit this interaction, significant results should be interpreted with caution.

Discussion

Proposition I: *The Executive Coaching Work Behaviours Survey will reveal an interpretable underlying factor structure of work behaviours of executive coaches as measured by frequency ratings.*

The results of the factor analyses provided a clear response for Proposition I. In addition, the factor analyses for this study supported assertions that have been espoused within the executive coaching literature for some time. For example, the executive coaching literature suggests that executive coaching is typically conducted in a way that involves relationship building, intervention (behaviour change), and follow-up (Stern, 2008; Feldman & Lankau, 2005; Frisch, 2001, Gilmore, 2002; Kiel et al., 1996; Kilburg, 1996c, 1997). Although developing a process model for executive coaching was not the aim of this study, the factor structure of the executive coaching work behaviour items does suggest that relationship-building and behaviour change are definable parts of the executive coaching process.

In fact, much of the executive coaching literature has focused on the relational and behaviour changing aspects of coaching with little empirical evidence to directly support these concepts as making up part of the variance in coaching work behaviours (Visser, 2010; Hart et al., from awareness to action," and "Challenge and encourage clients to take action towards accomplishing goals" were within those same factors and rated on average as frequently used and highly important among coaches.

Although not predicted by prior coaching research but quite consistent with prior counseling research, executive coaching work behaviours that involve the promotion and maintenance of the professional coaching identity and practice did cluster (Loesch & Vacc, 1993; Nassar-McMillan & Borders, 1999). Work behaviours represented in the *Professional Coach Activities* factor are a part of the executive coaches' experiences; however, they tend to be underemphasized in the literature in relation to other coaching work behaviours deemed more fundamental. This under emphasis within the literature reflects the findings of this study, in that participants rated the frequency with which they engaged in *Professional Coach Activities* work behaviours on average less than the mean scores for frequency for behaviours within the *Relationship Activities* and *Goal Setting and Attainment Activities* factors. Coaching items within this factor such as "Supervise staff," "Give talks and speeches related to executive coaching," "Develop reports," "Maintain membership in coaching-related professional associations," and "Engage in advertising and marketing," were not considered as pertinent to the practice of executive coaching as items represented in the other factors - a trend evident in counselor work behaviour studies as well (Loesch & Vacc, 1993).

Overall, the factors that emerged for frequency in this study generally support the trend throughout the executive coaching literature that focuses on the coach-client relationship and behaviour change as fundamental to the practice of executive coaching.

Proposition II: *Mean differences (main effects and interactions) among the dependent, factor-based scores for frequency exist with respect to demographic variables such as gender, level and type of education, type of work experience, and years of coaching experience.*

Gender. There were significant main effects for gender for the *Relationship Activities* factor. Women reported a higher frequency for engaging in these behaviours than did men in the 2001; Quick & Macik-Frey, 2004; Stern, 2004; Ting & Sisco, 2006; Witherspoon & White, 1996). Confirming the assumption that has existed, this study found that the coaching work behaviours rated most frequent were within the *Relationship Activities* and *Goal Setting and Attainment Activities* factors, and included relationship-based items such as "Maintain a sense of trust," "Maintain honest and straightforward communication," "Use appropriate body language when in person with the client," "Use non-verbal signs of attentiveness," and "Use reflective listening skills." Likewise, behaviour change items such as "Collaborate with client in establishing coaching goals," "Coach clients concerning personal change," "Help client move study. Given the rapport building and relationship development nature of the work behaviours included in these factors, it is not surprising that women may show an inclination to maximize these coaching behaviours. It is well documented in studies examining gender differences that women are more relationship focused than men (Pease & Pease, 2000).

