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2025

University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

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Executive Coaching Effectiveness in Performance and Coping Skills of Young Professionals Transitioning into Executive Roles in South Africa

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A research report submitted to the Faculty of Commerce, Law and Management, University of the Witwatersrand, in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Management in Business and Executive Coaching

Wits Business School

Johannesburg, 2025

Abstract

Executive Coaching is gaining prominence as a development tool within the South African workplace in line with global trends, as evidence by the increasing number of coaches and coaching organisations. There is also a rise in the number of young executives transitioning into executive roles fueled by emerging technologies and the South African government regulatory environment. The inexperienced young transitioning executives have a need for resources to help them navigate the challenges and the complexities of these roles.

The purpose of this study was to explore how executive coaching impacts the performance and the coping and decision-making skills of young South African professionals who are transitioning into executive roles. This study looked at the (1) the pre-coaching experience of young executives, (2) the coaching experience of these executives and (3) the perceived success of coaching.

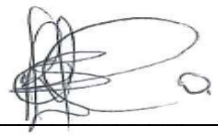
A qualitative research methodology was selected to explore the efficacy of coaching amongst young South African executives. Seven semi-structured interviews were conducted with seven participants of all South African race groups. These participants have received coaching as young professionals appointed into executive roles. A thematic analysis was conducted to examine the data from interviews with the participants.

The findings of this study reinforce the need for coaching for young transitioning executives who sometimes find themselves left to their own devices without proper training for the responsibilities and boardroom politics that are characteristic of executive roles. The findings also show that coaching is a preferred method of intervention as it provides a confidential and non-judgemental space for these young executives to vent their frustrations.

Keywords: executive coaching, young professionals, transition, effectiveness of coaching

Declaration

I, Marvellous Phindile Mthethwa, declare that this research report is my own work except as indicated in the references and acknowledgements. It is submitted in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Management in Business Executive Coaching at the University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination in this or any other university.



Signed at JOHANNESBURG

On the **27th** day of **March 2025**.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank my three daughters Kagiso, Sabelo and Vuyokazi as well as my only sister, Jabsi Mabaso and her husband, Thami, who have been my source of inspiration from the time I embarked on the MMBEC journey.

However, as a member of a village, this would not have been achieved without a community that was behind me throughout these studies. Therefore, my gratitude goes to the following:

- The seven participants in this research study for generously taking time off their packed schedules to subject themselves to the interviews that gave credence to this paper.
- Friends and relatives who were always encouraging me and checking on my progress, especially my friend Paballo Vilakazi for those comfort packs that randomly made their way to my house.
- Members of my church who offered prayers on my behalf.
- The lecturers who took us for course-work and open-handedly imparted much-needed knowledge and wisdom.
- Wits Business School non-academic staff who were at our beck and call whenever we needed support with technical issues.
- The MMBEC 2021 cohort - my fellow virtual classmates - with whom we shared notes, frustrations, victories and everything else that goes with being an adult student.

It would be amiss of me not to single out my lecturer and supervisor, Dr Jabulile Msimango-Galawe who, when I had abandoned all effort, gave me the much needed push and encouragement to complete what I had started. I am eternally grateful, Dr J.

Lastly, but most importantly, I thank the Lord Jesus Christ for being a Provider of all resources I have needed during these studies.

In memory of Sicelo Gumede, the only male member of the 2021 cohort, who lost his life in July 2022 and could not finish his studies. Lala ngoxolo, Phakathwayo!

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Chapter 1: Introduction

This chapter introduces a qualitative study that explores the impact of executive coaching in enhancing the performance of young professionals who are transitioning into executive roles in South Africa. The chapter will discuss the purpose of the study and give context within which the study is taking place. The chapter further clarifies the problem and provides the motivation for the study, whereafter it discusses the objectives of the research and the questions that this study seeks to answer regarding the topic. In addition to the aforementioned, this chapter explains the significance of this study and the contribution to the knowledge base on the subject matter, whilst highlighting its delimitations and the assumptions made during the study.

1.1 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this qualitative study is to explore how executive coaching impacts the performance of young professionals who are transitioning into executive roles in South Africa, and how it affects their coping and decision-making skills.

1.2 Context of the Study

Africa is seeing a rise in the appointment of young professionals into executive roles as evidenced by the Forbes Under 30 annual publication. Aziz (2020) cites the 2018 publication, which placed the youngest Chief Executive Officer (CEO) at the age of 24 (Forbes, 2018), and Ndofirepi (2015) placed the youngest CEO at the age of 31. Philani Potwana was reported to be the youngest CEO at First National Bank (South Africa) at the age of 31 in 2020, while in 2016 Dr Nokwethemba Mtshali-Hadebe was reported to be the youngest hospital CEO also at the age of 31 (Guardian, 2021; Makgatho, 2017). Further back, in 2006, Yolanda Cuba became the youngest CEO of a JSE-listed company at the age of 29 (Bonorchis, 2016). The

latest reported appointment is that of Tshego Modise as CEO at Aeon Investments in July 2021 at the age of 30 (Cairns, 2021).

Dotlich and Cairo (1999) mention that jobs and role changes are not a new phenomenon in organisations. The newness lies in the context of today's business environment where change happens rapidly and the executive has to cope with the requirements of producing instantaneous outcomes, competition in the marketplace and all the new innovations, whilst dealing with meeting customers' needs and complexities brought about by globalisation.

So, for these executives who are going through these role changes, Bawany (2018b) suggests a much more focused coaching approach which he terms, "transition coaching" that uses the principles of executive coaching with a focus on executives who are transitioning. According to Sutton (2008), transitioning managers are now required to think differently because it is no longer about functional or operational management; but they now have to be strategic in their outlook. To be successful in the new role, the incumbents have to adapt and learn to operate differently from their previous roles in terms of how they think and behave as they may now be required to interact with multiple stakeholders. Sutton (2008) quotes a Roundtable (2005) Leadership research study that found that 46% of new executives fail in the first 18 months. In fact, more literature seems to concur with this number and places the failure rate of executives between 40% and 50% (Keller & Meaney, 2018; Watkins, 2013).

The context of coaching young executives in South Africa is provided by Heyns-Nell et al. (2021) who did a neurobiological study on 31 male subjects between the ages of 25 and 45 years old, and put them through, what they termed "Strategic Leadership Coaching (SLC)", to prove the efficacy of coaching for decision-making on these young executives. Their study showed that the executives who had received this coaching made better quality decisions relative to the control group who had not received the same coaching, as attested to by their

stakeholders, including customers. The limitation of their study is that it was only done on male subjects.

Schutte (2019), who has done a study on business coaching in South Africa, states that South Africa is aligned with the global trends in coaching. Despite the fact that the coaching phenomenon is still in its infancy in South Africa, it can be mirrored against world trends.

1.3 Problem Statement

Young professionals transition into executive roles without receiving any coaching and this affects their performance adversely, as they are unable to cope with their new roles, which is costly for their organisations. Heyns-Nell et al. (2021) assert that the challenge that executives generally face is having to make intricate decisions on a daily basis as required by their roles. Also, they have to develop strategies to respond to the evolving business landscape. One could even include the unforeseen challenges posed by global phenomena like the COVID-19 pandemic.

The McKinsey (2015) study paints a gloomy picture of only 27% of participants believing that their organisations had programs and suitable resources in place to ensure that they thrived as they transitioned into their “C-level” roles. In their study, Keller and Meaney (2018) state that 83% of global leaders feel that they are not adequately prepared for the roles they transition into.

There is also a cost element associated with the failure of transitioning executives (Terblanche, 2019). Keller and Meaney (2018) list the costs associated with recruiting these executives, which are said to be around 223% of their annual salaries as hiring fees, sign-on bonuses, relocation costs, etcetera. These fees are usually not recouped when an executive

fails. Keller and Meaney (2018) also highlight an unquantifiable cost associated with time lost by the company in the effort of taking corrective measures, while the company's competitors are forging ahead.

Not only is derailment costly, but it jeopardises strategic objectives and the sustainability of a company which may, as a result of failing young executives, not have a pipeline of leaders to take over leadership roles in the future (Bawany, 2018b). Over and above that, Terblanche (2019) posits that the failure of an executive would have a psychological effect on him/her and the team he/she works with.

Further, the Roundtable (2005) research as quoted by Sutton (2008), states that the effects of an executive who is failing during his/her transition are felt directly by 50% of the organisation. This affects the overall productivity of the company while the company is taking corrective measures, a feat that many companies cannot afford in times where finances are tight or during an economic meltdown.

This study investigates the effectiveness of executive coaching in enhancing the performance of these young executives, their coping and decision-making skills that would ensure that resilience is built in them, and their ability to stay in their roles so that companies are not faced with costs associated with failure of these young executives.

1.4 Research Objective

The overall objective of this qualitative study is to explore the effectiveness of executive coaching as a development tool for young professionals who are transitioning into executive roles.

Within this objective are sub-objectives probing:

1.4.1 Sub-Objective 1

The impact of coaching for enhancing the performance of young professionals who are transitioning into executive roles.

1.4.2 Sub-Objective 2

The effectiveness of coaching for young professionals to cope with roles they are transitioning into.

1.4.3 Sub-Objective 3

The effectiveness of coaching in enhancing decision-making skills for young professionals taking up executive roles.

1.5 Research Questions

The three questions that this study aims to answer are:

1.5.1 Research Question 1

What is the impact of executive coaching on the performance of young professionals transitioning into executive roles?

1.5.2 Research Question 2

How does executive coaching affect the coping skills of young professionals who are transitioning into executive roles?

1.5.3 Research Question 3

How does executive coaching enhance the decision-making skills of young professionals who are transitioning into executive roles?

1.6 Significance of the Study

This study will make a contribution towards the existing body of knowledge that looks at the impact of coaching for professionals transitioning into executive roles in South Africa (Terblanche, 2021). The gap that this study is filling is in making ‘young’ South African

professionals who are transitioning or have transitioned into senior and/or executive positions, the focal point. The study also shows the extent to which executive coaching impacts on their coping skills and their performance in their new roles and, therefore, how companies could reduce the cost of failing executives. The work of Hofmeyr and Adonisi (2014), Bawany (2018b), Van Coller-Peter et al. (2018), and Terblanche (2021) in the South African context, has been largely of a qualitative nature, primarily explaining the role of executing or transitioning coaching and its impact in an organisation. In addition, this study also looks at how coaching enhances the decision-making ability of these transitioning executives.

The studies done by Schutte (2019) and Stout-Rostron (2018) were mostly about the development and the prevalence of coaching in the South African context, while also highlighting the momentum that coaching has gained because of the efforts of organisations to fast-track managers into executive positions, in the wake of the new democracy.

Therefore, this study aims to assist the boards of directors of organisations and human capital executives with empirical evidence that would justify the need for adding coaching to their development and/or orientation programs for transitioning executives. The transitioning executives will understand the impact of having a coach to help them navigate the complexities of their new role. Coaches and coaching firms will have empirical evidence of coaching outcomes so as to show their clients that their efforts can translate into executives who are more resilient than those who have not been coached during transition.

1.7 Delimitations of the Study

The context of the study is executives who transitioned or are transitioning into executive roles between the ages of 25 and 45 to align with the Heyns-Nell et al. (2021) study. In this regard, ‘executives’ refers to senior levels of management up to the level of chief executive officer. It, therefore, excludes junior managers and non-managerial or technical staff.

The geographical location of the study is limited to young executives who are South African citizens. The study does include executives who transitioned into executive roles while they were based in other countries and were seconded to companies in South Africa, or had emigrated to South Africa after they had been promoted.

The study also includes executives who are self-employed and run their own businesses in order to understand their own experience with executive coaching as they became their own companies' leaders.

1.8 Definition of Terms

The table below gives a definition of terms that have been used frequently in this report.

Table 1: Definition of Terms

Career Coaching	
	Career coaching is a process that helps a client regarding his/her career through guided conversation(s) using tools, approaches and theories that have been proven to give positive outcomes in an ethical manner (Yates, 2013).
Coaching	
	Downey (2014) says coaching is an art that is used in the facilitation of the learning and development of another. For Rogers (2008), coaching effectiveness is when the learning outcomes are client-driven and achieved in a quick and sustainable way, using all of the client's potential.

Executive Coaching
Bawany (2018b) then explains executive coaching as a process between a coach and an executive working in partnership; it is personal and highly confidential and contains all the properties mentioned by Rogers (2008). In the definition offered by Kilburg (2000), he mentions the formalisation of the relationship in an agreement. He then introduces the concept of using behavioural techniques and mentions the triad relationship in that the effectiveness of these methods would benefit both the coachee and the organisation.
Fourth Industrial Revolution
The Fourth Industrial Revolution is defined as the usage of technology in all industries such that every market is affected by the usage of technology and the latter is used as part creative growth models of companies (Lee et al., 2018).
Transition
Watkins (2013) who has written widely on executive and career transitioning does not give definition of the word transition but gives the various types of transitioning as: "moving to a new industry or profession; joining a new company; moving to a new unit or group in the same company; being promoted to a higher level; leading former peers (assuming you have been promoted); moving from one function to another (e.g. sales to marketing); taking on a cross-functional leadership role for the first time; moving geographically; entering a new national or ethnic culture; having to do two jobs at the same time (finishing old role while starting a new one); taking on a newly created role (as opposed to an existing role); or, entering an organisation in which major change already is going on" (p. 38).

Young Professionals
Buxton's study and defines young professionals as those professionals who are/were aged between 21 and 35 (Buxton, 2020). However, Heyns-Nell's study extended this age range to 45 (refer Par 1.2 above) and for the purposes of this study, this will be the age range used to define the term, young professional (Heyns-Nell et al., 2021). This would be the age at which the latter were appointed to or transitioned into an executive role.

1.9 Assumptions

This study makes the following assumptions:

- The participants in this study will respond to the interview questions honestly and in an ethical manner.
- The participants will be sincerely interested in participating in this study and have no ulterior intentions like receiving payment or gifts for participating in the study.

1.10 Conclusion

This chapter introduces us to the purpose of the study, namely, the exploration of the impact of executive coaching on the performance of young professionals transitioning into executive roles. From this problem statement, the study derives its problem statement, the research objective with its three sub-objectives and accompanying research questions.

The significance of the study has been outlined as that of adding to the body of knowledge with a specific emphasis on executive coaching of young professionals irrespective of race or gender with the hope that this information may be used to persuade company boards of directors and human capital executives to implement executive coaching as a development tool for these young executives. The delimitations of the study is that it focuses on executives

who were at the ages of between twenty-five and forty-five when they transitioned and who have received formal executive coaching.

This chapter also gives a definition of various terms used within the study and the assumptions made regarding the participants with reference to issues of ethics, honesty and that there would be no exchange of financial and non-financial favours for the participation in this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

This chapter focuses on what the reviewed literature says about the key constructs of this study. The study further looks at literature in relation to the theoretical foundation of executive coaching, performance of executives, the three propositions made regarding executive coaching, and the conceptual framework of the study.

2.1 Background Discussion

The key constructs in this research study are executive coaching, young professionals, and transition. As the concept of coaching catches fire, literature is awash with what executive coaching is, and even here in South Africa we are seeing an emergence of studies and research papers by various authors on executive coaching. This chapter focuses on what literature has to say about the transition of young professionals into executive roles.

2.1.1 Executive Coaching

Authors on the subject of executive coaching agree that this is a new field (Bawany, 2018b). In explaining the phenomenon of executive coaching, Kombarakaran et al. (2008) state that it is a facilitative process that seeks to help an executive with self-discovery so that their performance is improved due to the resultant change of the behaviour and outlook in the organisational context, through the mechanisms of support and feedback. De Villiers and Botes (2013) accentuate the fact that executive coaching is a triad relationship in that it involves not only the coach and the coachee but other stakeholders as well, usually, the organisation that the coachee works for. They echo Kombarakaran et al. (2008) regarding executive coaching's contribution to the refinement of the abilities and outlook of the incumbent, but they add a mechanism of in-depth reflection as part of this facilitative process. They also agree that coaching yields positive outcomes.

However, Terblanche (2019) and Bawany (2018b) believe that for executives transitioning into new roles, this facilitative process has to be focused and niche so that it targets matters pertaining not only to the role, but the underlying problems that may come with being new in the role, like navigating company politics and, if the executive is not new in the company, the ability to extricate himself/herself from his/her old roles. They also point out that with the latter, it means that the executive must show up differently in the new role, which may not augur well with former colleagues and may give rise to tensions in the organisation. Therefore, a transitioning coaching process would need to be put in place for the executive to help him/her deal with all the challenges associated with the new role. In their study, N. H. Terblanche et al. (2017), found that the timing of this intervention is of essence as many of their subjects had stated that they had been subjected to executive coaching only when cracks had begun to show in their performance.

In citing reasons for executive coaching, Wise and Voss (2002) see executive coaching as a developmental tool to drive change in three(3) focus areas namely, at the intrapersonal level, the interpersonal level and the strategic or organisational level. Their study, they assert, shows that when change happens at these levels, it has the capacity to impact business results positively.

2.1.2 Young professionals

Bawany (2018a) highlights the challenges that, in the wake of fluidity in the global markets resulting in changing business needs, organisations need to formulate a matching response. He identifies a challenge of having to develop individuals to respond to this global demand and as such, sees Generation “Y” or “Millennials” as incumbents. Gen-Y or Millennials or Dotcoms are those people born between 1980 and 1994 (both years inclusive) and are between the ages of 25 and 40 (McCrindle, 2014). Although McCrindle (2014) used the

Australian context, he asserts that this data is reliable globally. He describes this generation as a generation that is technologically savvy with a focus on outcomes rather than processes. This generation tends to be socially awkward as they interact mainly with technology; yet they are clever and are able to multi-task.

In their study regarding the role of coaching in aligning these professional millennials, Solomon and van Coller-Peter (2019) explain that these millennials have been entering the world of work since the turn of the century in 2000. They quote a 2011 PWC report which expected that they would make up more than 50% of the workforce. Blatterer (2007) explains that the current youth, in their twenties and thirties, is born into a world of much uncertainty where "values are pluralised" and pathways of life are no longer predictable. Yet, he posits that this uncertainty typifies life and could be seen as offering flexibility that is accompanied by a plethora of possibilities.

According to Solomon & Van Coller-Peter's study, millennials have different work expectations, and according to a 2016 Deloitte report, in emerging markets like South Africa, 76% of millennials are not expected to stay for more than five years in an organisation (Solomon & van Coller-Peter, 2019). This is largely due to the fact that they have, what Solomon and van Coller-Peter call, a different "psychological contract" with the employer in that they expect a reciprocal reward for their efforts in the workplace. Since they were born into a technology era, they tend to be shrewd in their use of technology for their work output. The study also posits that millennials are seen as lazy and impatient; the latter being fuelled by their use of technology. The use of technology also makes them not eager to engage much in face to face conversations, and thus deem them socially inept (Gosse, 2017). However, despite their prowess with technology, they are found to have low self-esteem (Solomon & van Coller-Peter, 2019) and this is where coaching could play a role.

In looking at this depiction of the Millennials, it becomes apparent that development initiatives for an executive who falls within this generation, will have to be aligned to their way of operation. At the same time, coaching would assist the executive in realising the heterogenous nature of organisations and how they would have to accommodate all generations in their outlook and implementation of their strategies. In the South African context, the situation is aggravated by issues of racial disparities with underrepresentation of Black people in organisations, a matter that organisations have to contend with as well (Motsoaledi & Cilliers, 2012).

2.1.3 Transition

Transition is explained as a process where an organisation elevates a leader to a higher position and the incumbent is given more intricate responsibilities (Terblanche, 2019). Van Coller-Peter et al. (2018) show that transition manifests in the South African context because there is a relationship between “social transformation” and “corporate transformation”. Transformation is about redressing the imbalances brought about by the apartheid regime. This necessitates a robust program for quick development of leadership skills in view of an existing shortage of such leadership skills in organisations (Underhill et al., 2007). This leadership development is required for transitioning executives because they face numerous personal challenges when they transition into their new roles (Terblanche, 2019; Van Coller-Peter et al., 2018). These challenges are listed by Terblanche (2019) as:

- *Cognitive*: In transitioning, these leaders need to adopt new forms of thinking and be much more strategic in the way they perceive things.
- *Behavioural*: The leaders act differently as it pertains to issues like time-management and how they communicate with their stakeholders.

- *Interpersonal*: This requires leaders to network at a different level and be politically astute (Bunker et al., 2002, p. 10).
- *Psychological*: This speaks to a leader's emotional intelligence and their self-awareness.
- *Systemic*: This refers to their global outlook and internally, issues like the company's culture.

Dotlich and Cairo (1999) present another challenge, which is the requirement of the present day for leaders to act with agility and speed. They argue that transition is not a new concept. However, the lay of the land is different, in that nowadays, changes are rapid relative to the olden days when there was consistency within organisations. Riordan (2008) states that, in order to attain this required agility during transition, leaders need to embark on leadership transformation and build their leadership maturity and resilience.

As such, according to Terblanche (2019), leaders in transition need assistance and coaching is seen as one of the leadership development tools that promises to address this need (Bozer & Jones, 2018). Terblanche then advocates for what he terms, "transitional coaching" which he claims is a branch or subset of executive coaching. In a study done in 2017, it was found that most transitional coaching had happened when the executive was already in distress at which time it would sometimes be too late to salvage the situation (N. H. D. Terblanche et al., 2017). Therefore, the issue of timing of this leadership intervention or development becomes paramount as well.

2.2 Theoretical Foundation

2.2.1 Theoretical Frameworks

There are numerous theoretical frameworks and models that underpin executive coaching. Palmer and Whybrow (2019) identify, amongst a plethora of frameworks and models, six groups of approaches used by coaching practitioners in coaching and lists them as the following:

a) Behavioural and Cognitive Behavioural approaches

Behavioural coaching speaks to the coachees/clients through coaching, which ends with them building their own way of acting and rewarding themselves (Passmore, 2018). From there emerges a cognitive behavioural approach whose two basic assumptions, according to Palmer and Szymanska (2014), are that a person embarks on coaching because they either have under-developed skills for solving problems, or they are just not using those skills. They then introduce models like "PRACTICE" which is an acronym for: *"Problem identification, Realistic goal development, Alternative solutions generation, Consequence consideration, Targeting the most feasible solution, Implementation of chosen solution and Evaluation"*. Neenan and Palmer (2006, p. 110) introduce shorter versions of this model, namely "STIR " which stands for "*Select a problem, Target a Solution, Implement a solution and Review the Outcome"*; as well as the "PIE" model which is, *"Problem definition, Implement a solution and Evaluate the outcome"*. Palmer and Szymanska (2014) then introduced the ABCDEF of Coaching, developed from the Ellis (1962) ABC model. This model addresses issues of self-belief which could be blockers for a coachee and introduces behavioural strategies such as time management, assertiveness training, relaxation and mindfulness, imagery techniques, as well as thinking skills.

b) Humanistic approaches

The humanistic approaches are person-centred and take the view that the role of the coach is mainly that of a facilitator. The coachee is seen as the expert and the guidance from the

coach is merely to elicit behavioural change driven by the coachee's own internal motivation (Joseph & Bryant-Jefferies, 2018; Palmer & Whybrow, 2019).

c) Existential approaches

This approach stands out from other approaches as it touches on existentialism. It also draws on the Gestalt theory which is the lens into the phenomenological approach (Allan & Whybrow, 2014). Mindfulness is brought into the discussion (Spence, 2019).

