



## EXECUTIVE COACHING RESULTS: A CLASSIFICATION PROPOSAL

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The number of studies examining the effectiveness of executive coaching has not been very extensive. However, most of them indicate that executive coaching produced positive results in different aspects of the coachee. In this paper, we classify these kinds of results into three categories, depending on the type of variable referred to: personal traits, behavior or business results. We discuss the advantages of using a classification tool like this and we put forward some ideas connecting the results with professional practice and future research.

**Key words:** Executive coaching, Results, Classification model.

El número de estudios que analizan la eficacia del coaching ejecutivo no es muy extenso. Sin embargo, la mayoría de ellos, indican que el coaching ejecutivo produce resultados positivos en diferentes aspectos del coachee. En el presente trabajo, clasificamos estos aspectos en tres categorías, en función del tipo de variable a que se refiere el aspecto: rasgos personales, comportamientos y resultados de negocio. Se comentan las ventajas de utilizar un sistema de clasificación como el propuesto y se avanzan ideas que conectan los resultados con la práctica profesional y la investigación futura.

**Palabras clave:** Coaching ejecutivo, Resultados, Modelo clasificación.

### INTRODUCTION

In the field of executive development, the failure of traditional training methods has led to the search for and use of alternative methods (Makin and Cox, 2004).

Ways of learning through experience such as on-the-job-training, programs of performance evaluation and feedback, participation in special projects, coaching, mentoring, job rotation, and succession and career planning have emerged as a powerful learning source for managers (McCauley & Brutus, 1998).

The use of job assignments has been identified as particularly useful for managers to learn about team-building, how to be a better strategic thinker and how to attain the valuable skills of persuasion and influence (McCall, Lombardo, & Morrison, 1988). This approach has also been used in executive training (Sims & Manz, 1982), having demonstrated its effectiveness as a learning method. Other activities such as "action learning" and "360° feedback" are also increasing in importance as part of executive development programs.

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One of the most powerful ways of providing feedback, 360-degree feedback with multisource evaluations, has become one of the key components of any executive development program (Church & Bracken, 1997). Its effectiveness is connected to other processes, such as the degree to which it is linked to coaching actions. The follow up of the improvement achieved in the learning process can be accelerated by using a teacher or coach (Ericsson, 2006).

Executive coaching represents a truly different approach to traditional leadership training. Its distinctiveness is characterized by four aspects: the personalized attention given to the needs of the client, the convenience of the coach possessing certain special competencies, the importance of the client-coach relationship and the value of following a flexible process to achieve the expected results (Ely, et al., 2010).

Although the definitions of executive coaching cover widely diverse content, we can see that the majority of them agree as to the essential elements covered. The existence of two parties (coach and executive), the personalized relationship of assistance and the use of methods to achieve the best results are included in the majority of them (Kilburg, 1996; Feldman and Lankau, 2005; Kombarakaram, Yang, Baker, & Fernandes, 2008).

They differ however, in the approach they use (business or problem solving), in their view of the extent of the



process, in the particular aspect that is the focus of the intervention (leadership, effectiveness at work, aspects of intra- or interpersonal competencies or specific problems), in the type of techniques on which the intervention is based (psychodynamics, behavioral, person-centered, cognitive based therapy or systemic orientation) and in the assessment criteria they consider in evaluating their effectiveness. In common practice, executive coaching consists of individual sessions on work-related issues aimed both at middle managers and more senior or even top managers, in which targets are set to improve their current or future performance (Feldman, 2001).

In these interventions, the coach is a professional who uses a variety of methods to help the client, who has formal authority and responsibility in an organization, to improve his or her management skills (Kilburg, 2000). To this end, and essentially using communication strategies such as the use of relevant questions, adequate listening and accurate feedback, the coach guides the coachee (executive), in the formulation of his or her objectives and the implementation of action plans for improvement.

The literature highlights a sequence of four phases or main activities in any coaching process (Feldman & Lankau, 2005): obtaining information on the executive and the organization, providing feedback to the executive, holding regular meetings to monitor and enforce the development activities and evaluating their effectiveness. The use of 360-degree feedback, to identify strengths and weaknesses as a starting point, has become an essential part of this type of process.

The coaching process facilitates the acquisition of new skills, perspectives, tools and knowledge through support, encouragement and feedback in an organizational context (Kombarakaram et al, 2008). Carrying out the improvement plans established in a coaching session can allow managers and executives to achieve different objectives, ranging from developing their potential or succeeding in a new assignment or position, to improving their performance or personal satisfaction, (Kilburg, 1996; Katz & Miller, 1996; Hall, et al., 1999).