Education level. Educational level for coaches in this study was categorized as Bachelor's, Master's, or Doctoral degree (as the terminal degree). For Education Level, those coaches with Bachelor's degrees rated the frequency for performing work behaviours within *Professional Coach Activities* as significantly higher than those with Doctoral degrees. The emphasis given among those with Bachelor's degrees to *Professional Coach Activities* work behaviours is not clearly understood, although it could be that the behaviours needed to maintain a professional identity and promote a professional practice may be amplified for those with less educational credibility, especially in a profession where higher education levels provide face validity and the notion of expertise. In general, those with Doctoral degrees placed less emphasis on *Professional Coach Activities* than those without Doctorates.

In addition, those with Bachelor's degrees reported more frequently performing work behaviours within *Goal Setting and Attainment Activities* than those with Doctoral degrees. Interestingly, an interaction effect of Education Level and Educational Focus indicated that those with bachelor's degrees with a business-related focus had significantly higher frequency ratings for *Goal Setting and Attainment Activities* behaviours than those with Doctoral degrees and a business related focus. These results should be interpreted with caution, however, as only ten participants in this study reported a Bachelor's degree as their terminal degree and of those ten only four reported a Bachelor's with a business-related focus.

Educational focus. Educational Focus was categorized as counseling-related, business-related, or other (non-counseling/non-business). For Educational Focus, those with business-related educations rated their frequency for performing work behaviours in the *Professional Coach Activities* factor significantly higher than those with counseling-related educations. Interestingly, those coaches having counseling-related educations did not significantly differ in their reported frequency ratings of coaching work behaviours beyond the diminished frequency ratings for *Professional Coach Activities*.

Work experience. Work experience was categorized as counseling only, business only, counseling and business, and neither (counseling nor business). For Work Experience, those with business only work experiences rated frequency for performing *Professional Coach Activities* work behaviours significantly higher than those with business and counseling combined work experiences. It is not entirely clear why those with pure business backgrounds tended to emphasize these work behaviours, but given that many of these behaviours relate directly with the promotion of a coaching practice/business, intuitive connections can be inferred. Most strikingly, however, was that professional work experiences did not seem to have any effect on how coaches approach the intervention and relational aspects of coaching. Opinions within the executive coaching literature that suppose that coaches with counseling-related work experiences would emphasize certain aspects of coaching more than others are not supported by the results of this study. Furthermore, assertions that coaches with primarily business-related work experience would bring that bias to their coaching work go unfounded in relation to these results (Stern, 2008).

Coaching experience. For Coaching Experience, those with five or more years of experience rated their frequency for performing *Goal Setting and Attainment Activities* significantly higher than those with less than five years experience. These work behaviours focused primarily on the steps for client growth and development beyond the initial relationship building stage of coaching. It could be argued that those with significant coaching experience have a deeper understanding and appreciation for the work behaviours needed to push the coaching intervention beyond its primary gains. The executive coaching literature supports the notion of "master coach" as a title indicating significant coaching tenure and experiences (Ting & Sisco, 2006). Master coaches anecdotally are believed to take coaching to a more advanced level, which would be consistent with the theme established with the *Goal Setting and Attainment Activities* factor.

Conclusions

The creation of a valid set of executive coaching work behaviours, which was an important part of this study, contributes to the academic study of the field of executive coaching. Although executive coaching has emerged as a viable profession that has established itself as a common contributor to the training and development agendas of major organizations, very few empirical studies have examined the process of executive coaching at the behavioural level (Glunk & Follini, 2011). Specific coaching work

behaviours have been implied by past research but never accounted for empirically. In doing so, this study confirmed that executive coaches participate in work-based, client-focused, one-on-one experiences that challenge clients to assess their strengths, analyze their needs for development, and enact of plans for growth and improvement. This study confirmed that coaches draw on specific competencies related to relationship building and behavioural interventions with the client, and competencies that allow for coaches to develop independent coaching practices/businesses. However, results also suggested that the needed competencies to achieve professional level performance as an executive coach are not derived from particular educational or work-related experiences. In addition, this study offered data supporting anecdotal reports that executive coaching is being performed by professionals with varied backgrounds and demographic characteristics. Although differences exist that affect how coaching work behaviours are performed, it remains unclear whether particular demographic variables place coaches at an advantage or disadvantage to perform executive coaching overall.