McLean (2012) weighs in on the issue of mindfulness and states that a raised level of consciousness creates a basis for new choices and thus influences change in behaviours which would not have happened if awareness was not raised.

d) Being focused approaches

This approach uses Ontology – the study of 'being' and looks at how coachees use language and how they use their emotions to interpret their worldview. Its aim is to get to the core of a coachee's being and help the coachee look at alternative possibilities. (Shabi & Whybrow, 2018)

e) Constructive approaches

These approaches include coaching with Personal Construct Psychology (PCP), Narrative Coaching, Solution-focused Coaching and Neuro-Linguistic Programming. The PCP has themes of constructivism, humanism and contextual psychology (Duignan, 2018). Narrative Coaching helps the coachee to be aware that he/she has more knowledge and skills to be able to cope than they have imagined or ever investigated (Law, 2018). The Solution-focused Coaching is outcomes oriented and competence-based and central to it are the knowledge, the skills and the strengths of the coachee (O'Connell & Palmer, 2014). The last of these

approaches is the Neuro-Linguistic Programming, which is said to be more modelling than coaching (Grimley, 2007).

f) Systemic Approaches

Systems approaches comprise of Transactional Analysis, Systemic Coaching and Psychodynamic Coaching. In Transactional Analysis, the coach tries to link human behaviour and needs, and how these impact a coachee's effectiveness in the organisation (Wilson, 2018). With Systemic Coaching, the coach looks at what the coachee is bringing into the system he belongs to and this is studied using mapping which can unravel complex patterns that are at the root of the coachee's behaviour (Farr & Shepheard, 2018). The last one of the lot is Psychodynamic Coaching. Brunning (2018) argues for a systems-psychodynamic approach when it comes to coaching, because its basic principle is to consider the positives and the negatives in addressing a client's complex situation by looking at those things that pose as blockers to a client's success, whether they are at a conscious or unconscious level. Brunning claims that this is the differentiator in the systems-psychodynamic approach and its benefit is that the client (an organisational leader) is capacitated to be able not to use defence systems, but to be able to find root causes and thus be strategic in addressing issues in the organisation. She suggests that, as with any other relationship, a coaching relationship has a life cycle that consist of three stages, namely:

- The beginning – where trust is established.
- The mid-stage – where there is a search for perfection.
- The End stage – the relationship is terminated and an evaluation takes place (Brunning, 2018).

This suggested framework is aligned to what the GSAEC framework suggests for a coaching relationship (GSAEC, n.d.).

This study will adopt a constructivist approach, in particular, a combination of the Narrative and Solutions-Focused approaches. According to the constructivism approach, all the knowledge that a human acquires comes from the person's experiences (Andrew et al., 2019). The Narrative and Solution-focused approaches in coaching seek to bring to the fore the competence and the skills of the coachees as they work more towards the solution, instead of delving too much into the complexities of the problem at hand (Iveson et al., 2012). The combination of these approaches thus speaks to how the participant would have experienced coaching to develop their skills and competence to deliver superior results.

Having looked at the framework, the study will now explore the tools and techniques to be used within coaching frameworks. These tools and techniques come in the form of various coaching models that help structure the coaching (Stout-Rostron, 2018)

2.2.2 Coaching Models

There are numerous models in coaching literature, the most popular of which is the GROW model, also known as the ancestor of coaching models and developed by Whitmore (2009). "GROW" is an acronym for *"Goals, Reality, Options and Will"* and the model is about a coaching session/relationship addressing the coachee's goals, their reality, what options they have and what they will do following the discussions. Needless to say, most of the models proposed, such as the PRACTICE model discussed above, have their roots in the GROW model.

Another model is Ken Wilber's Integral model that allows one to probe deeply. This model has four quadrants that look at behaviour, the intention, shared perceptions, and systems. It also looks at the individual and the group setting, while taking a perspective on the subjective (I), the objective (We), the inter-objective (It), and the intersubjective (We), (Wilber, 2005). In terms thereof, one's thoughts are the basis of one's actions and what one thinks and does,

contributes to the group culture and it then becomes a system that people observe (Stout-Rostron, 2018).

Another popular coaching model is Scharmer's U-Model which speaks to the fact that a coachee may have old behaviours which he wants to let go off. (Scharmer, 2009). It is about self-awareness, sense of purpose and co-creation as the coach and coachee work towards the emerging future, while addressing blind-spots which are areas that the coachee may not be conscious of.

Also in the fray is the Hudson's conceptual model for change, which is also known as a Lifecycle / Cycle of Renewal model (McLean, 2012). This cycle also has four quadrants, the optimistic – go-for-it stage (phase one), the doldrums stage (phase two), the cocooning (phase three), and the getting ready stage (phase four). The importance of this model is for the coaches to identify where their clients are and work with them to get to phase one.

Finally, Eric Berne has come up with what is termed as Transactional Analysis, which is about three states of being, namely parent, adult and child (McLean, 2012). This model alerts a coach to identify the functional ego states that the client is in.

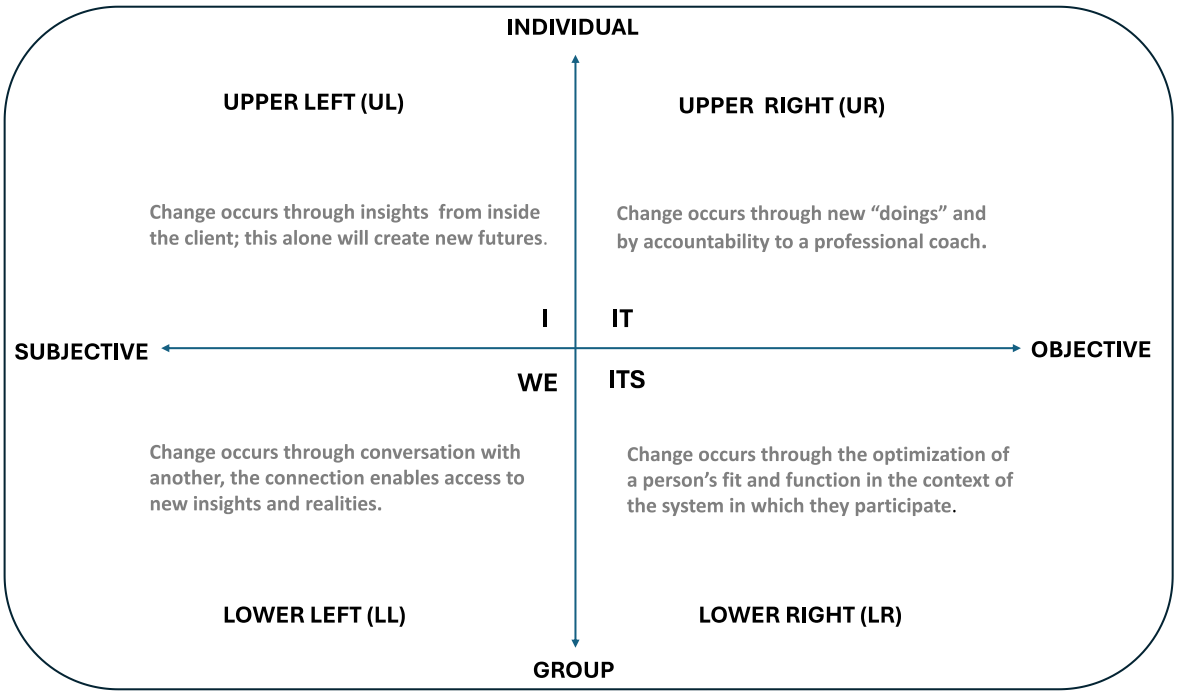
The above list of frameworks and models is not exhaustive, and a coach is encouraged to use multiple approaches as the situation demands. In the case of this study, because transition is transformative in its nature, Ken Wilber's Integral model as depicted in Figure 1 will be used as it addresses group and individual dynamics and their effect on one another.

Jakonen and Kamppinen (2018) also advocate for the Wilber's Integral Model and cite that the motive for their choice is that various coaching schools differ on the underlying beliefs regarding salient questions on change, i.e., the definition of change, what brings change about and how change can be sustained. The systemic nature of this model through its four quadrants, thus affords a tool that enables a coach to assist the coachee to understand the

changes from any of the perspectives, namely, the “I” (in the Upper Left quadrant), “We” (in the Lower Left Quadrant), “It” (in the Upper Right Quadrant), and “Its” (in the Lower Right Quadrant) perspectives. The “I” Quadrant helps the coachee explore changes that could be emanating internally; while the “We” Quadrant looks at changes that could be from interactions with others, the latter being important for a young transitioning executive who may need to make certain adjustments as he/she takes on a higher role. The “It” quadrant refers to the coachees own actions in bringing about change and the “Its” refers to the environment or system within which the coachees operate and how he/she fits and is integrated into the environment.

This model is thus a good fit for the study as it links back to the Systemic framework which attempts to show how a coaching approach of this nature is essential in coaching transitioning executives. In addition, it augurs well with the research paradigm chosen for this study (refer to paragraph 3.1), namely, the Constructivist paradigm which is concerned with and focuses mainly on the lived experiences of the research participant.

Figure 1: Integral Model: Common belief structures for cha



Source: Hunt (2009)

2.3 Performance of Coached Executives

Performance in this study relates to the extent to which an executive uses his skills and talents to execute the strategy of the organisation against set objectives. Performance is measured against key performance indicators and is reviewed at a periodic performance discussion with superiors to establish if the incumbent has met the organisation's expectations (Sala & Dwight, 2002) . Below is a discussion of the impact of executive coaching, its impact on the performance of transitioning coaches, and their coping skills in their new roles.

2.4 Executive Coaching and Performance

This section will look at what existing literature says regarding the impact of coaching in enhancing the performance of young professionals who are transitioning into executive roles.

There is a plethora of literature regarding executive coaching as a development tool to assist professionals transitioning into higher roles.

Weinstock (2011), in his study that examined the challenges facing nurses transitioning into leadership roles, states that coaching is valuable in helping a coachee to identify latent challenges that come with career advancement. He lists, as some of the challenges of career transitioning, matters like self-doubt, one pressuring oneself to hit the ground running and do things right, self-doubt, and the realisation of the meaning of the new role. He states that these are not overt but are latent factors that plague transitioning incumbents.

Regarding age, a study conducted by Tamir and Finfer (2016) looked at the responsiveness of executives to coaching according to their ages. Their study found that executives younger than the age of 40 were more focused on building their careers and did not embrace the concept of reflection time as much as their older colleagues who had been bruised by life and were more amenable to coaching. Their study recommended that, as part of their development, the younger executives need to be exposed to coaching for the express purpose of affording these young executives the opportunity to be more reflective.

In one of the more recent articles on the subject of young professionals, Buxton (2020) gives ideas on impactful coaching and states that it has to have certain characteristics including;

- being offered on a blended platform to address the young generation's aversion to face to face meetings;
- Flexibility to match the agility of this generation;
- Transparency in coaches themselves;
- Reassurance of their capabilities when they change jobs; and
- Skills to help them relationally.

Underhill et al. (2007) have found that measuring the impact of coaching poses a challenge due to its confidential nature and the subjectivity associated with this measurement, because it is related to issues such as the relationship between the coach and the coachee. In their study they found that one third of organisations do not formally measure the impact of coaching. They also found that organisations sometimes resort to using measures like retention of these executives.

This study hypothesised that young professionals who have received formal coaching perform well in the executive roles they have transitioned into. A study by Kombarakaran et al. (2008) showed that coaching works and that it had a positive impact not only on executives, but on other members of these executives' teams. Smith's study of resilience of executives who have been coached also shows a positive impact resulting in high performance for these executives (Smith, 2015). However, the study by Underhill et al. (2007) laments that companies are going against their own principles of measuring return on investment where there is a significant investment. Underhill et al. see this as opportunity for further research.

Despite the above sentiments, Parker-Wilkins (2006) has done a study measure ROI and the results of the study show that more than 50% of the leaders exposed to coaching had improved their performance, time management and relational issues.

What this current researcher has identified, is that the studies generally speak to the impact of executive coaching across the board, and do not isolate the impact of executive coaching on young professionals who are transitioning into executive roles.

Proposition 1: Young professionals who have received executive coaching perform well in the executive roles they transition into.

2.5 Executive Coaching and Coping Skills

This section of the study looks at literature regarding the role of coaching in assisting young professionals to cope with the demands of transitioning into executive roles. Buxton (2020) states that young professionals are finding themselves in positions that they did not ask to be in as they get promoted into these huge roles, and they are therefore, forced to find ways to cope. He identifies one of their coping mechanisms as coming up with suggestions when they themselves are clueless.

Emotional fatigue in executives is also cited as a negative contributor to the ability to cope with their highly demanding jobs. This occurs as a result of executives having exhausted all their emotional resources in trying to meet the performance outputs of the organisation. The drawback is that some executives opt for emotional-detachment as a mechanism to counter this emotional fatigue, and this has negative results for these executives who have no attachment to, or any connection with their team ((Brooks et al., 2023).

Smith's study on the resilience of executives who had undergone coaching shows positive results and she asserts that there are five areas where participants were assisted. These are: believing in themselves, learning new techniques of self-awareness, having a global perspective, relations with others, and providing incumbents with a space to think. (Smith, 2015).

The Parker-Wilkins (2006) study on Return On Investment from coaching interventions, also infers on improved coping skills of leaders, in that there was a high retention following coaching interventions.

The study hypothesised that young professionals who receive coaching cope well with the requirements of their new responsibilities in the executive roles that they transition into. The proposition generated from the question of young professionals coping with transition into executive roles, is that boardroom dynamics require a level of maturity that can only be achieved through acquisition of coping skills through coaching. The aforementioned literature does show that resilience is built through coaching and the inference is that with strong resilience, an executive has better coping skills.

In a mixed methods study by Grant et al. (2009) they had found that coaching had a definite impact on coached executives in that they had better workplace well-being, more resilience, reduced anxiety and increased goal-attainment. However, their study did not show any difference in the stress levels. The implication of the latter is that, while stress levels were still high as is inherent in these roles, the coached executives were able to cope better with these high levels of stress.

Literature is not succinct on the coping mechanisms and the study will have to research how well coached young executives cope with transition. The aforementioned study by Smith does not show whether there was an observed control group who were not coached, neither does it classify the participants in terms of age. Therefore, we do not have a comparison with uncoached participants and neither do we have age classification. Nonetheless, literature attests to the value and efficacy of coaching in enhancing the resilience of executives.

Proposition 2: Young professionals who have received executive coaching cope well with the responsibilities of the new executive roles they transition into.

2.6 Executive Coaching and Decision-making Skills

There is not much literature that talks directly to the subject of the impact of coaching on the decision-making skills of transitioning executives. Decision-making literature is usually positioned as a subset of, and cushioned within executive performance studies. The literature mostly gravitates towards behavioural changes required in executives for them to be able to improve their decision-making capabilities. However, Heyns-Nell et al. (2021) and Nawab et al. (2021) have conducted studies on this subject. The former's focus was on obtaining neuroscientific data to evaluate the efficacy of coaching in decision-making for young leaders, while the latter's qualitative study focused on the use of coaching for improvement of leadership competencies through behavioural flexibility for effective decision-making.

The Heyns-Nell et al. (2021) study, a first of its nature, is of particular interest to this paper because its focus is on young executives between the ages of 25 and 45 who were put through what they term, "Strategic Leadership Coaching", over a period of two(2) months where their decision-making capabilities were evaluated using non-invasive EEG (electroencephalography) and other neuropsychological models . The findings of this study supported their hypothesis that, with increased coaching, the young leaders effective decision-making abilities is enhanced with improvements in decision-making turnaround times, in particular.

Longenecker and McCartney (2020) identify the alignment of the right behaviours as a benefit of executive coaching. They assert that, while executives may have been promoted because of their successful track record, as they climb the corporate ladder and as responsibilities increase and issues become more complex, a new set of behaviours is required for them to continue the success trend. The process of finding this realignment, they posit, can be daunting. However, it can be achieved through the facilitation of an executive coach. They

also identify one of the behavioural competencies critical to the success of an executive as making timely decisions.

Enhanced thinking skills, a requirement for effective decision-making, are a product of executive coaching. As these skills are developed, through the coaching process, they drive behavioural change and enable executives to be better leaders because in the process, they become more flexible in their approach, adopt open mindsets, and are able to value other people's opinions (Nawab et al., 2021).

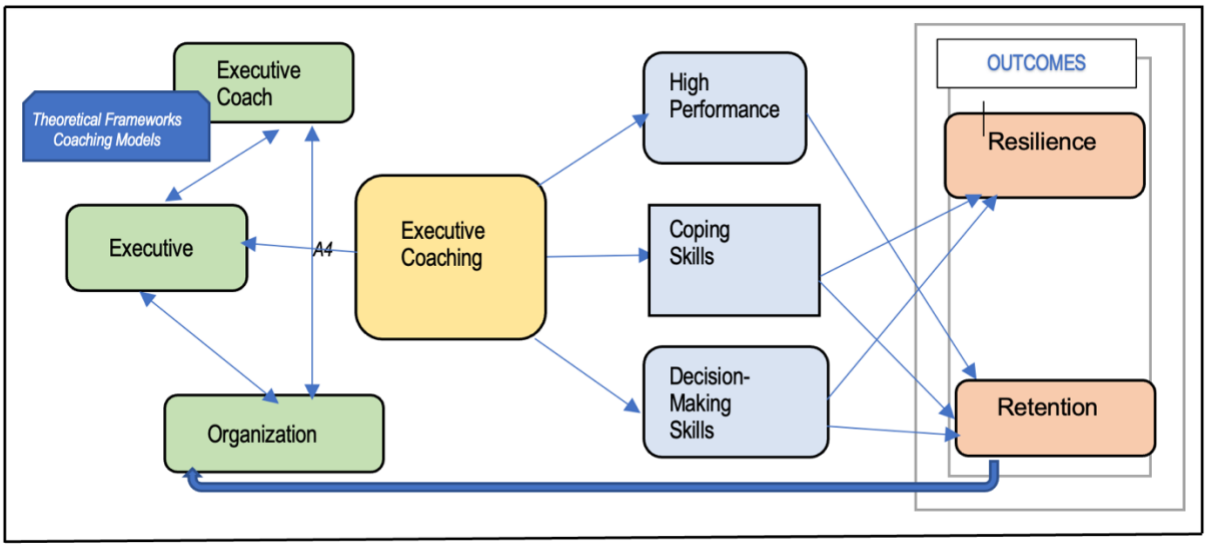
One of the attributes of decision-making skills is the ability to know which decisions to make. Newly appointed leaders are sometimes overwhelmed when they realise that not every decision can be made by them (Kaufman, 2006). Kaufman then advocates for executive coaching as a development tool that can help with the leader's style and flexibility that would result in better and more effective decision-making.

Proposition 3: Young professionals who have received executive coaching have enhanced decision-making abilities.

2.7 Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework in Figure 2 below gives a pictorial depiction of the afore-going literature discussion. The picture shows the Triad relationship between the Organisation, the Executive and the Coach. The Coach uses theoretical frameworks, coaching models and other tools to assist them to deliver coaching to the executive. Executive coaching is a factor, the effective facilitation of which causes high performance, coping skills, and the enhancement of the decision-making skill. High performance results in the executive being retained. When the executive's coping and decision-making skills are enhanced, their resilience increases resulting in them staying longer in the organisation and the organisation benefiting from these outcomes.

Figure 2: Conceptual Framework of Executive Coaching for Young Professionals Transitioning into Executive Roles.



Source: Researcher's own utilising reviewed literature.(Parker-Wilkins, 2006; Smith, 2015; Underhill et al., 2007)

2.8 Conclusion

This chapter analysed the literature associated with the research topic. The constructs associated with the topic were identified; whereafter they were defined in conjunction with the key concepts associated with them. Thereafter, an investigation of literature was done to analyse the theoretical frameworks together with the models largely used in executive coaching. The interpretivist approach has been chosen for the study in conjunction with Ken Wilber's integral model as the study seeks to capture the lived experiences of the participants. The model, because of its transformative view that it depicts, is more aligned to the transition phenomenon than the other frameworks and models.

The literature review of the three (3) research questions was discussed along with the literature review of the propositions linked to those research questions. What became apparent is that the literature has not focused on the impact of coaching for transitioning young professionals, nor addressed their coping skills in-depth. This allows for a study to be done to understand the impact of executive coaching on these young executives. Most of the studies have largely been around gender and race classification (Roche & Passmore, 2021) (Hofmeyr & Mzobe, 2012) (Khunou, 2019).

Lastly, the study looks at the conceptual framework and the literature that informs it. In Annexure 1, the researcher shows a graphic picture of the consistency matrix as well as the research questions and the associated propositions.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology

The objective of this chapter is to outline the steps that were taken by the researcher to answer the research questions posed in Chapter 1. The study has opted for a qualitative research approach in undertaking this study. Qualitative research is defined as research study that uses a true-to-life approach whose aim is to understand phenomena in specific settings and under certain contexts, such as the real-life setting where the researcher does not seek to manipulate what is being researched (Patton, 2001, p. 39). According to Patton, this type of research does not use scientific methods, but is arrived at by allowing the phenomenon that is being researched to unfold on its own. Golafshani (2003) states that the qualitative research approach allows for the use of underlying philosophical paradigms for a study and the comparability of research methods.

This chapter discusses the paradigm of choice and the research design that was used in this study. Also covered in this chapter is the choice of population and sample, together with the instrument used to gather data. Thereafter, issues of the validity and reliability of the data are discussed, followed by the aspects of ethics that have been considered in this study. It concludes by looking at the limitations of the study.

3.1 Research Paradigm

A paradigm is said to be “a set of beliefs” that directs action in a “disciplined inquiry” (Guba, 1990, p. 17). According to Guba, the characteristics of each paradigm are seen in the way the study responds to three (3) basic questions namely:

- What is the nature of the reality? (Ontology)
- What is the relationship between the inquirer and what is known? (Epistemology)
- How should the inquirer collect knowledge? (Methodology).

Mackenzie and Knipe (2006) state that a theoretical framework is referred to as a paradigm and determines how the study is done and the interpretation of the knowledge that comes out

of the study. The choice of paradigm then drives the objective, motivation and what is expected for the study. Therefore, the choice of paradigm should be the first step in doing a research study, before even deciding on the research methodology, literature to be looked at and/or research design.

For this study, the interpretive phenomenology paradigm has been chosen as it is generally associated with qualitative studies (Alase, 2017; Creswell, 2012; Mackenzie & Knipe, 2006). The Interpretivist/Constructivist paradigm originated from German philosophers, in particular, Husserl's study of phenomenology and interpretive hermeneutics. The afore-mentioned authors agree that the Interpretivist /Constructivist approach to research has the objective of understanding the human experience and there is a heavy reliance on the participant's views, yet the researcher's own background could have an impact on the study.