The use of executive coaching as a management training tool has increased dramatically in the last two decades (Felman & Lankau, 2005; Joo, 2005), such that it has become the fastest growing method of leadership development (McCauley, 2008).

The fact that it has become such a popular method in management development has been due, amongst other

things, to its unique position in helping to change perspectives and behaviors (Strickland, 1997). Executive change involves identifying patterns of experience and behavior that affect goal-setting, creating new insights into these patterns through the reframing and testing of new behaviors (Pilette & Wingard, 1997). In this change, the processes that occur during coaching, such as feedback or interactive learning, serve to increase the executive's awareness of the impact of his or her behavior on performance (Diedrich, 1996).

The growth in the use of executive coaching as a tool for executive development has not been accompanied by a similar growth in the number of studies that demonstrate its effectiveness and support its use. There have not been many publications on the effectiveness of executive coaching (Kilburg, 1996 Kampa-Kokesh & Anderson, 2001).

The evidence regarding the effectiveness of coaching programs is therefore an issue that deserves attention. Therefore, and in order to present a system that can guide professional practice, the training of future coaches and future research in an organized manner, in this paper we produce an working outline of the most relevant findings on the effectiveness of executive coaching.

## EXECUTIVE COACHING PRODUCES DIFFERENT TYPES OF RESULTS

Most studies that have analyzed the effectiveness of executive coaching have been carried out through the analysis of interviews or questionnaires conducted with clients (coachees) who have participated in coaching processes. These qualitative techniques have been carried out with varying samples (from 5 to 1361 people), who have participated in a process that has lasted between 6 and 12 months (Feldman and Lankau, 2005; Díaz Castillo and Gajardo Barrientos, 2007; or Hill, 2010).

The majority of the results obtained in this way support the belief that executive coaching produces positive results (Feldman & Lankau, 2005; Dagle, 2006; Finn et al, 2007; McKie, 2007; Passmore & Gibbes, 2007; Kombarakaram, et al., 2008, McCauley, 2008).

However, when a study used a more rigorous quantitative correlational experimental or quasi-experimental methodology, (Hernez-Broom, 2002. Smither et al, 2003) the results have shown slight improvements in some aspects, but they have not been significantly clear.

The positive results reported have been diverse. Having



not found any classification of these and in order to facilitate the understanding of this heterogeneous panorama, we propose to situate the results on a continuum that ranges from one end that reflects changes in internal characteristics or dispositions to the other end which reflects changes in business results, passing through an intermediate space characterized by behaviors or variables related to performance (see Figure 1).

If we use this outline, a possible ordering of the most relevant results on the effectiveness of the coaching process would be as follows:

a. Results related to changes in personal factors or traits

The coaching has helped to develop new attitudes or perspectives such as self-confidence, self-awareness, interpersonal sensitivity, adaptability and flexibility in relations with others (Hall et al, 1999.); to facilitate the achievement of goals related to mental health and quality of life (Grant, 2001); to increase emotional maturity and effectiveness (Laske, 2004); to reduce work stress (Gyllensten & Palmer, 2006); and to strengthen beliefs and expectations of self-efficacy (Evers, Brouwers, & Tomic, 2006, Moen et al., 2011).

b. Results related to behavioral change or performance-related variables

In addition to a positive attitude and general satisfaction with the process and results, improvements have been reported that have gone from 10 to 100% (Gegner, 1997), learning increases and more effective behaviors at work (CompassPoint, 2003) and behavioral changes (63%) related to self-awareness and understanding (Wasylyshyn, 2003).

With regard to leadership, Komabarakaran et al. (2008) showed, through an empirical study on executive coaching, that change takes place in five areas: people management, relationship with managers, goal-setting, commitment and communication. In other studies, executives say they have been helped to become better leaders (45%), they have improved their leadership effectiveness (Thach, 2002) and they are more effective in promoting change (Dawdy, 2004).

However, not all of the results have been so positive. Kampa-Kokesh (2001) found changes in the leadership styles of 50 executives as a result of coaching, only in one of the dimensions of transactional leadership evaluated by the Multifactor Leadership Questionnaire. On the other

hand, Smither, London, Flaut, Vargas and Kucine (2003), in a quasi-experimental study with 1,361 senior managers who received multisource feedback on their performance from their superiors, found that those who received coaching were able to establish more specific goals, solicit ideas for improvement from their supervisors and they also received higher evaluations from their superiors a year later. The differences were not very large however, the study concluding that there were no factors that could be linked to the success of the process.