Implications for Practitioners

For individuals working as executive coaches, this study has held up a mirror to the field and provided information that each coach can now compare what she or he is doing against the data about colleagues in the field. The most frequent coaching behaviours are (1) establishing trust, honesty, and respect (2) using open-ended questions, and (3) clarifying and understanding client concerns and challenges. These findings also suggest that there remains a wide variability in the activities under the umbrella of “executive coaching” (Baron & Morin, 2009) and that practitioners would be wise to affiliate with organizations such as the ICF, EMCC, Global Coaching Community or the International Confederation of Coaches in order to present a more unified set of offerings to organizations.

This study has been beneficial to those who will use the services of coaches by delineating the specific types of activities coaches are involved with and determining which match well with the client’s desires (de Haan, et al., 2010). These findings also help clients be more astute about obtaining executive coaching services because the clients can now ask better questions about a particular coach’s emphasis on *Relationship Activities* behaviours versus *Goal Setting and Attainment Activities* behaviours, for example. From this work clients can also be better informed about whether they want or need a coach with a doctoral degree or with psychological experience (Gray, 2006).

Limitations of the Study

The results of this study should be considered within the context of study limitations. Although the study aimed to recruit participant coaches who were well established as executive coaches, all participants were certified coaches from a major global leadership training and development organization. This organization has a specific mission and emphasis directed at individual leader development and self awareness and, therefore, all coaches participating in this study likely have in common a bias for the mission, philosophy, and ideology of the organization’s work. Although the majority of coaches indicated that they also perform coaching work outside the bounds of this organization, this relationship should be considered when interpreting the results. It should also be noted that this organization carefully screens possible affiliates for a specific type of training. These coaches are probably more likely to have doctoral degrees than executive coaches generally and more likely to have clinical psychological training. Consequently, these coaches are not representative of the industry as a whole.²

² The authors thank an anonymous reviewer for this important qualifier.

In addition, although 505 coaches from all over the world were invited to participate, only 130 participants fully completed the Executive Coaching Work Behaviours Survey. Of this sample, the vast majority were North American and Caucasian. Given the sample, results may not be indicative of executive coaches in general. Also, 67.7% of the respondents were female. A common name by gender analysis of the 505 people solicited was performed and it appears that the percentage of females in the total population would be in the low sixty percent range. So, the higher percentage of female respondents in the study is not quite representative.

As with most work behaviour studies across fields, participation in this study was voluntary and there is no way to know how respondents differed from non-respondents. A further limitation is that the work behaviours were measured using self reports only.

Recommendations for Future Research

The following recommendations for future research are based on this study and attempt to address the limitations previously identified. Future researchers should consider conducting this survey with other populations, both with other executive coaches and counselors. Different populations of executive coaches could help determine the reliability and validity of the survey instrument and its factors, and provide data that could help to generalize the work behaviours of coaches. In addition, a population of counselors who were not executive coaches could help delineate those behaviours that overlap between the coaching and counseling fields.

Additional research with the Executive Coaching Work Behaviours Survey also should aim at attracting a larger response set overall. This could be encouraged by developing a shorter survey by eliminating the items that were not endorsed in this study and by using the parceled items.

Lastly, future researchers should consider the idea of having coaching clients respond to the Executive Coaching Work Behaviour Survey. Information gathered in such a study could better inform the executive coaching field about what coaching work behaviours are meaningful to clients. The current study provided some insight as to the frequency and importance of coaching behaviours as perceived by the coach, but if those behaviours are not seen in equal standing by the client then the overall success of the coaching intervention may be in question.

This study provides a critical first step in identifying empirically the specific work behaviours of executive coaches. Up to this point, the practice of executive coaching has been largely inferred and only generally described within the executive coaching literature. By identifying an extensive set of coaching work behaviours, additional research into the efficacy and impact of coaching can be conducted more successfully.

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