According to Creswell, a constructivist researcher, in general, does not start with a theory (as in post positivism). The researcher rather generates or develops a theory inductively, while studying and ascribing meaning to the patterns that develop throughout the research process (Creswell, 2003, p. 9). The constructivist researcher uses qualitative data collection methods and analysis or may use a mixture of both qualitative and quantitative methods (mixed methods). Quantitative data may be used in a way which supports or expands upon qualitative data and effectively deepens the description, a concept that Alase (2017) supports. The latter refers to the Interpretive Phenomenology analysis' "spirit and sensibility", because it is not preoccupied with theories but seeks to draw from a wide knowledge base so that it is able to examine and interpret the human experiences of the participants in the study. In this study, the objective was to answer the questions posed in Chapter 1 to understand the lived experience and the reality of the participants as it relates to the phenomenon of executive coaching. The study sought to understand, inductively from the interviews with the

participants, whether coaching has helped them perform better and whether it has enhanced their coping as well as their decision-making skills in the process of taking on executive responsibilities during their transition.

3.2 Research Design

Creswell and Creswell (2018) explain research design as an investigation within a research approach that supplies the researcher with a particular direction for processes in a research study, also known as strategies of inquiry (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005). These could take forms of surveys, questionnaires and/or interviews. In this study the latter was used, namely interviews with standardised open-ended questions which were asked of all participants. In qualitative research, interviews are the most widely-used method of collecting data (Creswell & Poth, 2016).

However, taking into account that this is a qualitative study to seek out each participant's lived experiences, follow-up questions differed with each participant to enable the researcher to get to the bottom of certain issues. Finlay (2009) postulates that the phenomenology in a phenomenological analysis is made apparent when the study shows a rich depiction of the lived experience of the participant and where the researcher has taken a special, open attitude which, at first, avoids importing external theories and frameworks and does not judge the realness of the experiences.

The questions were standardised and the same questions were posed to each participant with the scheduling, i.e. the ordering of the questions being the same for every participant (Seale, 2018).

For convenience, where there are time constraints and where participants are geographically not in one place, interviews using online techniques like Skype and Zoom can be utilised (Janghorban et al., 2014; Salmons, 2009). Owing to the fact that the study was drawn from South Africans in various provinces, all the interviews were conducted and recorded using online methods of the candidates' preference, including but not limited to Zoom, Microsoft Team and Webex. Janghorban et al further argue that online interviews (in their case, Skype) also offer the same authenticity that physical interviews offer for reading non-verbal cues. Once completed, these online interview recordings were transcribed for record purposes.

3.3 Population and Sample

3.3.1 Population

The population of this research is based on South African business executives, who work or have worked in South Africa and at the time of transitioning into executive roles, fell within the youth demographic of 21 – 45 years in age, in line with the definition given in Chapter 1. The population considered executives in JSE-listed and non-listed entities, government and non-governmental entities and non-profit companies to allow for representation of all business entities and to ensure a larger pool of participants. The 2021 second quarter labour report from Statistics SA, gives a management population of 1,4 million, an indication of how many managers are currently in the workplace (StatisticsSA, 2021). Price Waterhouse Cooper put the number of executives in all the 285 JSE-listed and Alt X companies at 725 (Smit, 2021).

The population does not have a gender or racial bias. However, questions of gender and race were asked as part of the demographic information collected in order to ensure the diversity of participants.

3.3.2 Sample

Authors do not seem to agree on the number of participants that would make a good sample for a qualitative study. Green (1991) cites that there are differing opinions regarding the acceptable number as a rule of thumb. Alase (2017) suggests a number of between two (2) and 25 participants who have a homogenous experience of the concept or phenomenon that is being studied, while Creswell and Creswell (2018, p. 262) state that the number is suggested by the nature of the qualitative design chosen for the study. Thus, for phenomenology, they suggest a number of between three (3) and ten (10) participants. They argue that issues of saturation come into play where beyond a certain number, there is no real value derived in the information that would be forthcoming from the participants.

For this study, a sample of seven (7) participants has been used for in-depth interviews and for the purpose of affording participants adequate time to delve deep into matters that may speak to their experiences of coaching during their transition period. Most of these participants were accessed through the researcher's networks and there is an element of backyard research where some of the participants are from companies / organisations the researcher has worked for. Creswell and Creswell (2018, pp. 260-262) warn against "backyard" research where the researcher gets participants from the organisation they work for, as this may lead to bias. In this study, this number has been kept to only three (3) such participants whom the researcher worked directly with.

This sample was also drawn from organisations with a preferably national footprint so that the experiences of executives are not limited to one (1) or two (2) provinces. After choosing the companies, the sample gravitated towards the executives who were appointed into senior roles when they were between the ages of 25 and 45 to ensure that the study targets the correct sample. The challenge encountered is that smaller or provinces perceived as less economically active, were not able to yield the required participants as most companies have

their head offices in the big metropolitan areas like Johannesburg, Cape Town and Durban. However, the researcher managed to get a participant who was based in Gqeberha in the Eastern Cape province.

3.4 The Research Instrument

The instrument used in this study is an in-depth interview with ten (10) standardised open-ended questions (excluding demographics) using an interview guide, a template of which is attached as Annexure 2. Patton (2014, p. 74) explains that interviews are the prime method in which qualitative researchers seek to understand the "perceptions, feelings, experiences, and knowledge of people" because they are a probing and deep process, and not just open-ended questions on self-administered questionnaires. He suggests a guide for settings where there are time constraints and adds that it is the basic tool for validity and reliability because all participants are asked the same questions (2014, p. 644). The targeted participants in this study are busy executives and as such, this study made use of an interview guide in order to conserve time and to ensure that the discussions are streamlined. The interviews were conducted through an audio-visual means. A number of between 5 and 10 questions is suggested by Creswell and Creswell (2018, p. 266). On completion, these interviews were reduced to writing into interview transcripts with the help of the Zoom transcription program and manual intervention as some of the responses were either in African languages or Afrikaans. The participants were given an opportunity to liaise with the researcher if they found the need to give more inputs to the conversation after the interview. This would be done via email or WhatsApp / text messages so that there is a record. However, there were none forthcoming.

Furthermore, the participants were requested to sign a consent form that makes an undertaking to protect the information and use it for research purposes only. The wording of the consent form appears in Annexure 3.

The first seven (7) questions in the interview guide are personal information and demographic questions and the last ten (10) are the interview questions regarding the participant's coaching experience. These demographic questions, classified as categorical (qualitative) variables, were included to ensure that the population is representative and not from a singular gender or race group (Pousa & Mathieu, 2014). However, as in the study by (De Haan et al., 2009) these variables may be used to establish if there is a correlation between them and both the dependent and independent variables, a fact that is important in the South African context where gender and race disparities are matters of national interest (Stout-Rostron, 2018). This set of questions also helped in ensuring that the participants are in the correct population i.e. they are or have been in executive positions, and indicated the age at which they were appointed into these positions (Pousa & Mathieu, 2014). The results of the study do show that the participants are a national representation and come from various provinces of South Africa.

The Interview Questions in Block 3 sought to understand how the participants came to the conclusion that they needed to undergo a coaching process and what their expectation of this process was. This gave an indication of how they had viewed their performance, their coping skills and decision-making skills before they embarked on this process and what gaps they had hoped the coaching process would fill.

The next four Questions in Block 4 were about the dependent variables linked to the sub-objectives, namely, the impact of coaching on performance and coping skills respectively, as

experienced by the participants. This block was addressing the independent variable of the coaching intervention received at the time of transition and it focused on the impact of executive coaching in enhancing their leadership abilities as well as their coping and decision-making skills. Smither et al. (2003) utilised this construct in establishing the effectiveness of coaching and observing the coached and those who had not received coaching in their study.

Block 5 then delves into what the participants perceive as the success factors of the coaching process. It also calls on the participant to state where they could have encountered problems during the coaching process. This section also affords the participant an opportunity to volunteer any additional information that could be helpful to the researcher in understanding the impact of coaching for these young executives.

The questions in the interview guide are in English and will be kept simple in order to avoid ambiguity and misinterpretation by the participants. It is to be noted that some participants would respond in some South African language from time to time. The researcher ensured that those responses are translated into English.

Refer to **Table 2: Interview Questions Summary** below.

Table 2: Interview Questions Summary

TABLE 2: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS SUMMARY								
High-Level Factors	**Indicators/ Dimensions**	**Section**	**Question #**	**# of Items/ Questions**	**Research Question Linked to**	**Variable (IV/DV/CV)**	**Scales**	**Sources**
Introduction								
Selection Criteria and Classification	Individual Personal Data	B1	1-3	3	n/a	Categorical Variable	Nominal	(Pousa & Mathieu, 2014)
Demographic data	Executives, Board Members, Heads of Organisations, Retirees	B2	4-7	4	n/a	Categorical Variable	Ordinal	(De Haan et al., 2009) (Pousa & Mathieu, 2014)
Pre-Coaching Experience	Motivation for Coaching	B3	8	1	1.5.1	Dependent Variable	Ordinal	(Kombarakaran et al., 2008) (N. H. Terblanche et al., 2017)
	Expectations of Coaching Outcomes		9	1	1.5.2	Dependent Variable	Ordinal	(Kombarakaran et al., 2008) (N. H. Terblanche et al., 2017)

TABLE 2: INTERVIEW QUESTIONS SUMMARY								
High-Level Factors	**Indicators/ Dimensions**	**Section**	**Question #**	**# of Items/ Questions**	**Research Question Linked to**	**Variable (IV/DV/CV)**	**Scales**	**Sources**
Coaching Experience	Impact of Coaching on Performance	B4	10-11	2	1.5.1	Independent Variable	Ordinal	(Smither et al., 2003)
	Impact)O of Coaching on Coping Skills		12	1	1.5.2	Independent Variable	Ordinal	(Smith, 2015)
	Impact on Decision-Making Skills		13	1	1.5.3	Independent Variable	Ordinal	(Heyns-Nell et al., 2021)
Perceived Success	Coaching outcomes/benefits	B5	14	1	1.5.1	Dependent Variable	Ordinal	(Underhill et al., 2007)
	Success/Effectiveness of Coaching		15	1	1.5.2	Dependent Variable	Ordinal	(Kombarakaran et al., 2008) (Underhill et al., 2007)
	Challenges during Coaching		16	1	1.5.2	Dependent Variable	Ordinal	(Grant et al., 2009) (Tamir & Finfer, 2016)
	Other inputs		17	1	n/a	n/a	n/a	n/a
				25				

3.5 Procedure for Data Collection

Data collection was done through in-depth interviews made up of standardised open-ended questions, as proposed in 3.4 above.

The participants were sourced through personal networks, the MMBEC cohort and former colleagues. A challenge that was encountered, was that of finding the time for these in-depth interviews considering the busy schedules of the executives, some of whom are young mothers. In the case of one participant, breaks had to be taken often for the young mother to attend to her new-born baby. However, largely, the participants were requested to choose a timeslot most suitable for them and these interviews were mostly conducted virtually, with some taking place after hours.

3.6 Reliability and Validity

Creswell and Creswell (2018, p. 274) highlight that validity and reliability in qualitative research is different from quantitative research. Validity is about checking for accuracy using certain procedures and reliability is about a research being consistent in their approach across various researchers. Kirk and Miller (1986, p. 20) define reliability as the extent to which the finding is "independent of accidental circumstances" of the study, and validity is the extent to which the finding is "interpreted in a correct way".

3.6.1 Reliability

Golafshani (2003) posits that reliability is a concept used in quantitative research to test or evaluate the quality and the replicability of a research study. However, it can be used in qualitative research as well. However, in this case, trustworthiness of the study is the essence of reliability. Also, good quality in a qualitative study would mean that the evaluation or test generates an understanding of concepts that would otherwise be confusing. Patton (2014) argues that reliability in quantitative research has to do with the accuracy of the instrument,

while in qualitative studies, it has to do with the quality of the inquirer (the researcher) taking into account things like researcher bias, the influence the researcher has on the participants, and the manner the research conducts the inquiry. Patton further states that the challenge in qualitative research is that of separating the noise from the signal, the noise being the copious amounts of data to be sifted through in the analysis, and the signal being the themes that develop during the process of analysis. The human factor also plays a major role as analysis also depends on the inquirer's experience, insights and intellectual capacity. However, researchers are encouraged to look into guides offered by various authors for ways to ensure that the study still remains replicable. In pursuance of the afore-going, this study has ensured that issues of researcher bias, influence, and reflection will be disclosed so that the evaluation incorporate these. (Lincoln & Guba, 2004) assert that reliability can be paralleled to dependability and its focus is on the researcher in making sure that the study makes logic sense, is documented and can be traced. Further, they argue that owing to the afore-going, reliability is dependent on validity which will be discussed below.

3.6.2 Validity

Validity in qualitative research is different from what validity in quantitative research tests. Guba (1990) argues that validity in qualitative research is social construct and it finds its basis in the constructivist/ interpretivist paradigm. Various authors seem to concur that in qualitative studies, validity is about rigour and trustworthiness of the study (Golafshani, 2003; Patton, 2014). Guba parallels internal validity (from quantitative) to credibility (qualitative) and says this assures a "fit" between the participants' views of their life experiences with the researcher's reconstruction of these experiences. External validity, in turn, is paralleled to transferability where the researcher provides the reader with enough information for the latter to be able to assimilate or transfer the findings of the case study to other cases.

3.6.3 Objectivity

Qualitative research by its nature encourages subjectivity and the latter is characterised in how the research topic for a study is chosen, how the hypotheses are formulated, how methodologies are selected and how data is interpreted (Ratner, 2002). In fact, the researcher is encouraged to articulate his/her own objectives and the values he/she brings into the study. According to Ratner (2002) this raises a question of whether a qualitative study can be objective, when it is, by its very nature, subjective. He argues that, while subjectivity is unavoidable, objectivity can be found in qualitative studies and an advantage of recognising subjectivity in a study is that it helps one to establish whether it facilitates or hinders objectivity. He further states that in qualitative studies, objectivity and subjectivity are integrated because objective knowledge necessitates “active, sophisticated subjective processes”, i.e. analytical reasoning, insight, logic and the ability to separate essence from the apparent (Guba, 1990).

In this study, the researcher made a concerted effort to establish checks and balances for the evaluators, allowing them to critique the reasoning and logical deductions based on the participants' responses. This was done using the data analysis methodologies outlined in Paragraph 3.7 below.

3.7 Data Analysis

Data analysis in qualitative research is defined as a “systematic and essentially taxonomic process” for arranging and classifying data which has been collected (Green et al., 2007). According to Green, et al, a well-written research paper has four (4) key steps, namely, data immersion, coding, categorisation and thematization. Green et al and Creswell and Creswell agree that there are steps involved in data analysis. The researcher has used the Green et al. (2007) analysis process, as it contains the same factors as the one presented by Creswell and Creswell.

3.7.1 Data Immersion

With regard to immersion, these authors suggest that it is advisable, where possible, for the data analysts to be part of the interview process so that they are able to internalise and get context. Immersion also means that the interview transcripts are read over and over again and the recordings watched or listened to numerous times in order to gain an understanding of both the researcher and the participant's role in the interview. For this study, the researcher personally undertook the analysis and was the person conducting the interviews with all the participants, taking notes during the interviews. The researcher also prepared the transcripts and summarised the interviews on Excel which allowed her to be fully familiarised with the data and the responses of the participants to the interview questions.

3.7.2 Coding

Green et al. (2007) explain coding as a second process in qualitative data analysis and it involves the interrogation of arrangement of information that is in the dataset. For Creswell and Creswell (2018) it is the third step. The researcher then assigns tags to blocks of transcripts and puts descriptive labels to these tags. These labels are called, "codes"; but this is done with clarity of mind of the context of the interview data. The process may involve predetermined codes, or the researcher may develop their own codes; or use a mixture of both.

Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggest online tools to assist in coding of the data that has been collected as manual coding could be tedious especially where data is voluminous. However, researchers like Meyer and Avery (2009) acknowledge the research analysis problem created by the need to track participants responses in overwhelming amounts of data, but they support the use of the Excel program despite the fact that this programme is generally used in

quantitative studies. This, they assert, can be done by transposing information from other programs like Word and creating codes on Excel as the latter is also able to process copious data amounts and provides diverse presentation methods. Ose (2016), a proponent of this, suggests that if there are four (4) or more interviews, this is an ideal way of analysing data because the objective of a qualitative research is not to do number crunching on qualitative data, but to rearrange these large amounts of collected qualitative data. For this study, Excel was used to summarise the responses of the participants to the questions and codes were generated from those summaries.

3.7.3 Categorisation

The coding process in this study revealed patterns or words that were prominently used by the participants which prompted the categorisation of these words or statements, and this led to the emergence of themes. Green et al. (2007) explain the process of categorisation as a process whereby data is re-examined and the codes linked in order to see coherence in the phenomenon that is being studied. Outliers when detected necessitate that data be investigated further to see points of dissention amongst the participants. A point of saturation is reached when categories reach a point where they are coherent and can be explained.

3.7.4 Thematization

This process according to Green et al. (2007), is the final step in data analysis and involves the identification of themes from the categories, explaining them (description) and interpretation of issues under investigation. The process is about testing the data in line with the theoretical concepts linked to the study. It is a process that enables the generalisability of the findings of this study. For Vaismoradi et al. (2016) what is of essence in the analysis is that subjective meanings given by participants as well as their social reality are properly expressed. He further describes a theme as a group of ideas that keeps being repeated and

thus allows a researcher to answer the research question. This group of ideas has codes that have similar points of reference with a high propensity of generality that is able to unify them towards the research topic.

What Green et al lament is that some researchers end their studies at description level and do not delve further into the interpretation of these themes. According to Vaismoradi et al. (2016) the key characteristic of the process of theme analysis is that codes are processed systematically, their meaning is examined, and the social reality is described using a theme. This study attempts to follow through after coding by identifying developing themes and giving interpretation in Chapters 4 and 5 in relation to the coaching theoretical framework, as it relates to young transition executives.

3.8 Ethical Considerations

Bell and Bryman (2007) list eleven ethical considerations when researchers undertake studies as harm to participants, dignity, privacy, informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, deception, affiliation, honesty and transparency, reciprocity, and misrepresentation. In observance of the afore-going, the rules of the University of the Witwatersrand governing ethics in research were followed in every way, in that this study only began after the approval of the Wits Business School's Post Graduate Committee (PGC) had been obtained. The school's requisite ethics form was also completed.

Also, in the light of the recently promulgated Protection of Personal Information Act, confidentiality is of essence and all the participants were assured that their information would be used solely for research purposes, that the interviews will remain anonymous and that the necessary precautions will be taken to conceal personal information that may surface during the interview process ("POPI Act," 2013).

There were no instances where institutions or company approval was required for any of the participants and to a large extent, company names were not mentioned in order to avert the requirements of the POPI Act, which make it imperative for persons not to divulge information without the knowledge of the parties concerned. However, personal consents were obtained via email and do highlight the fact that the participants are under no obligation to partake in the study, that their responses would not be divulged to anyone except the University personnel, and that the information would be used solely for research purposes. Similarly, they were assured that their personal information would not be divulged in the research paper.

The anticipated challenge was in the participants not being at ease with divulging some information. In this regard, constant reassurance was provided during the interviews about the privacy of the study when such discomfort was noted.

The study is inclusive and does not exclude any person on the basis of race or gender bar the exclusion in terms of the limitations of the study regarding age because the study is aimed at participants who received coaching as young emerging or transitioning executives.

Although Creswell and Creswell (2018) suggest that there could be instances where gifts could be given to participants, in this study, no reciprocal benefits will accrue or have accrued to the participants for taking part, either by way of monetary or non-monetary awards or gifts.

The privacy and dignity of all involved participants have been upheld and information was communicated in an honest and transparent manner so that the participants did not feel that they may have been misled or deceived in any way.

3.9 Limitations of the Study

The limitations identified in the study are as follows:

- One of the limitations of this study is that the number of participants who had been coached as young transitioning executives was low because with executive coaching being a new or recent phenomenon, there are few executives who had gone through formal coaching. A PWC study found the median age of executives to be 56 and this may mean there are few participants, especially coming from JSE listed companies (Jarvis, 2020). An earlier study by (Nyirenda, 2010) had found the mean age of directors to be 53.
- The emphasis on young transitioning executive reduces the sample considerably owing to the fact that coaching is considered a new concept in the South African boardrooms (Stout-Rostron & Van Rensburg, 2009). A later study by (Terblanche et al., 2019) showed that in 2019, the majority of coaches in Africa, had less than seven years' experience which was a year younger than their European counterparts. For this study this meant that retired directors could not be found to participate as formal coaching was non-existent when they transitioned into executive roles.

3.10 Conclusion

This chapter has been about the methodology employed in the research process. It delved into the research paradigm chosen, namely the Interpretive Phenomenology paradigm using the constructivist approach. The research design opted for was explained as well as the strategies of enquiry that were used.

The sample of participants was chosen from a population employees in JSE-listed, non-listed, non-profit companies, as well as public benefit organizations. The seven participants are young executives or those who were young in terms of the definition at the time that they transitioned into executive roles. These were subjected to semi-structured interviews

conducted through online platforms using an interview guide. There was no racial or gender bias. These participants were sourced from the researchers' networks, the Masters programme cohort and former colleagues.

While being mindful of the role of the human factor in data analysis, the researcher made certain that rules of reliability and validity were adhered to by ensuring that the analysis is logical, documented and traceable. Also, efforts were made to show the transferability of this study to other cases.

The chapter also shows that the analysis was objectively done through the process of data immersion with the researcher personally engaging with the data and coding it on an excel spreadsheet where it was categorised in order to reveal themes coming out of the study.

The ethical considerations were mainly about participants' information privacy and they were all requested to sign the university's consent form. No company approvals were necessary for this study.

This chapter further highlights the main limitations as being a low number of participants due to coaching being a recent phenomenon in Africa, and thus, few executives would have been exposed to formal coaching at the time of transitioning into their roles.

Chapter 4: Presentation of Findings

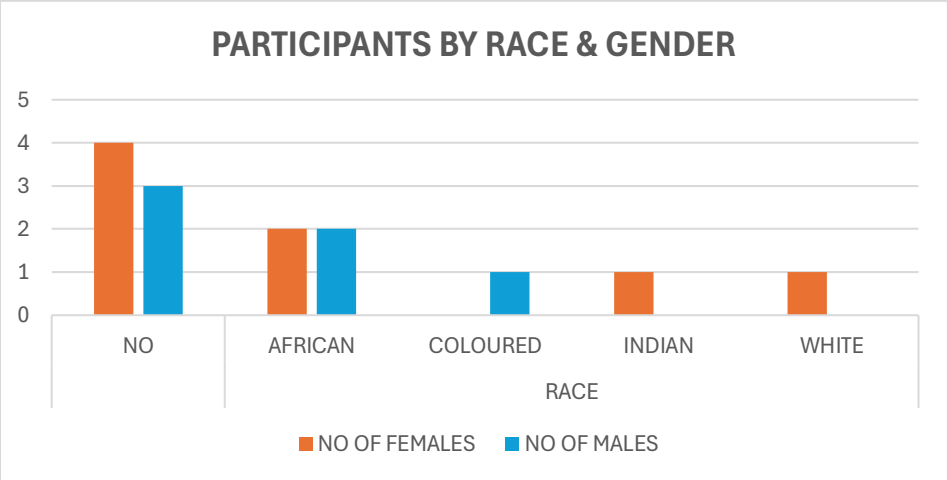
The objective of this chapter is to outline the findings stemming from the responses of the participants to the questions posed to them during the semi-structured one-on-one interviews held with them. The discussion will start with a brief overview of the demographics of the seven (7) participants followed by a short summary of the participants' experience, prior to embarking on a coaching journey. Thereafter, it will proceed to the findings pertaining to the two (2) research questions found in Chapter 2 of this study and give expression to how the researched South African executives experienced coaching during the time of transitioning into their roles. This will lead to the discussion on the themes that emerged from the interviews.