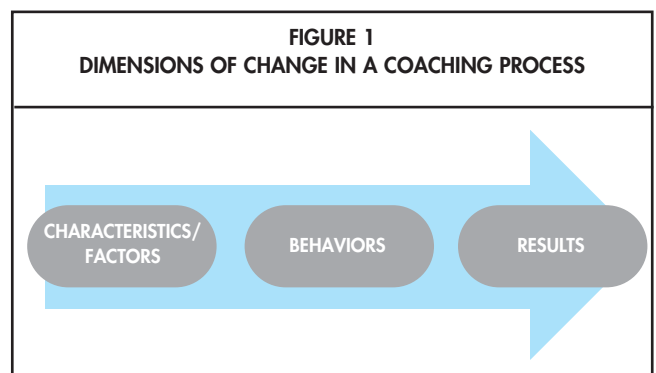
c. Results related to business indicators

Using self-report measures, increases in productivity of 88% have been reported after mixed training and coaching programs in comparison with training alone (Olivero, Bane & Kopelman, 1997); significant impacts on some business indicators have been found (Kampa-Kokesch, & Anderson, 2001) and the value of coaching in relation to the money and time invested was rated very positively (McGovern et al., 2001).

Other significant results regarding the effectiveness of coaching have been synthesized by Bayon, Cubeiro, Romo & Sainz (2006) in European organizations. For example, a return on investment (ROI) six times the cost of coaching in performance and quality improvements, a reduced staff turnover from 35 to 16%, and an improved attraction of executive talent. Meanwhile, ROI expert, Jack Philips (2005) has demonstrated the effectiveness of coaching in creating value within an organization, providing information on ROI.

**CONCLUSIONS**

Knowing that coaching produces results is undoubtedly important, but knowing the factors involved in the creation of these results is perhaps more important. On this issue, the authors are largely in agreement with regard to the type of factors that they consider important in their



studies.

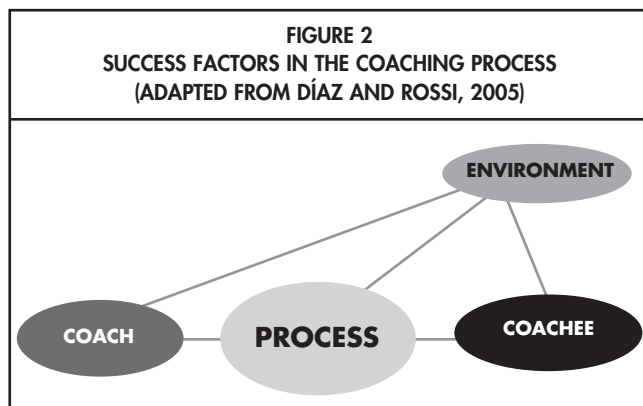
When classifying the key success factors in a coaching intervention, Díaz & Rossi (2005) propose a way of grouping these that contains four categories: factors related to the coach, factors related to the coachee, factors related to the coaching process and factors related to the environment where the coaching takes place, as we show in Figure 2.

Knowing the role that each of these factors play in the effectiveness of coaching will help to reduce the “black box effect” in the current literature on coaching, which is to recognize that it works but without really knowing why (Feldman & Lankau, 2005).

There is, moreover, recognition of the need for a sound theoretical framework to develop the practice of coaching (Eggers & Clark, 2000) and as a base for research (Grant, 2001). The degree of impact of coaching in business is possibly related to the complexity of the role of the executive and the organizational environment (Levenson, 2009). It is therefore necessary to create specific work models that can guide us in the research, taking into account the particular details of the situation, and that are more specific than generalist.

Feldman & Lankau (2005) suggest using a model based on the practice of the effectiveness of coaching (such as the 8 elements of Kilburg, 2001). The consideration of coaching as a process that aims to improve leadership effectiveness through increased self-awareness and the practice of new behaviors (Kombarakaram et al., 2008) could be a starting point in researching the coaching process.

As possible topics for future research, we propose an analysis of the relative effectiveness of the different approaches to coaching and the relationships between the variables involved (internal/external coaches, employees/executives) and the types of results expected.



All this without forgetting the need to define more clearly the type of results expected in coaching (Kampa-Kokesh & Anderson, 2001; Mackie, 2007); the relevance of collecting information not only on the coachees but also on the coaches (Joo, 2005) and the importance of using better research reports (Kampa-Kokesh & Anderson, 2001; Passmore & Gibbes, 2007).

Work in these areas will enable us to better define the impact of the different factors on the results of coaching and to develop models that help us to choose the best coaches, to monitor the process of communication in the coach-coachee relationship and to increase the involvement of the coachee.

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