4.1 Demographics of Participants

Seven (7) participants were interviewed for this study, all of whom have held down executive/leadership roles and/or are still in those roles and/or progressed into entrepreneurship. The participants were drawn from all types of organisations, namely the corporate sector, the non-profit sector and public benefit organisations. All of these participants had received executive coaching as they transitioned, or after they had occupied their new executive positions.

The gender distribution is four (4) females, and three (3) males. Of the females, two (2) are African, one is of Indian descent and the other one is white. From the males, two (2) are African and one (1) is coloured. See Figure 3 below.

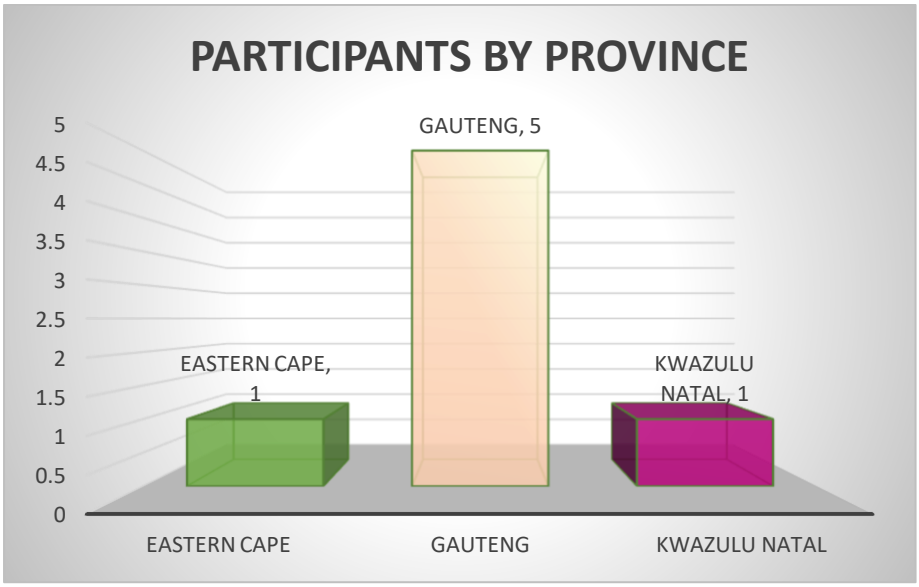
Figure 3: Participants By Race and Gender



Source: Author's own interpretation

While an attempt was made to source participants from all provinces, we could only find participants in three (3) provinces namely, Eastern Cape (Gqeberha), Gauteng and Kwazulu-Natal. Most of the candidates were from Gauteng Province and only two (2) came from other provinces. See Figure 4 below.

Figure 4: Participants by Province

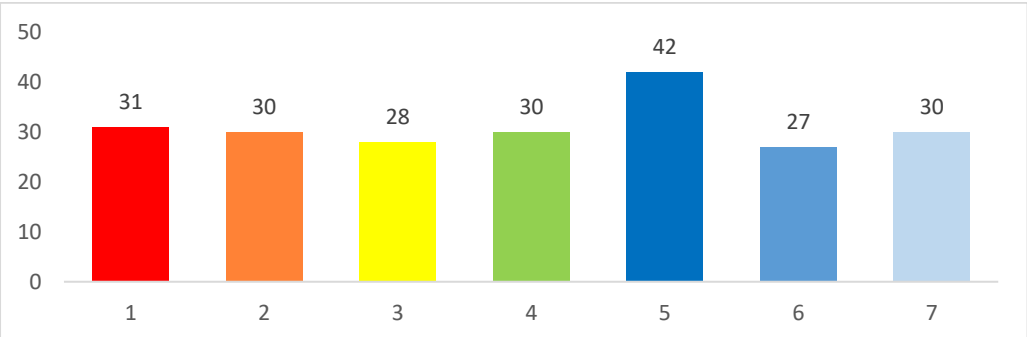


Source: Author's own interpretation

The objective was to get a diversified group, and this was achieved in that the applicants come from different sectors ranging from Information Technology (IT) sector (2), Health Sector (2), Finance and Investment Sector (1), Enterprise Development Sector (1) and Public Benefit Organisation (1). While some may have come from the same sector, they occupied different roles. With reference to the two (2) in the IT sector, one (1) applies her trade as a consultant, whilst the other works in the sales environment. For the other two (2) in the health sector, one (1) is a medical doctor while the other is a Human Capital Officer/Director. This added to the richness of the study and gave the researcher enough information to be able to establish emerging themes.

Owing to the fact that the focus of the study is on youth coaching, age was a critical factor in the selection of participants. However, this is not the current age of the participants, but the age at which they took occupation of a senior management or executive role. The lowest age at which a participant took on an executive role is 27, while the highest is 42 (Figure 5 below refers). The mean age is 31 and the median is 30, which seems to tally with Paragraph 1.2 of this paper where the documented young executives hailed by various media houses were placed at the ages of 30 and 31 and further provides some validation of the study with respect to this demographic.

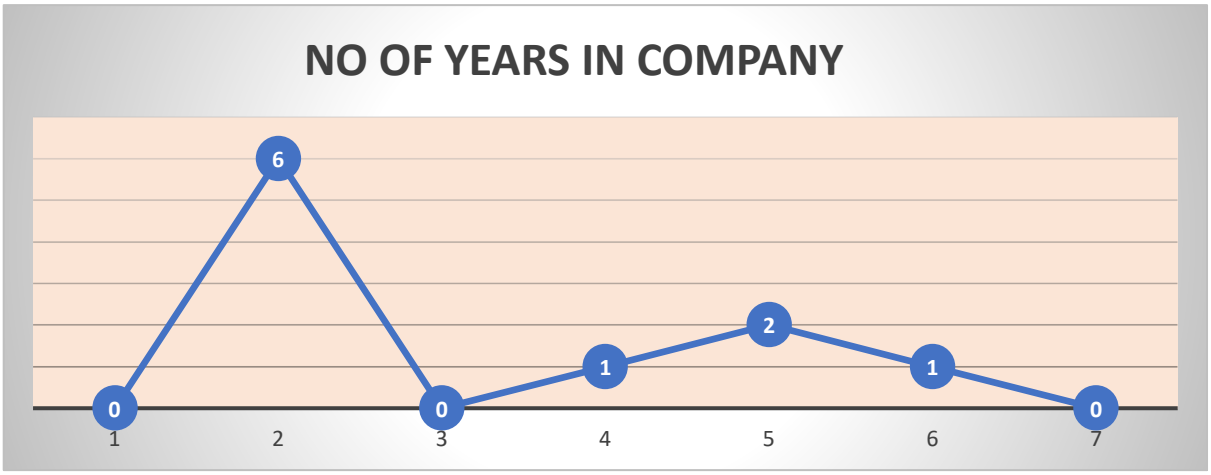
Figure 5: Participants' Ages at Time of Transition



Source: Author's own interpretation

Regarding time spent at the company or the organisation prior to occupying the executive role, as depicted in in Figure 6 below, three (3) of the participants came into the role from other organisations, meaning they came in as external recruits; two (2) had been with the company for a year; one had spent two (2) years with the company while the other candidate had been in the company for six (6) years before they were promoted to the executive role.

Figure 6: No. of years spent in the company prior to transitioning into exec role



Source: Author's own interpretation

4.2 Overview of Thematic Analysis Results

As suggested by Vaismoradi et al. (2016) and as discussed in paragraph 3.7 above, a thematic analysis of the data gathered from the semi-structured interviews with the seven (7) participants was done and out of it key or major themes and sub-themes emanating from the interviews, were derived. In addition to these key themes, some emerging themes were extracted from this dataset and these are tabled below:

Table 3: Key Themes

KEY THEMES			
#	***THEMES***	***No of Mentions***	***SUB-THEMES***
1	Personal Growth	23	- Self-discovery - Behavioural Change
2	Reflection	9	- Learning from Experience - Enhanced Decision Making
3	Effective Leadership	8	- Leadership Skills Building - Strategic Thinking
4	Self-awareness	8	- Recognition of Strength and Limitations - Alignment with Professional Roles
5	Professional Development	7	- Skills Acquisition - Career Transitioning
6	Career Development	5	- Career Advancement
7	Self-Improvement	4	- Skills Acquisition - Learning from Experience

Source: Author's own

Table 4: Emerging Themes

EMERGING THEMES			
#	***THEMES***	***No of Mentions***	***SUB-THEMES***
1	Experiential Learning	3	- Learn through doing - Opportunities to apply new skills in real world
2	Mentorship	2	- Complementary to coaching
3	Perspective Shift	2	- See challenges from different angles - Innovative problem-solving

4	Uncertainty	2	- Overwhelmed - Thrown in the deep end
5	Team Management	2	- Delegation

Source: Author's own

4.3 Pre-coaching Experience

The first two (2) non-demographic questions, i.e. Questions 8 and 9 in the research instrument (Annexure 2) were meant to set the scene and the tone for the interviews by enquiring about the participants' workplace or career journeys, and what led them to decide on coaching. The participants were then asked what they had expected the outcomes of the coaching interventions to be. The latter question would help in establishing whether the coaching intervention was seen as successful and whether it had met the participants' expectations.

4.3.1 Career Journey and Reasons for Seeking Executive Coaching

The interview commenced by asking each participant to talk about their career journey and the reasons why they had sought coaching. Responses to this question varied due to the differences in participants' careers and industries. However, there were two (2) occasions where the participants used the words, "thrown in the deep end". These participants had no prior experience in managing large teams. Participant 1 had just been a Sales Executive and was now a Business Executive with direct reports. Participant 6 had been a line manager with a small team and a particular area of focus, when he was given the whole operation to run with a massive budget. They articulated that they had been left to their own devices and had to find their way out, which led them to seek coaching.

The participant further illustrates this by citing a time when she had a problem with a serious client issue and her boss simply told her to manage the situation because that is why they had

appointed her. Participant 6, who had just joined the organisation as an outsider, still unsure of his capabilities as an executive, was also thrown into the deep end with much bigger responsibilities, i.e. taking care of an entire operation with an even bigger budget, in a foreign country, from just managing a small unit. For that reason, these participants had to find a coach to help them succeed in their new roles.

Participants 5 and 7 talked about being overwhelmed. Notably, Participant 5's sense of being overwhelmed came from the excitement of the prospect of the new role. However, the excitement quickly turned into trepidation at the realisation that he had not asked some of the key questions concerning his role and those areas were unclear to him. On the other hand, Participant 7, who had never managed people before and stepped straight into the new role, was overwhelmed by the prospect of the challenges associated with the new role because she was succeeding a much older and well-respected individual.

There is also mention of fear of the people who were superiors before, and were esteemed by the participants, but they now sat at one table as equals with the participants. The realization that the latter were now part of the executive team was daunting as they sought to find ways to liaise with these individuals at the boardroom level.

However, it was not only for the above emotive reasons that coaching was sought. Some participants sought coaching for "filling gaps" where they felt that they were not adequately skilled and/or had a weakness. Participant 3 wanted to strengthen his leadership skills as he was going to be at the helm of his organisation, a role that came with the responsibility of financial and human capital performance. Participant 7 was also faced with the prospects of being the leader of an organisation for the first time in her life. At that point she understood

that she needed guidance to harness all her previously acquired skills and align them with her strengths, while working on her shortcomings for her to succeed in the new role.

Another reason that was given by the participants is that of navigating their new roles. Some participants knew that they would be faced with a difficult task of introducing new ways of working and had to find ways to do that seamlessly.

In response to the question of whether the seeking of coaches was of their volition or whether it was offered by the employers, most of the participants stated that they had sought the coaches themselves. With some participants, the service is offered by their employers. With Participant 2, it is part of the company culture, but she had selected the coach herself. With another participant, coaching was offered by the employer, and she thought she would, out of curiosity, try it out.

Table 5: Pre-Coaching Experience: Reasons for Seeking Coaching

REASONS FOR SEEKING COACHING	
Lack of Support	**Participant 1**: "And I can't say that the company that I joined provided coaching. I was put on a customer site, and it was, "okay, there you go. Now, start working". And I had a team of about 42 people at the site that needed to be managed in different roles; and also having to manage the customers themselves. So, I think I was put in the deep end, and I was asked to swim with no warning, no training, no nothing. And I had to figure it out on my own". **Participant 6**: "I came in as an outsider and was given the role. They ended up throwing me into the deep end to lead the program; and knowing that I was still not sure of myself especially as I think

REASONS FOR SEEKING COACHING	
	as a leader and the second part as somebody who needed support on executing executive decisions - being able to because I was a line manager. I was just responsible for a particular area of focus. Now all of a sudden, I was responsible for the entire operation, including budgeting which was a lot of dollars".
Emotional Impact	**Participant 5**: "I think I was overwhelmed by excitement and opportunity, and there was a blind spot in asking some key questions. And I think once getting into the role, I actually realised that there was quite a lot of things that I was very unclear of and I had to go back and set up what I did." **Participant 7**: "I think I can start it off by saying it was very overwhelming in the beginning". **Participant 5**: And that was a challenge, because these were individuals that you kind of scared you when you see the executive team. And now I'm part of the executive team. So, how do I navigate those conversations?"
Self-Awareness	**Participant 3**: "Prior to that, it was more focused on leadership development, which was an area that has always been a big focus area for me because of the acknowledgement of the role that leadership plays in ensuring the success of organisations. And so, when I transitioned, I also saw it quite fit and important to be able to strengthen those capabilities specifically, because I would then be directly responsible for the financial and human capital performance of the organisations that I would then be running when I did the transition."

REASONS FOR SEEKING COACHING	
	Participant 7: Because, I just said to you now that I had not previously had a role that required me to really be the figurehead of an organisation, I basically knew from the beginning that I would need personal development. I would need to align all the skills that I had acquired, all my strengths, and acknowledgement of my weaknesses, in a way that would assist me in the new role.
Navigating Conversations	**Participant 7**: "… maintaining the old is easy, bringing in the new is hard. That's part of the reason why I needed a coach - how do I manage that? How do I navigate?" **Participant 5**: "And that was a challenge, because these were individuals that you kind of scared you when you see the executive team. And now I'm part of the executive team. So, how do I navigate those conversations?"
Company Culture	**Participant 2:** "And then I think when I started working with very senior people at a very early stage in my career, not only were they expressing that they have their own coaches and mentors, but they were constantly feeding to me the importance of me personally paying it forward. And I just thought that if I was not exposed myself to what coaching and mentorship entails (and you can tell me now if you refer to the two as synonymous or separately), how can I ever be in a position to coach or guide anybody if I had not received the same? So, that was my frame of reference." **Participant 4:** "… initially I didn't really think - I'm like, ugh, it's one of those HR things. But I took up the opportunity because I always like doing stuff and seeing what it's about".

Source: Author's own

4.3.2 Objectives or Expectations at the Start of the Coaching Process

The participants were asked what their initial objectives or expectations had been when they started coaching as part of the transitioning process. While there was an overlap in the responses of the participants, as with Paragraph 4.4.1, responses varied.

Some participants went into the coaching relationship wanting to be able to get different perspectives and insights from an objective viewpoint. Participant 6 and Participant 7 respectively agree with this sentiment, and they added that they wanted someone who would also forewarn them of dangers in taking certain decisions. Further, in seeking out a coach, they were looking for a professional who would bring unbiased perspectives and provide insights. The coach would be someone they could "bounce off ideas" to.

Another objective or expectation from coaching was to learn from the coach's own experiences and get guidance that would ensure the participants challenges are addressed, by means of the coach being a support mechanism to guide them through the process of finding solutions and overcoming these challenges.

The enhancement of leadership skills also featured in the responses of the participants. The responses ranged from the objective or expectation of expanding their leadership ability, to understanding strategic thinking in leadership and the right leadership style for delivering the requisite performance. There were also concerns about leading older people, former peers or seniors who are now subordinates and probably more knowledgeable than oneself. Another concern that had to be taken into account, is that this is a South African context, meaning leading a team with people of diverse racial groups.

Performance also featured strongly amongst the participants' objectives or expectations. The participants wanted to gain strategic thinking skills to be able to bring value to their organisations. A coach would assist them in reviewing and evaluating their performance and together they would explore ways to get the performance to the levels expected by their boards of directors.

Participant 3 mentioned that this also extended to team performance and Participant 6 was in congruence with that calling it "*leading from behind, so to speak, but making sure that things are getting done by making your work easier for your team members.*"

The response from Participant 1 was vastly different from the other participants' responses. She had expected coaching to be like mentoring and was surprised to find that not to be the case. She states that she was young and had not known the difference between coaching and mentoring. As such she was distressed to find that the two are not the same and with coaching, she had to still find the solutions herself. As such, she felt she was still on her own; yet she persisted until she understood the mechanics of the coaching process.

Table 6: Pre-Coaching Experience: Objectives when Seeking Coaching

COACHING OBJECTIVES / EXPECTATIONS	
Objective Viewpoint	**Participant 2:** "And to get that different perspective, you have to engage with another third person that is able to help you to decipher…So, it was that part and then the second part I would say is, any challenge that you experience in your leadership journey, whether it is a client personal challenge that you need to personally be responsible for moving through, if you don't know what the solution is and what the right way to resolve or overcome the challenge, you have to have the applicable avenue, I would say to understand in a different person's lens, how you can overcome the challenge that you are experiencing.

	Or else you sit with it. And I think it's like everything in life: you can sit with the challenge, and you can think that you are too small or too weak or too whatever that term is, to resolve that or overcome the challenge. But when you touch base with a professional who is able to help you through that challenge from a career perspective, you can really overcome it with great strength, because you have not only a different perspective, but you have that support mechanism that you can leverage." **Participant 6**: "As the relationship formalised into a coaching relationship, it was about also getting them to understand the business that I'm in and giving me insights from their perspectives - not just me bringing up the problems all the time; but them being able to say, "hey, foresight - have a look at this. Be aware of these kinds of things". So, it became more of a two-way relationship". **Participant 7:** "I wanted an objective viewpoint. I wanted a neutral professional viewpoint … I needed a sound(-ing) board, "this is what you are saying; this is what you want to achieve" and somebody who'd be able to say, "how are you accountable, how are you planning on doing these things?" And not just ask and not listen; but ask and be able to really take down what I'm saying and give me that professional insight of saying, "chances of that working are slim".
Learning from Coaches	**Participant 2:** "And if there was (sic) any gaps in my personal approach to a problem, I would love to understand how your (the coach's) experience and your life journey can help me to plug some of those gaps" **Participant 6: "**It's tapping into the experience not just to fix problems, but also to be able to guide and make sure that you remain on the right path and eliminate a lot of the challenges."
Leadership Skills Enhancement	**Participant 2:** "And I think it was because my objective was about growth - how do you grow beyond that role if you are not given different perspectives that make you question how you should be approaching things. So, it's just expanding your

	leadership ability and just having that broader frame of reference to refer back to when you have these challenges**.”**
Strategic Thinking	**Participant 3: -** “I'd always heard a lot around executives and leaders in organisations needing to be strategic thinkers. So, I firstly wanted to establish what does it mean to be a strategic thinker? And what does it look like practically - whether one is working in in a multinational organisation or in an SME environment, or even for public sector?
People Management	**Participant 3:** - “The second part was, what does then the management of people look like and what really is my own leadership style, as it relates to how I would want to contribute in various organisations that I would be contributing in?” **Participant 4**: “And so, my biggest concern was taking on leading a group of people that were my peers and some of them, actually, had been with MY COMPANY for longer than I had been. And to be frank, I also were worried about being a White executive in South Africa when I was competing with other Black doctors, some of whom I know applied for the position. And then there was one or two of the people that were my peers that were now going to be my subordinates, with whom I didn't have particularly good relationships.” **Participant 2:** “And for me that was quite important because of, as I said, it was just six years going into the workplace and then being in a role that required you to lead people that were way more experienced or older you than yourself. So, just coming from a position that you don't know everything for sure, and you need to be coached through certain things in life, it's just part of life and part of growth, I wanna add that.” **Participant 6**: “So, a lot of young managers feel that because they're young and they're managing older people, they have to throw their weight around to be felt or to be respected or to be listened to. I’d seen that happen a number of times, especially with my first employment… So, I wanted to avoid those kinds of calamities because they are emotionally taxing.”

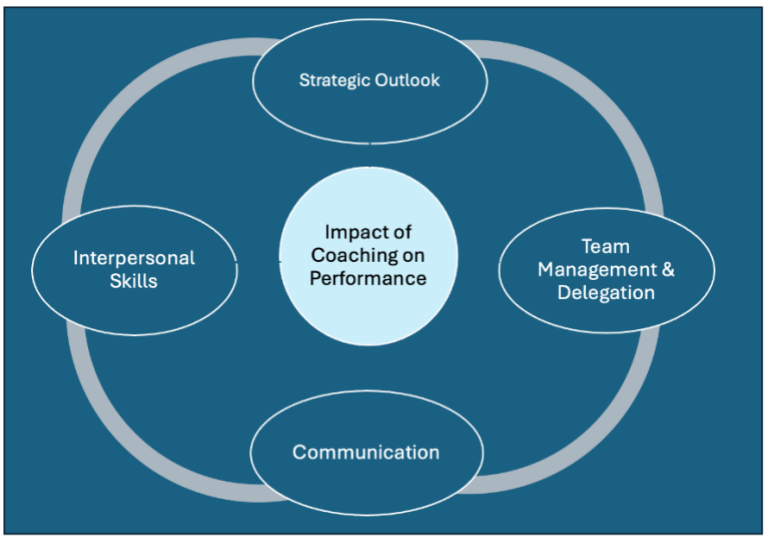
Performance Outputs	**Participant 3:** “And so, in this instance, that is, though those 3 were part of the objectives that I really wanted to understand: - Strategic thinking; what does it mean to manage people; and, of course, ultimately, how then, do I bring all of those elements together in a way that can deliver value for the companies that I’ve been involved in.” **Participant 7**: “But in a professional aspect and when you are looking at performance, performance also a big reason why I needed a coach - to be able to measure performance; to be able to measure and evaluate, because in the space that I'm in, the Board... you are accountable to the board, but to a certain extent your performance measurement is not at a level it ought to be.” **Participant 6**: “leading from behind, so to speak, but making sure that things are getting done by making your work easier for your team members.”

Source: Author’s own

4.4 Findings Pertaining to Executive Coaching and Performance

When the question about the impact of executive coaching on the performance of young professionals who are going into executive roles was posed, it was positive all-round. Whilst there were areas of agreement amongst the participants, it is apparent from the responses of the participants that each has been impacted differently.

Figure 7: Coaching Experience - Impact of Coaching on Performance



Source: Author's own interpretation

Participants 7, 5 and 2 attribute the strategic outlook they have acquired to coaching. They stated that they are comfortable with their competence levels, but it was the strategic lens that they needed to work on. The participants wanted to be able to service their clients at a strategic level without going into operation mode as would be expected of people at executive level. They felt they needed the right strategic tools and guidance to be able to take on the new roles, in the case of Participant 2, in readiness for a role in a new industry.

Another emerging theme from the responses of the participants is the impact of executive coaching on the participants' interpersonal skills. To that end, Participant 4 explained the difficult relationships she had had with one of her subordinates. However, once she had gone through coaching, she learnt to make herself vulnerable, engaged with the individual and they were able to bury the hatchet. For Participant 1 it was a case of learning not to obsess with numbers but try and understand the person first in order to be able to assist them at their level and she would then, as a leader, be able to create the right environment for her team to thrive.

Participant 1*: And, for you to be able to get the numbers, you need to know how the person works and what circumstances influence, how they work."*

Delegation and Team Management were also topical on the question of the impact of coaching, with participants seeing the virtues of coaching in helping them delegate better and allow the teams to do their work. Participants 4 and 7 had to relinquish the title of "runner" to that of executive and create enabling environments where team members could freely explore their skills. For Participant 4 it was particularly difficult because it was a natural reaction for her to get into rescue mode and find a solution for her unit's problems due to her extensive technical knowledge. Participant 7 was in the same boat and both participants learnt through their coaches to trust their team members without necessarily abdicating their roles. Participant 7 learnt to build a strength-based team and learnt to delegate effectively.

Participants also found that communication was an area impacted by the coaching intervention. For Participant 5 it was learning to communicate and have strategic discussions with fellow executives. Participant 7 had discovered that she was not getting the results from her team because she was not communicating at the level that her team were at. She learnt to adjust her language and found that the team responded better and delivered on the vision. Her coach had also helped her with resources that would help in improving her communication skills. In the case of Participant 4, coaching guided her for the difficult conversations that she sometimes needed to have with her team members taking into account that with some team members there was general hostility following her appointment.

In essence, participants found coaching impactful in the performance of their roles. The above list is not exhaustive as some participants found coaching impactful in personal growth, confidence boosting to make bold decisions, studying different concepts and applying them in

one's life, identifying pitfalls, knowing one's audience and packaging the right service for them, allaying of fears and having peace of mind to enable the participant to focus on the task at hand.

Table 7: Coaching Experience - Impact of Coaching on Performance

IMPACT OF COACHING ON PERFORMANCE	
Strategic Outlook	**Participant 7:** "So, one of the ways, I think, I mean this is my fifth year – going into my fifth year in this role; and when I look at all the decisions that I've made in terms of just strategy, it's definitely coming from the coaching aspect. Just on a strategic perspective and viewpoint..." **Participant 5:** "So, it was always important that the competence level is where it needs to be but also knowing that I also don't need to know everything, because I'm not executing. But I actually need to know where to fetch what, package it, and I can talk to it. So, if I need to talk to reward, I can talk to reward because I understand it. I don't need to be able to explain to them how we calculate certain percentages on pay scales. But I can be able to have a conversation with them, and be able to answer the questions, both at a strategic and technical level without going, you at an execution level." **Participant 2**: "But then you need the arsenal because you've got the tools, you've got the experience, and you've got the ability. You just need to know how to strategically leverage it. And I think that was what I needed guidance on: how to strategically leverage the right experiences, the right you know attitude, and the right tools to

IMPACT OF COACHING ON PERFORMANCE	
	navigate the newness of the role and the new industry, the new clients, the new expectations."
Interpersonal Skills	**Participant 4**: "I had some really difficult relationships with some of the people I was leading; and Person X, in particular, we had really big issues when I was in a research position. And with the coaching, I engaged with her, made myself really vulnerable, spoke about things that happened in the past and the two of us, I think, were able to work through that. And now have a really strong relationship. Well, we're not friends, but at a work level, I think we have a really strong relationship which I don't think I would have done - I don't think I would have managed it, had not been for the coaching." **Participant 1**: "So we tend to be focused, especially in the IT space, or in the Sales space - we tend to be focused on numbers and closing that deal, and we forget that there are people behind closing the deal, and there are certain things that you need to take into account. Not everyone comes from the same background, and not everyone has the same experience. So, coaching taught me to be able to know that there's more to a person than just a number. And, for you to be able to get the numbers, you need to know how the person works and what circumstances influence, how they work."
Team Management & Delegation	**Participant 4:** "I have this tendency if I see a problem I jump in to fix it because I can. I'm technically really good. In my organisation I know a lot because I'm so inquisitive. I made it my job to really know everything that happens here. And so, with the coaching I now step

IMPACT OF COACHING ON PERFORMANCE	
	back and try and create an environment that makes it easier for my team to do their jobs." **Participant 7:** "I could say that just how I've managed the team - team mastery, how we've managed as a team in the organisation, I take a lot of that from the coaching; just the people dynamic aspect of it, and the leadership dynamic. So, what I for instance, building a strength-based team comes from the coaching aspect because it's one thing to give an instruction that you hope everybody is going to follow, but it's another when you are able to identify the strengths in the team you have and then are able to then get the team to work towards something that you already know they can do and you can just better it." **Participant 7**: "So, coming up with roles was also a very potent thing that I was able to get done from the coaching, because I think my coaches kept asking me, "but why don't you just give people roles so that they know what's expected of them? … So, a lot of the things I used to do, what he said I did, because I was a runner. So, moving from being a runner to actually facilitating the running, is a very difficult transition. So, being hands on was not necessarily my role anymore in a sense. Yes, I had to be hands-on in certain areas but not like in the past. So, how to delegate - how to delegate effectively, and how to communicate well."
Communication	**Participant 7: "**The other place where it also helped me with, other than the teams, was in my areas of communication - how I communicate a vision in such a way that it's implementable. So, one

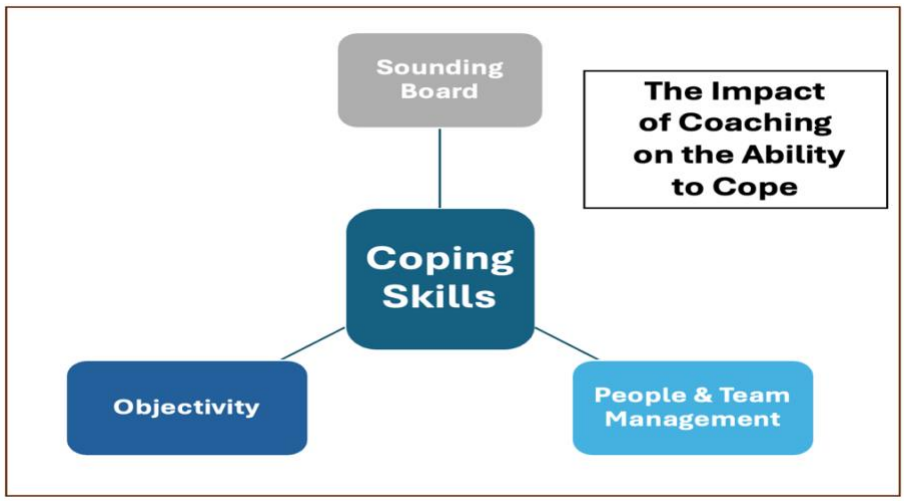
IMPACT OF COACHING ON PERFORMANCE	
	of the things that became a barrier to a certain extent was that sometimes I would speak in a language that I understand; like I know what I'm saying, but in order to be able to unpack it and say, "this is what I mean; this is how we are going to get it done. What do you think?", in terms of also involving the team. But my coach also helped me to get the right resources in terms of books; the right resources to look at in terms of helping me to communicate, especially in the areas of my weaknesses. **Participant 5**: "But I can be able to have a conversation with them, and be able to answer the questions, both at a strategic and technical level without going, you at an execution level." **Participant 4**: "But if I speak about the team that I was supposed to be leading, I used the coaching to help me guide through some really difficult conversations that I needed to have."

Source: Author's own

4.5 Findings Pertaining to Executive Coaching and Coping Skills

Six (6) of the participants in the study found coaching to be essential for their ability to cope with challenges and stressors which are associated with their new executive roles. However, one (1) of the participants, Participant 2, disclosed she did not tap into coaching for coping because she used the concept of 'Mindfulness' which she acquired from her Yoga practice. She did acknowledge, though, that the concept of coaching as a coping mechanism is probable.

Figure 8: : Coaching Experience - The Impact of Coaching on the Ability to Cope



Source: Author's own interpretation

The other participants found coaching to help them cope because it allowed them to have an outlet or a sounding board where they could "bounce-off" ideas. Coaching was seen by participants as an avenue to ventilate their frustrations without fear of judgement, but with the expectation that the coach would facilitate a process of dealing with corporate challenges. Participant 6 added that he had kept coaches over the years in order to have an outlet for confidential issues which cannot be discussed with friends or family.

Part of learning to cope through coaching, according to some participants, included learning to extricate oneself from challenging situations, not take things personally and deal with matters objectively. To that extent, Participant 7 commented that with the support of a coach, they gained objectivity with regard to a matter where he was emotionally invested and it was stressing him out. The objectivity was crucial in alleviating the anxiety associated with this case. For Participant 7, it was a matter of understanding that some issues are systemic, in that way she was able to isolate them and work on what needed fixing and what needed enhancing.

The aspect of people management including team management and team dynamics was not lost to the discussion. Coaching was seen as helping participants cope with these aspects of management as they are not taught at school. Participants stated that coaching had help them understand their temperaments and how to regulate it. Knowing this helped them appreciate the human relations side of leadership and be able to cope with the demands of having larger teams, which they found at times very overwhelming. Also with coaching, Participant 4 states that she learnt to accept that she did not have to stress about knowing everything.

Participant 4: *So, I think with the coaching – one of the key things that I got out of the coaching was making peace with the fact that I didn't know and that I didn't need to know everything about everything."*

Participants also mentioned that coaching helped them cope better with aspects of career decision-making (Participant 1) and validation and/or assurance (Participants 5 and 7). The flexibility of the coach, according to Participant 7, in helping the participants deal with unscheduled issues also assisted with coping in dire situations. Overall, bar one participant, all the participants found coaching to be a valuable tool for coping with all the stressors coming from transitioning into an executive and much bigger role than they had held prior.

Table 8:Coaching Experience - The Impact of Coaching on the Ability to Cope

IMPACT OF COACHING ON THE ABILITY TO COPE	
Sounding Board	**Participant 1**: "So, I think, having a coach helped me to have a sounding board to help me think through some of the decisions that I had to take… So, because I wasn't micro-managed, I was able to go and bounce things off with an external person. And that helped."

IMPACT OF COACHING ON THE ABILITY TO COPE	
	Participant 6: “It's exactly what we're talking about - there's somebody you can call and scream at the phone for knowing they're going to judge you, and be as emotional as you can be, and let off steam; or somebody who, 1. Is not gonna judge you but is also going to be useful in terms of helping you deal with those stressors of being in corporate… But I've kept the coach primarily because I felt the benefit of having one and being able to continue bouncing off ideas against someone because, obviously I don't define myself from through work. There's a whole lot of other things that you do that that would need somebody who's more experienced or just a sounding board - something that you can't tell family; you can’t tell friends especially when it relates to work. You can then throw it to a coach and compensate them for it.” **Participant 7**: “Coaching helped me a lot in the sense that I had an outlet, number 1, and that outlet was very helpful and #2, there was a lot of assurance also in coaching.”
Objectivity	**Participant 5**: “Around this I actually got clarity around how to deal with and actually go and have the right conversations, because I think I was too invested emotionally in it. Because I've been through a couple of one section 189, I know what people go through. But I think what the coach did with me was to remove me from that, and make me understand what the objective is. How do I need to package it? Who do I need to chat to first. So, we went through all of those things, and actually my anxiety

IMPACT OF COACHING ON THE ABILITY TO COPE	
	lessened a little bit, because I think, initially, I didn't have a structure of doing it. And I think through the coaching I started to get a structure of how to engage, and with the regular check ins, I could also validate when I'm having the right conversations with the right people at the right level and that is really what I what I'm grateful for because I think I would have messed it up monumentally if it wasn't for that experience." **Participant 7**: "And also, like I'm seeing that this thing of getting outside of yourself and not taking things personally, is such a powerful thing. I feel like it's very powerful in leadership, because when we see everything rises and falls on leadership, sometimes we think that's a person; but it's not always a person, it's just certain structures and systems that your person kind of adds to, because of how you are and maybe your heart towards, and your passion towards things. But it's not - passion only is not going to make things stand. And I think that's how I coped with the transition in understanding that OK, what must we fix? Is there anything that must be fixed here? What must we improve? What's working really well that we must do more of? So, it wasn't always fixing something. Sometimes it was just enhancing what was working well. So, yeah, it was the fundamental role again that the coaching helped me with in my abilities."
People & Team Management	**Participant 3:** "There are also other issues that often, outside of the technical stuff, related to human relations, emotional intelligence, and also the question of temperament as well. At

IMPACT OF COACHING ON THE ABILITY TO COPE	
	which point does my cap or my lid come off? And at which point do I then try to moderate certain situations? And so, in those instances, I think it has played a significant role in being able to particularly understand the human component. Because even in the process, I even went on to study further; but what I found is that even when it comes to certain academic studies, Ma, the human and relational component is not fully covered in a way that I can practice in the world of work in a humane way. That, I think, has been the bridge that executive coaching has sort of filled in terms of the gap." **Participant 4:** "I didn't run operations. And so, to go from, I think the biggest staff compliment I ever had was like 5 people, to now having to look after 200 people - just the HR part of it, was really daunting. And the people management part of what it, was at times in the beginning, overwhelming. So, I think with the coaching – one of the key things that I got out of the coaching was making peace with the fact that I didn't know and that I didn't need to know everything about everything."

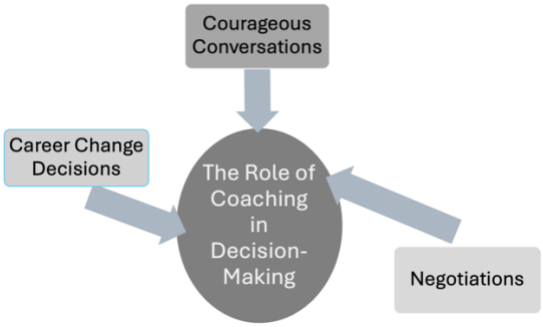
Source: Author's own

4.6 Findings Pertaining to Executive Coaching and Decision-Making Skills

The participants were requested to share an instance where coaching had played a significant role in enhancing their decision-making abilities. While the matter of coaching being a sounding board made an appearance again, some participants found that when it came to decision-making, coaching helped with career moves/changes where the participants needed

to be guided or have a sounding board to ensure that it was a correct decision, as well as giving them negotiating tools in order to come to a sound decision.

Figure 9: Coaching Experience - The Role of Coaching in Decision-Making



Source: Author's own interpretation

In three (3) instances, participants found coaching helping with the decision-making process as they were contemplating career moves. The coaches took them through the paces to the point of even planning for the life beyond the transition. In the case of Participant 6, the career move was triggered by a matter that would compromise the participant's integrity. When the participant had shown no will to make a decision, the coach had resorted to taking the matter into his hands and literally directed the participant to resign or he would write the letter on his behalf. In this case, the coach had felt the matter was of such magnitude, action had to be taken immediately.

Other participants found it helpful in having, what they termed difficult or courageous conversations, in order to arrive at well-ventilated decisions. Participant 5 admits that the process allowed him to have a courageous conversation albeit with an attitude of empathy so that the decision made at the time was a win-win for all concerned.

Coaching also helped a participant in reaching a negotiated settlement with a subordinate who had resigned. Participant 7 says previously she would have just accepted the resignation and

moved on with her life. However, she reflected more on the decision and its effect and made a decision to negotiate a much-needed exit strategy because her coach had put her through the paces of learning to reflect on issues instead of being haphazard.

The participants found the coaching process working for them. Participant 5 stated that through the process he also learnt to listen more.

Table 9: Coaching Experience - The Role of Coaching in Decision-making

THE ROLE OF COACHING IN DECISION-MAKING	
Career Change Decisions	**Participant 1**: "I think, when I moved - this is later in my career, when I made a huge jump and changed provinces. I think I had one of my coaches who was within the company, who sat with me and said, "let's work through this and see if you're making the right decision". And also, once we had made the decision, we sat down and drew up a plan. He helped me draw up a plan of my first 100 days and what I wanted to achieve and the understanding of the environment that I was going into. So I think if I hadn't had that help, I would have walked into that role blind, and I would have had to start planning once I got there. So, being able to be coached before getting into that role, gave me a good start." **Participant 2**: "…but another example maybe is when you have those really big decision points in your in your career. Like, for example, when I got retrenched, it was a very big decision point for me as to whether I should stay because even though I was retrenched, I was offered a role internally, and then I was offered

THE ROLE OF COACHING IN DECISION-MAKING	
	roles externally. So, a coach is also a good sounding board for what you actually should be doing because, to be honest, I was definitely keen to leave, but then the options that I had I couldn't decipher one from the other because I didn't have the necessary understanding of just how different it would be. And a coach can easily guide you in intricate details around, “did you know this role is in X industry, and it's going to require you to have 1-2-3 additional skills over and above what you're currently doing today. Whereas being in a professional industry role, it's similar to what you were doing before, and you could leverage some of your experiences”. So, yes, at certain big decisions in your career, like changing jobs, getting retrenched, getting offers from various companies, that was definitely also opportunity to explore coaching”. **Participant 6**: He really made it clear to say, “Look, let’s put the money aside. Let's say there was no money in it, what decision would you make?” And that was a perspective I wouldn't have put up-front because for me it was about the money and the work that I’d done. There was blood, sweat and tears are that had gone on; and the fact that we were the first Black-owned company that had received that much money from the Jobs Fund. I wanted to make sure that we were able to represent. But the guys was like, “hey, you leave all of your desires that you want to have it and get out. The situation calls for you to get out”.

THE ROLE OF COACHING IN DECISION-MAKING	
Courageous Conversations	**Participant 2**: "I think the benefit is having a sounding board; and then the other benefit is just having, not just the sounding board, but then also having the strength, (can I call it strength?), having the courage to have those courageous conversations. So, giving you the courage to open up into more courageous conversations to understand your decision points better." **Participant 5:** "And it started to spill over into some performance issues where things were just not done and I had to make some it some difficult conversations and to a point that I actually had to discipline the individual… so it was definitely the empathy side; other people's point of view, and also I learned to listen to understand and not to respond. So, I think that's what I got out of that; and it helped. It made that entire decision-making process at the end much easier."
Negotiations	**Participant 7**: So, what happened was that I had to say to the person, "Let's negotiate". And I understood why they felt that way. Then I actually agreed to because I could see that, "OK, in some instances we are doing some of the things he was saying". Number 2 was to say, "was this the right timing?". No, it wasn't. How do I help the person to see the perspective of time… But, I had to have a perspective of what this dynamic was going to look like overall, and it helped. All the things that I said I'd use; I did use them."

Source: Author's own

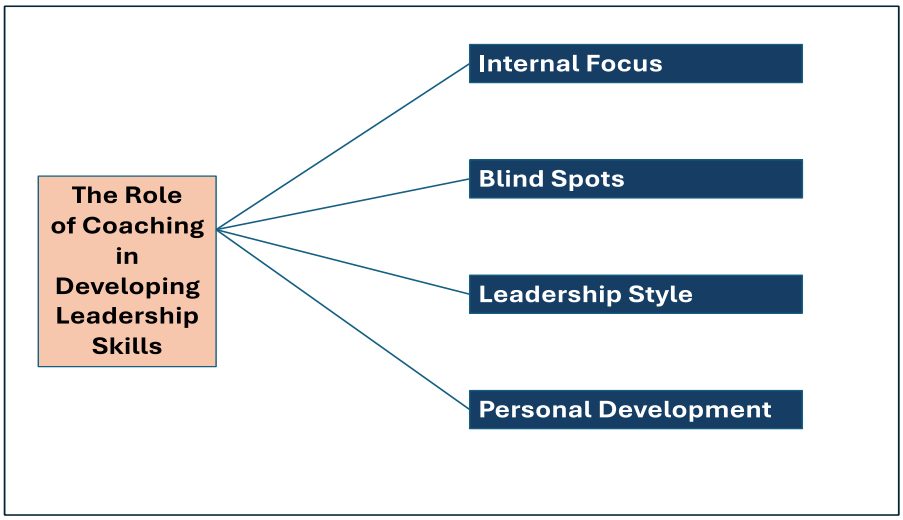
4.7 Additional Findings

Due to the semi-structured nature of the interviews, a theme emerged with regard to the role of coaching in developing leadership skills. Whilst this was not one of the research objectives, there was strong emphasis on its impact that necessitate a separate treatment of the subject as can be seen below. Also dealt with below are other general findings coming out of these interviews.

4.7.1 The Role of Coaching in Developing Leadership Skills

Participants in the study were asked how they saw the role of coaching in developing their leadership skills during the transition process. The most recurring theme was around "self". However, participants also touched on the effect of coaching on their leadership styles. Also featuring was the issue of being blind-sided and/or having blind spots. Furthermore, there was mention of the candidness of the coaches which helps with truth. Participants 3 and 7 shared the notion that coaching is fundamental to the development of their leadership skills.

Figure 10: The Role of Coaching in Developing Leadership Skills



Source: Author's own interpretation

With regard to self, self-awareness, self-confidence, self-development, self-appreciation, self-correcting and self-improvement, there was also an appearance of self in the negative sense, i.e. self-doubt. Participant 1 was expressing how coaching had raised her confidence level because of the tendency to question oneself. Participants believe that coaching helped in how they appreciated themselves, their capabilities and the value they bring into their organisations. In addition, through coaching they came to terms with their personality traits and found ways of working towards harnessing them for the greater good. The process guided them in solutioning their own behavioural weaknesses and they found the candidness of their coaches propelled them to work on improving themselves.

Another theme that kept making an appearance is that dealing with blind-sides and/or blind-spots. Participants were alerted to their blind spots or blind sides by their coaches so that they focus on the real issues instead of petty issues. In the case of Participant 1, it was a matter of appreciating the work ethic of a subordinate instead of being fixated about the time she comes to and leaves the office. This would help her to be more empathetic and understand her subordinate's circumstances and yet still get the required outputs from her.

In addition to the afore-going, participants commented on the effect of coaching on accepting their own leadership style through coaching. Whilst the aim would be for participants to learn from those ahead of them, they would still need to employ their own flavour and make a decision on the type of leader they want to be. In knowing and understanding their leadership style, they would use this understanding in adjusting themselves to the needs of their subordinates and help them to realise their potential and deliver effectively.

Two (2) participants found that the candidness of their coaches helped shape their leadership skills towards self-development and self-improvement and this is their observation. Whilst

they had struggled and had found it difficult to accept, it had taught the participants to take their roles and self-development seriously. Also, they had learnt in the process to be objective and not to personalize challenges but to view them in the context of a system.

Table 10: Role of Coaching in Developing Leadership Skills

THE ROLE OF COACHING IN DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP SKILLS	
Internal Focus	**Participant 1:** "So, I think coaching gave me confidence in myself, and how I was doing my role as a leader. It also gave me an understanding of myself as well what type of a person I am, and how I think and see things, and how that could be different from how other people see me." **Participant 3:** "So, executive coaching also helped me to also appreciate myself and what I bring in a specific context and explore ways, and how I can then be able to really add a value proposition that can be meaningful." **Participant 4:** "And I think one of the key things that the coaching has brought about is for me to make peace with who I am; but developing tools around how to harness it in a positive way." **Participant 5**: "…and the beauty of the coaching is that it's a process of self-correct. So, the coach doesn't tell me, "You have to do it". You need to find out ways because it needs to become a habit for you. There's just some very key questions that gets asked, and I also had to reflect on some of my own behaviours in order for me to become a better leader, and I must be honest."

THE ROLE OF COACHING IN DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP SKILLS	
	Participant 7: “So, that helped me a lot. It also challenged me to improve myself – the candidness.”
Blind Spots	**Participant 1:** “I wanted to put in a hard and first rule that this is how we work. You come to work at 8, and you leave when everyone leaves, until I... So, it really used to bother me, and I spoke to a coach about it, and they said to me, “How is her work ethic? Does she deliver on what she needs to deliver on within the time that she's at work?” And her performance was quite good. So, I was just blind-sided by her leaving early and coming to work late and not understanding the fact that she actually is a mother, and she has other responsibilities. But those really don't impact on how she delivers on her work. So, I had to change how I managed her as opposed to some who didn't have children.” **Participant 5*:*** “So, what he wanted us really to understand is that all your academic knowledge doesn't necessarily mean that you are at the top of your game. There is still a lot of other variables and those blind side; those blind spots from you was highlighted through coaching.”
Leadership Style	**Participant 3*:*** “But thirdly, I think, coaching has also helped me to accept that my style of leadership and my approach is also okay. Sometimes I think because of transitioning into an executive role, one can also, whilst learning from others, then tend to want to emulate 100% another leader, and sometimes that can also be a very big shortcoming.”

THE ROLE OF COACHING IN DEVELOPING LEADERSHIP SKILLS	
	Participant 1*:* "So, people for me, are a big thing - having happy employees is a big thing for me. So, I think, coaching helped me to understand my leadership style, and how to adjust it for the different types of personalities that we have, for them to allow them to deliver effectively. I hope I'm making sense." **Participant 2*:"*** So, I think they really help you with you know your leadership journey and what kind of leader you want to be."
Personal Development	**Participant 7:** "It was tough – it was very tough. It was a tough pill to swallow in certain instances; but I can see a positive or what we call it - constructive criticism? But it was the kind of candidness that was really pushing me to, first of all, take my role very seriously; and #2, take my personal improvement or personal development more seriously; as well as also having an understanding that at times you take things personally that are really not personal; they are really leadership challenges. It's a leadership challenge; it's a structural challenge sometimes."

Source: Author's own

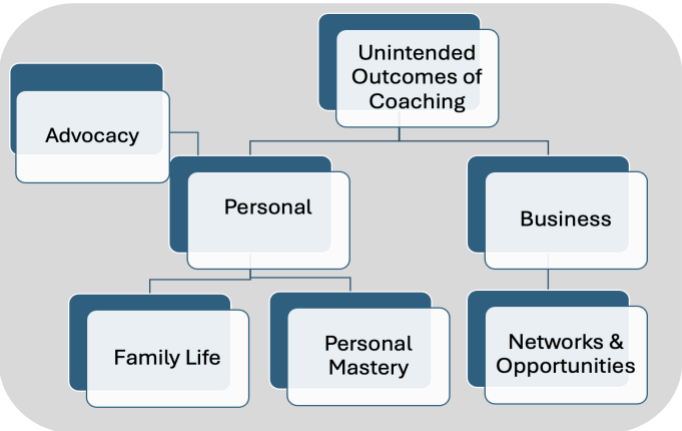
4.7.2 Perceived Success of Coaching

The next set of questions was to establish how the participants perceived the success of the coaching processes they had gone through. One question was about any unexpected or unintended consequences that may have come from the coaching process, while another question was about how they measured the success of the process. The participants were also asked to share about any challenges or limitations they may have encountered during the coaching process. The details are discussed below.

4.7.3 Unexpected / Unintended Outcomes of Coaching

In response to the question about unexpected or unintended consequences of coaching, participants had seen unexpected results on both the personal and business spheres. The process they attest helped with network and business opportunities as well as personal matters where they were able to instil coaching principles into their personal lives. Participants also alluded to using experiential learning by emulating their coach's personal mastery.

Figure 11: Coaching Success: Unintended Outcomes of Coaching



Source: Author's own interpretation

Participant 4: *"It was intended for a work focus - it was work focused, the principles I apply, well, I try to apply in my private life. And it has made a difference in how I deal with certain situations."*

Some participants mentioned that they were now advocating for coaches in their respective spaces, a concept we termed being a "disciple" during the interviews. Participant 4 had not been eager about coaching initially, but had now become a "disciple". They are also applying coaching principles as they deal with other people in their personal settings.

In addition to the sentiments relayed above, participants mentioned issues of career change that had not been originally intended, confidence to stand with industry leaders and on the negative side, Participant 5 said the process had at some stage pointed out his weakness, which was a matter that he had to attend to urgently. Overall, the sentiments were positive.

Table 11: Coaching Success - Unintended Outcomes

UNINTENDED COACHING OUTCOMES		
Business	Networks Exposure & Opportunities	**Participant 3**: "I think one of which have been getting a board appointment as a consequence of that experience. And that was again as a result of the executive coaching that I had received in that network. I was able then to be referred in that very same network, which then was quite enlightening for me to say, even when the referral happened, the technical aspects of my competencies were not necessarily in question, but my ability to bring together a set of competencies, some of which I'm a specialist in and some of which I'm not a specialist in, would then be able to bring value in a different environment, and that I was not in prior.
		Participant 6: "I would say, "yes there have been. But over time you kind of understand that (I was talking about the networks), half of the networks, in fact I'd say 60% of the networks that I have in the SME development-finance space, has come through mentors and coaches, especially coaches,

UNINTENDED COACHING OUTCOMES		
		because even the one that you put me through, has been very helpful… You then get to sit at the tables, you get mentioned in tables that you haven't sat in yet; because obviously you've established a relationship. Your coach knows what you're capable of doing and they put you into opportunities you wouldn't otherwise get."
Personal	Advocacy	**Participant 7**: "Maybe my belief in coaching now. I would see people, eh coach this, coach that. I had a certain, I don't know man, ugh, I just didn't get it. So, the unexpected is that me I keep telling people, "Hey, you must get a coach." **Participant 4**: "There've been a couple of people that have been extremely influential in shaping my career, and me as a person, and I certainly hope that I am paying it forward and doing the same thing for others".
	Family Life	**Participant 4**: "It was intended for a work focus - it was work focused, the principles I apply, well, I try to apply in my private life. And it has made a difference in how I deal with certain situations."
	Personal Mastery	**Participant 6**: "It's the kind of benefits that are beyond just the coaching relationship, that affect your personal life, that affect your career, your finances because you are then able to see how #1

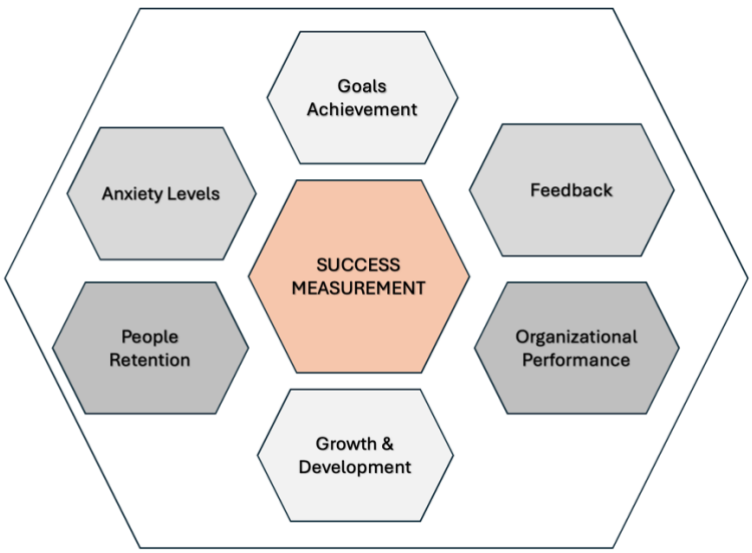
UNINTENDED COACHING OUTCOMES		
		the coach does things from their... as you establish your relationship you see how they get it themselves and you want to emulate that."

Source: Author's own

4.7.4 Measurement of Success of the Coaching Process

The participants were asked what key performance indicators they use to measure success. There was agreement on a number of points including the achievement of goals, feedback, company performance, sense of growth / development and lessened anxiety (peace of mind). Participants 2 and 7 felt that because measuring relationships is intangible, it is difficult to measure the success of coaching. Nevertheless, they still weighed in on how they view success in coaching.

Figure 12: Coaching Success: Measurement of Coaching Success



Source: Author's own interpretation

Regarding the achievement of goals as a measure of success, inputs received from some participants suggest that the achievement of goals at the beginning of the coaching relationship are viewed as a determinant of the efficacy of executive coaching for these transitioning executives. According to them, these goals need to be evaluated from time to time and need to be reviewed if they are not achieved or are misaligned.

Feedback was another key indicator of the success for the participants. For Participant 4 it was both formal and informal feedback, a fact which was also echoed by Participant 5. Within this feedback is a metric that Participant 5 uses for himself to gauge his stakeholder's perceptions of him, for fear that he may be blowing his own trumpet. This feedback also relies on the consistent achievement of goals he had set for himself and whether they are aligned to what is being said and how he is being experienced as a leader.

Regarding the subject of performance, all participants agreed that it is a core indicator of coaching success and can be tangibly seen in the stability or growth of organisations in which the coached executives are employed. It is in how these executives successfully implement deliverables as set on their organisation's key performance indicators (KPI). The achievement of these KPI's would be an indicator of how the coach's inputs are instrumental in the executive's outputs. This also extends to how the team advances the organisation's vision in achieving successful outcomes.

Participants also identified growth and development as a measure of successful coaching. This growth is not limited to the growth of the executive, but also to the people led by the executive and how that leads to their retention. In circling back to their own growth and development, participants found that the realisation that they have grown and the observation of their progress in particular spheres, instils confidence in their leadership capability.

Participant 2 relates how her coach would constantly ask about her next big project or initiative, as she had not wanted her to become stagnant.

Lastly, participants articulated that another measurement is in the decreased levels of anxiety and psychological well-being. Participant 6 called it “peace of mind”. Other success factors cited were staff retention, being able to develop others and leveraging of technology by new young executives. The participants were mostly upbeat about the success that coaching brought into their work and personal lives.

Table 12: Coaching Success - Measuring Coaching Outcomes

MEASURING COACHING SUCCESS	
Goal Achievement	**Participant 1:** “It's important to have goals when you start off with a coaching process, or when you approach someone for coaching. You need to be clear about what is it that you want to get out, or you want to achieve out of your career and not of the person that's coaching you. And the measure is, of course, achieving or attaining some of the things that you were set out to; and even if you don't get to the goal and you get to something else, that is a measure to say, okay, maybe it was a wrong goal. I should have been focusing on something else. So, setting goals and reviewing those at the end, is a measure.” **Participant 5:** “I think the indicators that I use is the success is always my coaching objectives. So, I use my coaching objectives that I start with in the beginning of the coaching journey. And there's 2 things to it. It is whether I have achieved what I needed to achieve.”

MEASURING COACHING SUCCESS	
	Participant 7: “So, I think it's evaluation - being able to say what was I trying to achieve when I came into coaching.”
Feedback	**Participant 5:”** And the second metric that I use for myself is that how are people experiencing this change, this success that I'm celebrating? Is it felt, or is it just something? Am I just shooting fireworks for myself, but it doesn't really have an impact anywhere else? So, I always try and do either a mini check-in or a survey with my key stakeholders. But those questions that I ask them is mainly aligned to the effect of what I was trying to achieve, whether it was felt or whether it's not, where it was felt once, where it was felt consistently, because I think the consistency is what also is important. And whether may be what I then earmark as an objective for me was totally misaligned to what I was actually supposed to do. And I think from time to time, when I get that feedback, it is always rich because it serves as an input, into how I shape my other coaching objective.” **Participant 7:** “And maybe also the feedback that I’ve been getting, I can say that.”
Organisational Performance	**Participant 3**: “On the one side we can say that it can be seen in, whether it'd be in the stability or the growth of the organisations in which individuals who have received executive coaching, and how those organisations are performing.” **Participant 6:** “The relationships are mostly intangibles; but how you then are able to execute on your own deliverables and your own KPIs and how successful you become at work, for me is an

MEASURING COACHING SUCCESS	
	indicative of the relationship or the input that your coach puts, provides you with." **Participant 7:** "… measuring it by myself being as confident as I am now versus how I was when I came into the job, and just seeing how everybody runs with the vision."
Growth & Development	**Participant 3**: "And over and above the financial aspect, even when it comes to human capital component - to what extent are those organisations led by people who have received executive coaching, retaining their people and also seeing their people grow within the organisation itself. I think that that would be another important indicator." **Participant 7:** "I think one of the one of the ways is the confidence that I acquired. There's a confidence in just feeling like you've learned- the sense of development. When you feel like you 've been developed (wena – [you]), you actually receive a certain level of confidence in what you are doing and how you're doing it." **Participant 2:** "… but I think another thing is also growth. If that person's constantly challenging me about what is my next big thing, or what is my next growth opportunity, then that would be a good indicator for me. And then the other one is mindset, because people can have a mindset of like, "No, change isn't good, or you should be grateful for your iron, and you should stick to that or whatever". And for me, they should relate to what my mindset is which is about growth. So, for me it's about progress"

Source: Author's own

4.7.5 Challenges or Limitations Encountered During Coaching

Participants in this study were asked about challenges or limitation they may have encountered during their coaching journeys. The responses to this question were as varied as the participants themselves. Participant 2 ended the relationship with her coach when she felt that the relationship was no longer serving her. Participant 3's challenge was that he found the probing invasive and had difficulty with it as it exposed certain vulnerabilities. The questions, he found, brought some discomfort. Participant 4 did not like to engage emotionally and deal with touchy-feely stuff. Participant 5 found himself being pushed to have difficult conversations that he was avoiding while Participant 1 received push-back for not wanting to patiently see processes through. Participant 6 had to deal with an emotional coach and had to come to terms with the fact that coaches are human as well; thus, they had to find mutually beneficial ways of resolving differences. Participant 7 had a problem with her busy schedule and the coach had to accommodate her. In addition, where the matter was out of her scope, the coach would refer the participant to a subject matter expert.

Apart from Participant 2 who ended up terminating her relationship with the coach, all participants viewed the challenges as part of their own growth and worked to find ways to resolve these challenges.

4.7.6 Other Additional Inputs

Participants were given an opportunity to make inputs on any other matter or issues that may not have been covered by the interviewer in relation to their experiences of coaching while they transitioned into executive roles. While some spoke about the impact of coaching on their personal lives, others gave recommendations for coaching to be made for the lower rung

and/or be made part of the fringe benefits. Other participants spoke to issues of gender and race. Below is an outline of these inputs:

Participants 3 and 5 shared how applying coaching principles had spilled over into their personal/domestic lives. These participants spoke about applying coaching principles in their family lives and giving their family lives the same attention as they do their work lives. The participants are more reflective when dealing with their spouses and perceive themselves as having improved their communication through better listening habits. As a result, even their kids are benefactors of the executives' coaching because their parent is much calmer and more contemplative than they had been before.

Participant 3: *"I think my coaching journey, I think, fortunately has also translated into how I think about things even in my personal life… So, I think that has been a big, big, big value-add that has encompassed my executive coaching journey to this point and which I think is also the most important area because if I hadn't gone through executive coaching, I wouldn't be thinking about my personal life in that way. I would just be assuming that everything just flows naturally, which is not the case."*

There were also feelings / suggestions that coaching could be extended to lower levels of staff, with a suggestion that, for executives, it could be offered as a fringe benefit like medical aid or pension fund and used as a recruitment/retention strategy or as part of succession planning. Although her organisation had started rolling out a coaching program for all senior personnel, Participant 4 lamented the cost if it were to be rolled out to junior staff. However, she believes group coaching could be an alternative for junior personnel. Participant 5, a Human Capital executive, sees the success of coaching in helping with the creation of a succession pool.

Some participants brought issues of gender and race into the discussion. Some participants had no gender bias, while others felt strongly about not having a lot of women coaches. One participant said that he would want to have a male and a female coach because there are topics he would prefer to discuss with one gender and not the other. He had not had a female coach but felt it would have enriched their deliberations.

The above comments closed off the interviews but also provided insights on what the candidates wanted to recommend to industry leaders regarding coaching interventions.

4.8 Summary of the Findings

This chapter presented demographic information of the seven participants in this study and gave details on the findings by identifying key themes that emerged during the analysis of the data.

The shared experiences of each participant by answering questions on their pre-coaching experience, the three (3) research questions and the questions about the perceived success of their coaching experience as outlined in the research instrument marked, “Annexure 2”. The studied participants are all South African citizens who would have worked in or outside of South Africa, received formal coaching while they transitioned into executive roles in their various organisations while they were young, as defined in paragraph 1.8.

These finding were organised according to themes answering the research questions and they spoke to how the participants experienced the effects or impact of coaching as they transitioned into executive roles.

Chapter 5: Discussion of the Findings

The objective of this chapter is to build on the findings gathered from Chapter 4, draw out their broader implications and discuss what their potential significance is in a way that would synthesise the data collected in this study.

The chapter begins with the discussion of the demographic information of the participants which will help in elucidating the opinions and perspectives of the participants and what informs their worldview on particular issues. Thereafter, a discussion on the findings in relation to the research questions ensues.

The discussion of the findings will highlight some of the points raised in our treatment of the conceptual framework in Paragraph 2.8 of this study. In the framework it was stated that executive coaching is a factor in the triad relationship amongst the coachee (employee/client), the executive coach and the organisation (the employer) for which the employee works and is driven by various theoretical frameworks and models that a coach may utilise to deliver coaching results that would benefit the coachee and the organisation the coachee works for. Therefore, this section infuses the effects of the various theoretical frameworks employed by a coach as experienced by the coachee to enable the latter to deliver superior performance results, to cope with the demands of the complex requirements of the executive role during transition, and to make sound decisions in the process.

5.1 Demographic Profiles of Participants

In an attempt to ensure that the validity and credibility of the study, the seven participants to this study were selected carefully in order to get diverse views on the subject matter as recommended for phenomenological studies by Palinkas et al. (2015) who believe that this enriches the discussion during the process of triangulation.

Of the seven (7) participants, four (4) are female and three (3) are male. Of the females, two (2) are African, one (1) is Indian and one (1) is white. Amongst the males, two (2) are African and the other one (1) is Coloured. This information holds significance in the South African context where issues of diversity in the workplace are of national interest as the country is seeking to correct the past imbalances created by the apartheid regime through the promulgation of the Employment Equity Act (Goverment, 1998). This information also ensured that the views were not one-sided and the experiences of all races and genders were duly recorded. Participant 4 felt it was important stating that *"for as long as we have inequity in South Africa, we have to focus on race".*

Whilst the aim had been to get participants from as many provinces as possible, only three (3) provinces were represented, namely Eastern Cape (1), Gauteng (5) and Kwazulu-Natal (2). This attests to Gauteng, though being the smallest of the provinces, as the most economically active of the provinces (Sihlongonyane, 2018).

Two (2) of the participants work for South African companies (corporates), two are self-employed or work in companies they own, two (2) are employed in a non-profit company (NPC) while one (1) is working for a Public Benefit organisation while also owning her own practice. The industries they are in are health, financial, information technology and religious sectors. The discussions were further enriched by the fact that most of these executives had had corporate experience as juniors and have a diversity of qualifications. Their profiles are also quite broad and diverse and consist of a Medical Director, an Architect, Small Medium Enterprise (SME) Development practitioner, Information Technology Business Development Executive, Human Capital Executive and an Economist.

The participants were also asked about the age at which they had transitioned into the executive roles, and this ranged from the age of 27 to the age of 42. This age range slightly differs with the definition of "young'" as given by Buxton (2020) who sets the range at between the ages of 21 and 35. This study uses the Heyns-Nell et al. (2021) definition which extends the range to 45. It is to be noted that only one participant (Participant 5) fell within the latter category.

With regard to the number of years spent in the company prior to transitioning into executive roles, three (3) of the participants transferred from other organisations, two (2) had been there for only one year, whilst another one (1) had been there for two years, and the same Participant 5 had been in the company for six (6) years before being promoted into an executive role. This gives a sense that organisations seem to be recruiting young professionals into executive roles despite their lack of experience and it augurs with the fast-tracking phenomenon explained by Underhill et al. (2007).

The varied demographic backgrounds of the participants served as a foundation for insightful responses received to the study's research questions that we discuss at length in the following sections.

5.2 Discussion Pertaining to Participants Pre-coaching Experience

This section discusses the findings that came out of the first two non-demographic questions which sought to establish what the proficiencies of the participants' experience was before being coached. The questions asked were: "*Can you share an account of your journey as a young transitioning executive and circumstances that led to you seeking coaching?*" Thereafter, they were asked what their initial objectives or expectations were when they started on their coaching journey as part of the transitioning processju8.

5.2.1 Career Journey and Reasons for Seeking Executive Coaching

This section deals with the various career journeys of the participants and what had led to them seeking executive coaching. The findings to the reasons for seeking coaching was out of frustration as these young professionals had been left to their own devices. In the case of Participant 1 and Participant 5, they were succinctly told to figure out issues on their own in a new environment and without any training. It is also echoed in a study by Longenecker and McCartney (2020) that often transitioning executives are left to their own devices when it comes to their personal development and performance expectations of the organisations. They transitioned from not having a team, to suddenly having subordinates and in some cases, having much bigger teams to manage with very little or no support. This is indeed one of the challenges identified by Van Coller-Peter et al. (2018) and they cite that transitioning leaders are expected to “hit the ground running”.

Participants also found themselves overwhelmed. This sense came from the uncertainty and lack of clarity with regard to what was expected of them. This was a finding in the study by (Van Coller-Peter et al., 2018) where anxiety levels of the transitioning executives was heightened by a lack of clarity of what was expected of them. This sense of being overwhelmed stems from the fact that some would not have been in a role where they had headed up an organisation. The challenge also came with being part of the executive now; being a part of the people who had previously been their superiors and that brought consternation in the wake of the realisation that they had to find ways of conversing at a much higher and strategic level than they were accustomed to. It is precisely this interpersonal skill of being able to navigate the boardroom and networking at a different level with an understanding of political undertones at play, that Bunker et al. (2002) point out as a challenge for young executives.

What emerged out of the discussions is that self-awareness played a major role in the decision to seek out coaching. In the results of a study of successful transitioning managers by Bebb (2009), participants viewed self-awareness as a vital asset that was a main characteristic of their effectiveness as it enabled them to have a fairly accurate view of how their behaviour was seen by others. This would help them in coming to terms with their weaknesses and designing plans to address these weaknesses.

For some participants in this study, seeking coaching was prompted by the need to address their shortcomings and/or reinforce themselves in anticipation of their new roles, or as and when they encountered struggles during their transition. These participants' behaviour seems to align with the assertion of McLean (2012)'s Existential Approach, in that a raised level of awareness creates a bedrock for making new choices and, therefore, influences behavioural change which would not have happened if levels of consciousness had not been raised. It is in that vein, that they felt that they needed to strengthen their capabilities in relation to leadership as they were to be responsible for the performance of the organisation both from the financial and the human capital perspective. They also needed to align the skills previously acquired and muster their strengths for the huge responsibilities that lay ahead of them, but acknowledge their weaknesses. Previous interactions with other leaders who had impressed upon them the need to have a coach, had played a crucial role.

Conversely, there are those participants whose initial take-up of coaching was merely out of curiosity, viewed as one of the typical human capital soft skills stuff. The reason for uptake was merely because it was offered by the employer. While for some participants coaching was part of their organisation's culture, other participants had to go out of their way to seek coaching as it was not offered by their organisations. Some participants were just starting out

in their entrepreneurship journey. Therefore, their businesses had not matured to that level yet.

The drivers or reasons for seeking coaching, as well as challenges experienced, were vastly different for the participants, yet there were similarities in certain areas.

5.2.2 Objectives or Expectations at the Start of the Coaching Process

When asked what their objectives or expectations were when they started the coaching process, objectivity loomed large from the participants. In this regard, different insights and perspectives from an independent third party were expected outcomes of the coaching process. This is the view held by Wise and Voss (2002) that executives do not require formal training but they need a "*sounding board*" in the form of *"objective and sustained feedback"* and what they termed a *"thought partner".* These are some of the words used by the participants. What is noteworthy is the concept of coaching as a "sounding board", which carried right through the responses throughout the study and constantly making an appearance from various participants. They wanted an objective and professional perspective from a neutral party. They also wanted the benefit of insights from their coaches, as well as wanting to learn from their coaches' experiences.

In addition to the above, participants expected the coaching process to assist them in enhancing their leadership skills at a strategic level to be able to deliver on the performance requirements of their new roles, to be able to lead older people, former peers or senior, more knowledgeable subordinates and subordinates of different race groups. They wanted to understand their own leadership style and learn how to grow in the sphere of leadership.

The participants were also wary of being seen as arrogant to older subordinates, a trait they had seen manifesting in young peers who had been promoted to senior roles. Mitchell et al. (2024) refer to this phenomenon as 'workplace arrogance' fueled by a superiority complex and self-importance by the perpetrators in an effort to belittle their targets.

The ability to measure performance, including team performance and delivering value for their organisations were also cited as expected outcomes from the coaching process. Participants wanted to bring the element of strategic thinking and people management together, then use that to produce good company results. They also felt that being able to measure and evaluate performance would assist in being more accountable to the Board. For them, it was a matter of leading from behind but still ensuring that the team delivers the results.

For one participant, the expectation was different in that she expected coaching to be more or less like mentoring and expected a hand-holding approach, but was met with a hands-off type of relationship where she had to find solutions for herself. Initially she had felt that she was not getting much out of the relationship and that she was still left to her own devices. However, she established that the difference between coaching and mentoring lay therein. This is what Kombarakaran et al. (2008) explain about coaching being a facilitative process to help the coachee on a self-discovery journey towards refinement of their abilities.

From the above one can glean that while there may have been varied expected outcomes, participants were aligned in some aspects. The participants expected positive outcomes from the coaching process and needed coaching to address some of their interpersonal issues and performance outcomes.

5.3 Discussion Pertaining to Executive Coaching and Performance

The participants were asked the following question: *Would you share examples of how coaching impacted / is impacting your performance since you transitioned into the executive role?* While the answers were as varied as the participants' careers, they still converged on some themes.

The first to emerge from the responses is that of a strategic outlook. Terblanche (2019) identified this as a cognitive challenge for transitioning executives because at the executive level they are expected to take on new ways of thinking and have a strategic perspective. In the afore-going section we mentioned that the participants had a raised level of self-awareness and they knew the technical aspects of their jobs. They aptly state that they had the ability and the technical tools to do their jobs, but needed a tool to use for strategic engagements when embarking on the new role and in certain instances, in a new industry with new clientele. Coaching had offered them that tool, and they were able to strategically leverage the right experiences. The theoretical framework discussed in Paragraph 2.2.1 (f) of this paper places this within the Systemic approaches in coaching, where the coach looks at what the coachee brings into the organisation, and the coach thus helps coachee to unravel blockers at a conscious or unconscious, in order to succeed in their new roles. In looking back, these participants could see the impact of coaching on their own developed strategic outlook and they are convinced that all the strategic decisions taken, were greatly assisted by the coaching they had received. While they acknowledged the need to still be technically astute, coaching had helped them to stay strategically focused.

Another factor highlighted in these interviews is that executive coaching played a significant role in their ability to manage the dynamics of interpersonal relations that emanate from having to manage teams. Wise and Voss (2002) quote a study where a hundred coached executives

found that following their coaching, they were able to build better relationships internally with peers, subordinates, superiors, as well as externally with their clients.

Some participants report having had difficult relations with peers and subordinates prior to coaching; but they had since learnt to allow themselves to be vulnerable and it had brought cordiality in these formerly strained relationships. They had also learnt to be more humane and not only focus on performance targets. Their coaches had helped them to find ways to understand their subordinates' way of work in order to be able to support them in a way that would make them deliver results. When discussing the Relational Dimension in her study of successful transitioning executives, Bebb (2009) found that successful executives had learnt to build linkages and have a will to change from how they had done things and how they had perceived people before.

In their new roles, all the participants alluded to having moved from having managed one or small teams to managing a team or much larger teams than they had managed before, which they found daunting stemming from the fact that they had previously been hands-on. From being hands-on and being "runners", these participants had to now learn to delegate effectively to their teams and trust their teams to do the work. With the assistance of coaching, they were now able to take a backseat, and facilitate an enabling work environment for their team members without totally abdicating their responsibilities. In a study of transitioning executives by Bebb (2009), the results show that under the Behavioural Dimension, a success factor for transitioning managers of managers, is their ability to change their behaviour and trust others with the work they used to do themselves. Managers of managers are advised to find a balance between delegating and still having a handle of issues without getting too involved in the operations. These participants were also able to build strength-based teams that leverage on the strengths of each team member where team members have the latitude

to do what they are good at. In pursuance of this, in the Parker-Wilkins (2006) study, a respondent had attested to coaching having enabled him to build a high-performance team from which he had even been able to recoup thirty-two manhours per month.

Participants also found that coaching had helped them with communication, albeit in differing contexts. Coaching had helped in communicating an implementable vision to the team, and helped address communication errors that had become a barrier to team members' performance to the detriment of the organisation's results. Coaches had also helped participants with resources like books to strengthen their areas of weaknesses as it relates to communication. Some participants reported that it was a case of being able to hold strategic conversations with other executives and having tough conversations with their teams. In the aforementioned study by Bebb (2009), she mentions that when it came to the Relational Dimension, participants had found that they had to now influence upward and speak the language of the people at their level or above their level in order to get projects or budgets approved.

Overall, participants showed an awareness of their strengths when it came to the technical aspects of their roles. They found coaching helping them in managing certain intrinsic issues like a strategic outlook, interpersonal relations, team mastery and communication, all of which would have an effect on their performance and the results they deliver for their organisations.

5.4 Discussion Pertaining to Executive Coaching and Coping Skills

Participants were asked to respond to the question, "In what ways did/does coaching impact your ability to cope with the challenges and stressors associated with your new executive role?

What became apparent is that coaching was seen as a support mechanism for “bouncing-off” ideas, a term used by several participants. It was also a learning curve for not personalising problems, thus be objective, and for team management. Coaching also helped in other aspects like decision-making on career choices and accommodation of participants’ abstract requests to address immediate issues by coaches.

Grant et al. (2009) recommend that organisations consider coaching as a support tool in conjunction with other initiatives during times of major transitions, as it has propensity to enhance resilience and the well-being at a personal and at an organisational level. They reference Myers (1999) in asserting that a supportive relationship where executives can discuss both personal and work-related matters, is essential for relieving stress and anxiety so that the executives are well-equipped to handle changes and stressors that come with these workplace changes. Participants in this study saw this kind of support from the coach as being the “sounding board”, a word that was often used even when responding to other research questions in this study. Not only would the coach be a sounding board, their experience would be tapped into. The process was seen as a safe place to “bounce-off” ideas as some of the issues cannot be discussed with family members and/or friends. The participants would use the platform to sound-out ideas about career options, vent frustration and be as emotional as they wanted to be, without fear of being judged and also for other matters besides work. The Personal Construct Psychology approach from the Constructive Theoretical framework discussed in Paragraph 2.2.1 (e) of this study becomes ideal in supporting a coachee as it affirms a coachee and raises their awareness of their capacity to cope beyond what they could have imagined.

It was noteworthy that one participant had not turned to coaching or seen it as a coping mechanism, but had instead used skills of mindfulness acquired in her Yoga practice. This

shows that there are multiple means that executives can use in order to cope with work-related stressors. Interestingly though, the participant did not discard the possibility of coaching as a tool for managing stress and helping executives cope; it was just that it was not her lived experience. To advance this thinking, Ebner et al. (2018) introduce a concept of differentiated coping strategies where there is distinction between behavioural and cognitive strategies. Behavioural strategies would include relaxation and controlling of the situation, for example. This then accommodates this participant's views because Yoga and mindfulness advocate for relaxation. This participant would have benefited from a coach who applied the Existential approach discussed in Paragraph 2.2.1 (c) of this study because this approach recognises mindfulness as another coaching approach that influences behavioural change. It is worth noting, though, that coaching was seen as a helpful outlet and the coaches giving affirmation in certain instances and being only about candidness all the time.

Objectivity was another point of discussion. In order to be able to cope with stressors, participants discovered that they needed to be objective when faced with certain cases. They appreciated and recognised the importance of coaching during emotionally difficult cases. The role of the coach was seen as being to direct towards objectivity and guiding these participants to a point of extricating emotions from the issues at hand, which helped in lessening anxiety and stress. This was important for the participants as it taught them that some issues are structural and part of organisational systems and have little to do with individuals. They had to be selective in what they took on and be able decipher what is repairable and what is not. This ability to have an external perspective to issues instead of being emotionally invested seems to have helped the participants cope with stressors that are not necessarily of their doing (Buxton, 2020). The role of the coach is vital in directing coachees to a point of objectivity and help them build capacity to handle change, a point that Kombarakaran et al. (2008) emphasises.

People and team management is inherently a major part of executive management. In paragraph 5.3 the participants found themselves managing teams, at times, much larger than they had before the transition. In their study, Kombarakaran et al. (2008) also found that sitting at the top of the areas of change affected by executive coaching, was people management. Of his respondents, 98% had found that coaching helped them manage their teams more effectively.

Participants in this study found that coaching helped them keep their emotions in check and not allow the “cap or the lid to come off”. This kind of approach by a coach would be based on the Ontological Theoretical framework discussed in 2.2.1 (f) as a “Being Focused” approach, and its fundamental basis is the consideration of a coachee as a whole being whose language use and emotions influence their worldview interpretation. In this study the coachees found this kind of approach beneficial for improving human relations and treating their teams compassionately. They were also able to delegate more effectively to their subordinates and to be comfortable with not knowing everything.

In certain instances, participants needed to tap into the flexibility of the coach. At times the demands of these roles would impact on their coaching schedules and/or unscheduled pressing agenda items with which these participants would need assistance. Participants list the flexibility and empathy of their coaches as being of great benefit. Exceptionally good coaches are those defined as being approachable, empathetic and have good relations with others (Kombarakaran et al., 2008). This finding emphasises the multiplicity of tasks and responsibility that executives have to cope with on a daily basis.

Participants and literature have shown that with all the leadership responsibilities, stress is a characteristic of the role of executives and senior managers. For that reason, coaching is a necessary tool in helping them handle their day-to-day stressors and challenges.

5.5 Discussion Pertaining to Executive Coaching and Decision-Making Skills

Participants were asked the question: *Would you share an instance where coaching played a significant role in enhancing your decision-making abilities?* This was asked in a behavioural format as literature generally associates decision-making with behavioural competencies expected from leaders of organisations (Heyns-Nell et al., 2021; Longenecker & McCartney, 2020; Nawab et al., 2021). Also, decision-making processes at executive level usually involve a heightened thinking capacity. The Behavioural and Cognitive Behavioural approach framework discussed in Paragraph 2.3.1 (a) emphasizes the development of problem solving skills and strategies using various models to get to most feasible solutions.

The experience of the participants in this study is that coaching was instrumental in the process of making decisions with regard to career change, albeit under vastly varied circumstances. An internally sourced coach, in one instance, was proactive in getting the participant to reflect and ensure that it was the right decision and helped her plan for the first 100 days in the new office. For another participant, it was an ethical dilemma that led to the decision to change careers and the method employed by the coach came short of being directive, a method not recommended in coaching (Hall et al., 1999), (ICF, 2020). This hard stance on the part of the coach had been necessitated by the participant's reluctance to make a decision regarding the matter at hand. Ultimately, it was the participant's decision, but it had come after a lot haggling and hard talk. What this gives rise to is whether a directive method has a place in coaching. However, successful coaches, according to Brotman et al. (2007), while approachable are known to uphold high ethical standards (Kombarakaran et al., 2008).

It is, thus, not surprising that the coach in this instance had resorted to a directive coaching method.

Another theme that emerged is that coaching benefited the participants by being a sounding board and giving them the courage to have courageous conversations that enabled them to make effective decisions. Longenecker and McCartney (2020) state that executives need this neutral and candid coaching from time to time to assist them in making well-thought-out decisions. The participants found that their communication skills were also enhanced as they listened with more empathy and also seeing other people's perspectives. This aligns with the findings in the Heyns-Nell et al. (2021) study that had shown increased levels of courage in decision-making for coached individuals.

Part of getting to a decision may involve negotiation, which is what one participant found coaching assisting with. A discussion with the coach equipped her with the necessary tools to engage and the dynamics of the situation had to be discussed with the coach. The process helped in that the decision that was ultimately reached was negotiated with the other party being made to feel valued. Coaching brings about better alignment of behavioural competencies and empathy being one of such behaviours as demonstrated by this participant (Longenecker & McCartney, 2020), (Nawab et al., 2021).

Whilst literature may not have isolated decision-making as a subject in coaching, the participants have certainly had the benefit of much more developed decision-making skills as a result of coaching interventions and the subject may need more and deeper investigation in the future.

5.6 Discussion Pertaining to Additional Information / Inputs

As mentioned above, some themes developed during the course of interviews which were not part of the Research objectives. The role of coaching in developing leadership skills was one such theme and below is a discussion of the findings pertaining to the question of leadership skills development through coaching.

5.6.1 The Role of Coaching in Developing Leadership Skills

The question posed to the participants was: "*How do you see the role of coaching in developing your leadership skills during the transition process*? Riordan (2008) advances that, for transitioning leaders to change roles successfully, they need to understand the juncture of what she terms, the leadership river. They also need to be perpetual students of leadership principles throughout their careers, and understand that effective leadership starts with them. The findings of this study seem to agree with this notion because when this question was asked, words that begin with "self" were uttered by the participants, namely, myself, self-awareness, self-confidence, self-development, self-appreciation, self-correcting, self-improvement and even in the negative sense, self-doubt. What came out of the interviews is, in fact what Weinstock (2011) enumerates as the challenges of leadership for transitioning executives, namely, "issues of self-esteem, assertiveness, self-consciousness, self-criticism, perfectionism, new boundaries, changing identities, and finding one's own leadership style". While he states that these are often not addressed to the disadvantage of both the individual and their organisation, in this study, they were prominent when leadership skills and coaching were discussed. Weinstock then suggests that coaching for leadership would be able to provide the necessary support and pragmatic strategies for handling and overcoming these concealed challenges.

The participants further reflected that, when it came to leadership skills, coaching had helped them to have an understanding and appreciation of themselves and what they bring to the table (organisation) and thus find ways to add value meaningfully. It had helped participants to come to terms with who they are, which is, in a sense, self-awareness, and then find ways to harness their character to the benefit of all.

Another aspect of the coaching as a process that is appreciated by the participants, is that of self-correct, in that the coach does not dictate but the coachee are self-directed to finding solutions to problems.

Coaching also played a crucial role during moments of self-doubt in the participants' ability to lead. The participants had found coaching helping in how they think of themselves during those moments, and in how they see things which could be vastly different from how they are perceived by others.

Coaching was found to help with blind-spots or being blind-sided. In their leadership journey, they learnt to look at things from others' perspectives as well.

Participants also spoke of how coaching had been instrumental in them establishing their own leadership styles instead of mimicking other leaders and understanding their own leadership journey to decide the type of leader they wanted to be. They found that the process helped them to adjust their leadership style to the different types of personalities that they were managing, for them to deliver what is required effectively. They quickly learn not to use a one-size fits all for their subordinates.

The candidness of coaches during the coaching process was a tough issue to deal with as it was candid and did not stroke their egos. Despite this, participants embrace this as a necessary push for them to take their leadership role seriously.

From the above, it is apparent that coaching for leadership has been very vital in the success and in building resilience of the participants. Some coaching conversations may have been difficult, but the participants had embraced it and benefitted in building themselves to be able to lead their teams.

5.6.2 Perceived Success of Coaching

The participants were also afforded an opportunity to evaluate the efficacy of the coaching process as they individually experienced it. Strong (2014) and other authors lament the absence of a single measuring tool. Jarosz (2023) has come up with what he terms, “The Cube of Coaching Effectiveness” which mostly aggregates various models and work of other authors who have written on this subject dating back to Kirkpatrick (1977) work to the recent work by Wang et al. (2021). Jarosz (2023) believes that his work offers practical steps to measurement and evaluation of executive coaching, because it incorporates evaluations not only from the coach’s side, but also the coachee’s, as well external sources like feedback from clients and colleagues to get a fuller and well-rounded picture.

This study is about the lived experiences of the participants, and its focus is on how they perceive success in coaching by discussing unexpected or unintended outcomes or benefits of coaching, their own measurement of success or effectiveness of coaching as well as their reflections on challenges or limitations they encountered on their coaching journey.

5.6.3 Unexpected / Unintended Coaching Outcomes

On the question of whether the participants had faced any unexpected or unintended outcomes or benefits from their coaching experiences, the objective was to explore the extent to which executive coaching, meant to address workplace issues, had had effects other than what was intended. The responses from the participants showed that participants had benefited both on the business and the personal fronts.

On the business front, participants alluded to having been exposed to other networks by their coaches. Owing to the relationship established with the coach over time and the coach having observed and become privy to the participants' competencies, participants were referred for business opportunities. Kombarakaran et al. (2008) have identified a distinctive character of effective coaches as that of being passionate about their work and wanting their coachees to grow and succeed in their jobs. Therefore, afore-going attests to this attribute as experienced by the participants.

On the personal side, findings show that participants got involved in extramural activities at the behest of their coaches. One participant learnt about other cultures, golf, sport and being a whiskey connoisseur. Another participant found himself emulating his coach with regard to his own life, career and financial management as he watched how the coach was conducting his affairs. What stood out is how some of the participants applied executive coaching principles in their homes by being more attentive, listening more, and being more empathetic. They used the coaching tactics used on them by their coaches in relating to their family members. In addition, they became advocates for coaching. Participant 7 is now mentoring young girls using the same principles of coaching and she says she is commended for her ability to listen.

5.6.4 Measurement of Coaching Success

The question asked of the participants with regard to the measurement of coaching success was: *"How do you measure the success or effectiveness of coaching in your transition process, and what indicators do you use to measure the improvement?"*

Participants were at pains to explain the measurement, their take being that coaching is relational and it is difficult to measure a relationship. Nonetheless, they were able to come up with some indicators that they consider ways of measuring or evaluating the coaching process. The indicators are mostly those found in literature and they list amongst other things attainment of goals or objectives, feedback, performance results, people growth and retention, increased confidence levels, as well as lessened anxiety. These behavioural and cognitive measurements are all found in the study by Jarosz (2023).

Most of the participants seemed to agree that the attainment of goals that were set at the beginning of the coaching relationship could be used to measure the effectiveness of the coaching relationship. However, their experience is that the goals must be reviewed periodically in case some re-alignment is required. Needless to say, literature is awash with the principle of goal-setting in executive coaching. Goal-setting and revisiting of the goals is the core-competency in coaching ("ICF Core Competencies," 2021) (Cairo & Dotlich, 2017). Coaching is seen as a goal-focused and reflective exercised.

Feedback was also seen as a valuable tool to measure coaching success. Participants felt that feedback from internal and external stakeholders was vital for how they would then design their other coaching goals. Participants alluded to relying on 360^0 feedback from their stakeholders to gauge how they were being experienced as leaders. Participants in the study by Strong (2014) also had similar remarks about getting feedback to ensure that one's real

skills are at work, because people have different perspectives and it could benefit the coachee to receive those viewpoints.

Additionally, participants rated the success of coaching using organisational performance results in companies where executives are receiving coaching. Thus, success at work by implementing inputs from coaching sessions and seeing subordinates adopt the vision, is also seen as an indicator of effective coaching. This indicator is to be expected as coaching is generally used to capacitate executives for better performance results. The study by Parker-Wilkins (2006) reveals that business benefit in various aspects, including on the financial front, as productivity increases due to a better work environment fostered by executive coaching.

Some participants also saw the benefits of coaching through the development lens. They felt that they could measure the success of coaching by observing their own and their teams' development and growth. Due to its ability to modify behaviours, coaching is now seen as a tool of choice in leadership development (Strickland, 2013). It is also seen as an investment for growth and development of employees (Jarosz, 2023)

Retention of employees by managers who are being coached, increased confidence and reduced anxiety are also seen as important success indicators of the coaching process. These are all listed by various authors (Jarosz, 2023; Kombarakaran et al., 2008; Parker-Wilkins, 2006).

5.6.5 Challenges / Limitations Encountered

As part of establishing the efficacy of executive coaching, participants were asked: *"Can you reflect on any challenges or limitations you encountered during your coaching journey, and how you and your coach worked through them?*

Other than the response of one (1) participant who had terminated the relationship when she felt it had run its course, challenges were the normal ones associated with coaching. It is the opinion of Hall et al. (1999) that coaching should be for a short period and not be viewed as a lifelong mentorship relationship or a consulting role. They cite that some companies have strong views on the issue and have set time-limits for coaching so that there is closure to the process.

Some participants had initially found the probing uncomfortable and invasive because it had exposed their vulnerabilities. These challenges and ill-feelings were mostly caused by the ignorance of the participants regarding coaching as a concept. Some participants cite having to deal with emotional coaches and making peace with that, realising that coaches are also human. A challenge was also experienced with time and schedules, with participants having to balance multiple roles resulting in schedules clashing with their coaching times. The coaches were found to be accommodating once a rapport had been established.

A positive finding is that when participants encountered a problem that would be outside of the coach's scope or area of expertise, coaches tend to have the presence of mind to refer them to other resources, be it books or subject matter experts who would be able to assist these participants.

5.7 Conclusion

The findings of the study have been well-ventilated in the sections above. In conclusion of this chapter, a summarized presentation of the answers to the research questions follows below:

5.7.1 Pre-Coaching Experience

In this section of the interview, participants were asked to give an account of their career journeys, the reasons for seeking coaching and what objectives they had in mind when they embarked on the coaching journey.

The chapter outlined key responses with participants seeking coaching for varying reasons. What came to light is that some companies have incorporated coaching as part of their leadership development programs so that it is now embedded in their culture. Some organisations have not reached that level yet, and their executives have to look for coaches themselves to deal with the challenges they encounter as they transition into executive roles. What also became apparent is that, until they experience coaching, some employees still feel that coaching is a sentimental process and some go into it out of curiosity with no real expectation of tangible results.

It is evident from the study that there are key drivers for seeking out coaching. Young professionals consider coaching out of frustration because they get left to figure things out by themselves without the necessary training. They also experience lack of clarity in respect of performance expectations. Added to that, is the burden of some of them managing bigger teams or in certain instances, managing a team for the first time in their careers. These teams usually consist of subordinates who were once their peers and/or superiors, or older people or people of different race groups or cultures. Further, they are now part of the executive team, and have to sit at the same table with people who they may have reported to; people they venerated and may have probably feared; but they are expected to hold their own against these individuals. This, they find daunting and they need coaching to be able to handle the pressures which come with transitioning and settling into their executive roles.

What is noteworthy is that these executives are self-aware and seek coaching because they realise what their shortcomings are. They do not want to make mistakes of being seen as arrogant young people.

The main objective for getting coaching is to get an objective viewpoint and a sounding board. These executives hope learn from the experiences of their coaches. They want to enhance their leadership skills at a strategic level in order to be able to perform and deliver value for their organisations.

5.7.2 Coaching Experience

Pertaining to how they experienced coaching, participants had to answer questions on the impact of coaching in four (4) areas, namely, on their performance, in developing their leadership skills, on their ability to cope with stressors that come with the role and in their decision-making abilities.

The findings show that young executives have confidence in their technical abilities when it comes to performance. However, coaching assists them when it comes to learning new ways of thinking strategically and perform at a strategic level. As they now rely on teams for their performance, these young executives have found value in the development of their interpersonal skills in managing teams and in their communication skills so they would be able to engage in strategic conversations with their stakeholders. Over and above that, coaching helped them to transition from being hands-on to finding a balance in delegating, yet still having some handle over issues of performance in their organisations.

The leadership skills discussion revealed an internal focus. Coaching had helped these young executives to understand and appreciate themselves and the value they bring into their

organisations. Through the coaching process, they established their own leadership styles while learning to acknowledge and accommodate the diversity of the needs of their subordinates. The candid conversations with their coaches helped them take their roles seriously. A further benefit for their leadership journey is learning to finding solutions to problems, because coaching is a solutions-focused concept.

Enhanced coping skills are also a benefit emanating from coaching in the experience of the studied executives. Coaching is seen as a mechanism for brainstorming ideas and for also venting frustrations with coaches. This provides stress-relief and allows them to be vulnerable and unmasked in a safe environment. At the same time, relief comes from the coaching process' propensity to help with objectivity so that decisions are taken with lesser anxiety. Through coaching, these young executives learn to keep their emotions under check. They also benefit from coaches who contribute to their sanity by understanding their busy schedules and put less pressure on them by keeping to rigid schedules.

As leaders, the executives found that coaching helped them in structuring their decision-making process especially as it relates to career change decisions. Coaches facilitated the process by directing them to look at options and to make ethical, courageous and effective decisions, even by learning to negotiate with stakeholders.

Overall, the findings show that young executives find coaching to be a positive value add to their performance and it assists them as they hone their leadership skills, while they also cope with demands of their jobs that require them to be decisive as the buck stops with them.

5.7.3 Efficacy of Coaching

In discussing the perceived efficacy of coaching, participants were asked to respond to three questions pertaining to the unexpected outcomes from coaching, their own measurement of the success of coaching and challenges or limitations they had encountered during the coaching process.

The findings of the interviews show that the unintended outcomes of coaching are in both business and personal angles for the young executives. Once a relationship has been established with their coaches, the latter are able to expose these executives to their business networks which opens up opportunities for business. On the personal front, younger executives are able to learn other extrinsic things like cultures, sport, financial management and personal mastery. Additionally, these executives employ coaching principles in their domestic lives and become advocates for coaching in their social circles such as friends, as well as their work colleagues.

The findings regarding how they personally measure success of their coaching relationships show that though these executives find it difficult to measure coaching success, citing that it is because coaching is relational, they link success to the attainment of the goals set at the beginning of the coaching process. They also use feedback from various stakeholders, including 360^0-degree feedback, as a self-measurement tool. The feedback is able to elucidate whether they are on the right track. Performance results of their organisations/units/department, as well as retention of staff are also seen as major indicators of whether coaching has been effective. Lastly, the results show that their own personal growth and development is a yardstick on the extent to which coaching has impacted them.

Not all was rosy on the participants coaching journey. The findings of this study show that in the initial stages particularly, challenges were experienced with the executives not understanding the coaching process, resulting in them being uncomfortable with invasive and probing questions. Challenges also came from them having busy schedules which would conflict with their coaching times. Some limitations came from coaches not being subject matter experts in certain areas resulting in the executives seeking alternative sources, albeit with the coaches' assistance. The study also found that some participants had come to a point where they had terminated the coaching relationship due to them feeling as if it had run its course.

The findings of this study on the measurement of the efficacy of coaching show that the coaching relationship can be a conduit for greater networking and business opportunities. Measurement of success is subjective, but both cognitive and behavioural indicators are seen as possible measurements of coaching success. However, the relationship is not without its limitations and challenges, but coaches and coachees have to find ways of working around them.

Chapter 6: Conclusion and Recommendations

This section summarises the key findings of the research study with regard to the effectiveness of executive coaching on young professionals who are transitioning into executive roles in South Africa. Below is a presentation of the findings of this study.

6.1 Conclusions of the Study

The objective of this study was to explore the efficacy of executive coaching on young professionals who are transitioning into executive roles and to examine what its impact is on their performance, their coping and decision-making skills. All seven (7) participants in this study are South-African and they are from various sectors, namely, information technology (IT), health, enterprise development, finance and a public benefit organisation. Both genders and all South African racial groups are represented; however, the majority is African with four (4) women and three (3) men.

The findings of this study reveal a positive coaching experience of the executive coaching process while these participants were transitioning into their new roles from the perspective of their performance in their organisations, as well as their coping and decision-makings skills. In an effort to highlight these experiences, questions were asked on their pre-coaching experience, the coaching experience itself and their perceived effectiveness of coaching.

6.1.1 Pre-Coaching Experience

The reported findings in this section attest to the infancy of executive coaching in South Africa as they show that there is no standard for how executives obtain access to coaching (Schutte, 2019). Some of the participants accessed coaching through workplace development programs, while others had to access them through their own resources. These findings further tell that both external and internal coaches were used with positive results.

The reasons for the quest for coaching were also indicative of the newness of the coaching phenomenon in the workplace, because, while some were sold to the idea others viewed it as just a Human Resources Department exercise. Where the reasons for attending coaching sessions were solid, it revealed that young executives transitioning into roles get frustrated and overwhelmed largely because they are left to fend for themselves without the necessary training or handholding, a fact highlighted by (Longenecker & McCartney, 2020). No consideration is taken of the fact that, whilst they may have been high-flyers, the role that comes with the burden of a larger team and/or a new team requires a new set of behaviours, skills and outlook. These young executives are left to navigate their roles independently while being expected to deliver results for their organisations right from the outset.

These participants also find themselves overwhelmed due to a lack of clarity of the role and the expected performance outputs. Van Coller-Peter et al. (2018) identified this as a contributor to anxiety and stress levels among transition executives. Bunker et al. (2002) had identified boardroom politics' savviness as a challenge for these executives, and the study revealed that some of these participants are in charge of organisations or business units for the first time and did not have the boardroom political flair to navigate them. It is the need to understand boardroom dynamics and to be able to hold the right conversations, that motivated them to pursue coaching. What they also found daunting is the people management element where they now had to be managers of their peers, older people and people from other racial groups. Additionally, in some instances, they now had their former bosses as their peers. This meant they were now in the Executive Committee and had to deliberate on issues with people they had held in high regard and, in some cases, been afraid of.

This study also shows that these young professionals have an appreciation of their capabilities, and they are self-assured with a raised level of self-awareness. They had no delusions of the

tasks ahead of them and sought coaching out of necessity to cope with the demands of their new roles and as they discovered their weaknesses as they were transitioning. This raised level of self-awareness is lauded and is foundational to behavioural changes that are necessary for transitioning executives and leads to a successful transition (Bebb, 2009; McLean, 2012).

With regard to objectives that the participants had in mind when they went for coaching, was a running theme throughout the study that there was a need to have an objective viewpoint for which they used the term, *"sounding board*". It is a term also used by Wise and Voss (2002) emphasizing that at their level, these executives no longer need training programs, but they need a sounding board by way of unbiased and constructive feedback. Their coaches could be their partners to help thrash things out, i.e. "thought partners". What is apparent from this study is that the young executives hope to learn from the experiences of their coaches; the unspoken meaning that there is an expectation that the coach would be someone knowledgeable and experienced. They expect the coach to be insightful and for the coach to be forthcoming with this knowledge and experience.

An exceptional finding from this study is that these executives seem to understand the implication of being a young executive leading older people. Daunting as it was, they did not want to find themselves on the spectrum of being seen as arrogant but were sensitive to the insecurities that accompany this dynamic. For that reason, they sought coaching in order to avoid the trap of having a sense of dominance with a resultant condescending attitude toward their older subordinates (Mitchell et al., 2024).

6.1.2 Coaching Experience

This part of the study focused on how the transitioning executives had experienced coaching with an emphasis on four (4) areas namely, the impact of coaching on their performance, the role of coaching in developing their leadership skills, the impact of coaching in their ability to cope with stressors associated with their new executive roles, and the role of coaching in enhancing their decision-making skills.

Young executives, the study has found, are confident of their technical abilities when it comes to their work for it is their competence that got them into those roles in the first place. However, at an executive level, technical competencies are of little or no consequence, because the executives now have subordinates to whom they can delegate. As such they need to be able to perform at a strategic level (Terblanche, 2019). Executive coaching facilitated an opportunity for these young executives to adapt to new ways of thinking, look at issues from a new perspective, and hold strategic conversations with their new peers, some of whom may have been their seniors prior to the transition.

Accompanied by this was the interpersonal dimension that stems from managing teams. As mentioned earlier, for some, managing teams and/or managing teams with large numbers was an unfamiliar territory. With coaching, they report that they saw an improvement in interpersonal relations with team members and other stakeholders. This also came about through better communication with teams and learning to delegate and trust team members as a result of coaching. Relationally, they were able to build connections with stakeholders, provide an enabling environment for their team members to thrive and build strength-based teams that recognised the abilities of all team members. This behavioural change is recommended by Bebb (2009) and Parker-Wilkins (2006) for building high-performance teams.

On the leadership skills enhancement question, the study reveals that the concern of the young executives is being able to lead in their own way. Whilst they are prepared to learn from their coaches, they also want to establish their own style and show that they have value to bring to the table. The trick was to find a way to navigate this hurdle by dealing with self-depreciating thoughts of self-doubt and grow a sense of self-appreciation and confidence to counter some of the negative issues that Weinstock (2011) lists as challenges of leadership for executives who are transitioning. These he enumerates as low self-esteem, being over-critical of themselves, non-assertiveness and finding one own's leadership style. In working with coaches, these young executives have found that they were able to work on themselves to overcome these hurdles.

The study also found that executives run a risk of being emotionally invested in challenges and not be objective about issues at hand. Also of interest was that they had to learn not to personalise issues and find ways of extricating themselves from situations to gain proper perspective because failure to do that results in high levels of stress and anxiety. These executives had to find coping mechanisms to deal with stressors which are intrinsic to their roles. The concept of a sounding board made a re-appearance with executives finding the coaching process as being one of the outlets they could use, to not only vent their frustrations, but also gain objectivity. Once the latter had been attained, they were able to have objective perspective and anxiety was lessened and it resulted in better decision-making. Notably, the stress also seems to emanate from the fact that they are unable to share some of their experiences randomly with friends and family, and in the South African context it is even more complex because of the regulations around the handling of personal information ("POPI Act," 2013). Therefore, it really gets lonely at the top. For these executives, coaching provides a safe environment for vulnerability and for unmasking and to be themselves without fear of

being judged. Myers (1999) posits that stress and anxiety relief occurs when there is a supportive environment (Grant et al., 2009). Another stress-buster that the study found amongst the participants, is that they have learnt to make peace with not knowing everything, through the method of coaching. This helped in team management and in valuing the contributions of team members and contributed to better relations between the executives and their teams.

The experience of transitioning executives in this study confirms the value of coaching when it comes to decision-making. These executives found value in coaches not only helping them with the process, but also going beyond the process to look at the aftermath of the decision and how they would deal with it. However, what the study reveals is that, at times, some coaches, where issues of ethics were involved, may have blurred the line between coaching and dictating. This then begs the question of how far a coach can go when issues of integrity are concerned. Do they still coach or do they advise, recommend or dictate the course of action?

6.1.3 Efficacy of Coaching

The objective of this study is to explore the effectiveness of coaching for transitioning executives. Therefore, it was important to discuss the efficacy of coaching as the young transitioning executives had experienced it. The study's findings are based not only the intended objectives, but also at unintended outcomes, the young executives' measurement of success and the challenges they may have encountered.

This study reveals that young transitioning executives who were coached had received far more than they had originally intended, both on the business and personal fronts. These benefits come from the relationships formed between coaches and coachees. Coaching thus

becomes a conduit for networks that these young executives would not have normally had access to. Some of these networks have high entry barriers and the young executives are afforded the privilege to be associated with them through their coaches. It is in the nature of successful coaches to want to see their coachees grow and succeed (Kombarakaran et al., 2008). Therefore, they will have a hand in ensuring that their coachees are well-positioned for success. On the personal front, young executives have found that, because coaches are expected to be people of integrity, their personal lives are well-worth emulating and they find themselves learning to conduct their affairs in order as well. The study also finds that they use coaching principles in their domestic lives as they interact with family members. These coached executives also become advocates for coaching.

Further findings in this study were made regarding the measurement of the effectiveness of coaching, and these include both behavioural and cognitive indicators. Participants admitted to the difficulty in quantifying these results but spoke to the indicators of success. The study agreed with the findings of Cairo and Dotlich (2017) that the attainment of goals set at the beginning of the coaching relationship as advocated by the ICF, are a measure of success of the coaching relationship because the coach needs to hold the coachee accountable ("ICF Core Competencies," 2021). Failure thereof is the failure of the coaching process. To add to this, organisational performance success, which is usually the reason for seeking coaching, is seen as a measure of coaching success. Feedback was also identified as another core indicator of the efficacy of coaching in particular 360^0 feedback processes as these generally incorporate opinions of most stakeholders in the working life of the executive (Strong, 2014). These young executives also see their own growth and development as a yardstick for measuring the success of coaching. Above all, it is their feeling that staff retention is an indicator of whether a coached executive is managing their team well.

Lastly, the study recorded the participants challenges experienced by these transitioning executives as mainly the discomfort associated with the probing and perceived invasive nature of coaching at the beginning of the coaching process, although these feelings wear off as the executives get to terms with the process. In certain instances, executives were faced with coaches who do not seem to have a good handle over their emotions. Whilst the case was handled with maturity, it brings to light the fallibility of coaches. A challenge that was also unearthed by this study is around time-management and the busy schedules of these executives. There are competing demands on their time and because they are young, they are most likely also raising young children. A mature coach, whilst holding the coachee accountable, is expected to be empathetic and be flexible enough to accommodate disruptions to scheduled meetings. Another finding brought out by this study is that the coaching process requires patience. For executives who are in fast-paced business environments, it may be difficult to be patient with the process. Coaches have an unenviable task of assisting these young executives to see the process to the end. Also, the study reveals that while young executives are looking to learn from their coaches, they are reasonable enough to understand that coaches have their own limitations, and good coaches are able to refer these young coachees to appropriate resources.

In conclusion, this study concludes that young transitioning executives are open to coaching and find value in the process as part of their development in order to counter the effects of being left to their own devices. Coaching provides an eco-system within which they can be vulnerable without losing face, but also provide them with further opportunities for business and networks. The study also shows that the efficacy of coaching goes further than fulfilling organisational objectives, and extend into coachees' personal lives when coaches are also invested in the process of seeing the coachee grow and succeed.

6.2 Recommendations

As the South African executive coaching landscape matures, coupled with the appointment of young professionals into executive positions, there needs to be structure in the way that executive coaching is rolled out in aid of the transitioning executives so that issues raised in the Problem Statement in Paragraph 1.3 of this study are attended to. Below are the recommendations of this study toward the attainment of this goal:

6.2.1 Executive Coaching Access

Young executives reported that they were left to find their own away around their responsibilities. The recommendation is that coaching should be part of the culture of organisations' leadership development programs so that young executives are not left to look for coaches by themselves. This initiative on the part of organisations would contribute towards the reduction of the number of ill-prepared professionals ascending into executive roles.

The decision of an external or internal coach should be left to the executives concerned as they have better insights on their needs or preferences.

Human Capital units should be actively involved in ensuring that coaching for young executives is well-structured and impactful.

6.2.2 Transitional Coaching

Organisations should have structured programs for the orientation and onboarding of young professionals into leadership roles. The emphasis is on these programs being a part of an organisation's culture and not used as a behaviour correction or disciplinary measure when the organisation realizes that the executive is not coping or delivering the required

performance results. These structured programs should include sections on navigating boardroom politics, people management, mindfulness, coping strategies and strategic decision-making. In this regard, consideration should be given to using senior executives as mentors, coaches or guides.

Coaches for young transitioning executives should be selected based on their experience, maturity, demonstrable leadership competence, and ability to provide objective and constructive feedback.

There needs to be a clear definition of ethical boundaries in order to avoid scenarios where coaches overreach and/or overstep into advisory roles especially when it comes to particularly sensitive decision-making situations.

Regular feedback processes should be put in place to objectively assess the impact of coaching and to be able to review goals, where necessary in order to ensure that problems are identified early and the company is able to obviate productivity and financial losses that result from a non-performing executive.

6.2.3 Work-Life Balance

Young executives are faced with the task of balancing demanding work schedules with family responsibilities. Therefore, organisations should create an environment that accommodates flexible schedules.

Similarly, coaches should accommodate exceptional time constraints of young executives in order to foster impactful and productive coaching sessions where these young executives would be able fully engaged.

6.2.4 Impact Measurement

Organisations should establish Key Performance Indicators (KPI's) to measure the efficacy of coaching. These KPI's will measure the impact of coaching on the business performance, team engagement and people retention, as well as leadership effectiveness.

360^0 feedback processes should be used to measure leadership growth and impact as these provide feedback from multiple sources.

The implementation of the above recommendations would be beneficial in that the organisation would have a structured and impactful executive coaching process integrated into the leadership development programs of the organisation. The effect of such initiatives would result in high-performing young executives who have developed coping mechanisms, and are able to make strategic decisions to the benefit of their organisations.

6.3 Suggestions for Further Research

This research study builds on the body of knowledge that currently exists in South Africa as well as globally. The focus of the study was on young South African executives' experience of executive coaching in the context of it being a relatively new developmental tool in South African organisations.

Needless to say, this study only touched the tip of the iceberg, and more work still needs to be done to delve deeper into the experiences of young executives both quantitatively and qualitatively as the coaching arena matures in South Africa. While research work has been done on both race and gender issues, there is lack of material that addresses issues of

millennial executives despite the changing landscape propelled by changes in technology and regulations that require the employment of younger and more agile executives.

Further research would also have to be undertaken to isolate the subject of the impact of coaching on the enhancement of decision-making skills for transitioning executives. Authors lamented that there was not much material on this subject and it is the experience of the researcher that it was difficult to find academic material that directly spoke to this subject.

An area that also still needs to be investigated or explored is the role of the coach when there is an ethics dilemma. The study would have to explore the extent to which a coach can go to convince a coachee to make an ethical decision without being directive. This then speaks to more studies being done on how to coach young South African coachees in an environment that is riddled with corruption.

On the technical side, a recommendation is that coaches should not rush through the co-creation stage so that these young executives know and understand what they are signing up for when they embark on their coaching journeys. These efforts will also ensure that there is mutual understanding of expectations and the process itself, along with all its attributes which may make the coachee uncomfortable.

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Annexure 1: Summarised Consistency Matrix

RESEARCH OBJECTIVE
To explore how executive coaching impacts the performance and how it affects the coping and decision-making skills of young professionals transitioning into executive roles.

Research Questions and Propositions

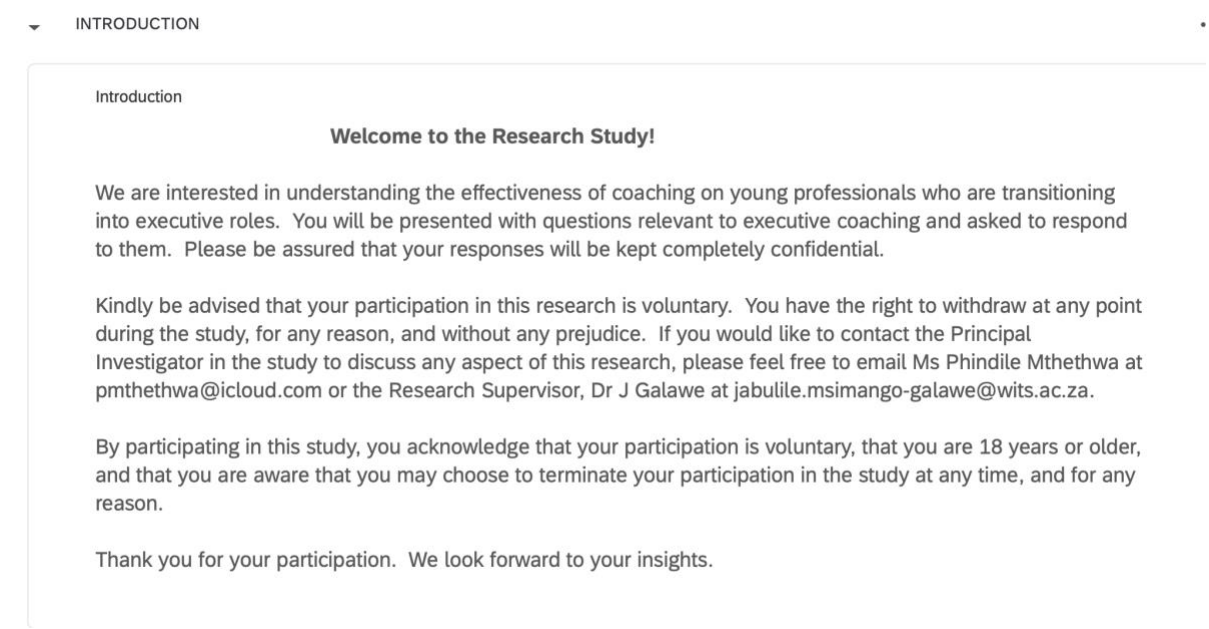
	Research Sub-Questions	Propositions
1.1	What is the impact of executive coaching on the performance of young professionals transitioning into executive roles?	Young professionals who have received executive coaching perform well in the executive roles they transition into.
1.2	How does executive coaching affect the coping skills of young professionals who are transitioning into executive roles?	Young professionals who have received executive coaching cope well with the responsibilities of the new executive roles they transition into.
1.3	How does executive coaching enhance the decision-making skills of young professionals	Young professionals who have received executive coaching have enhanced decision-making abilities.

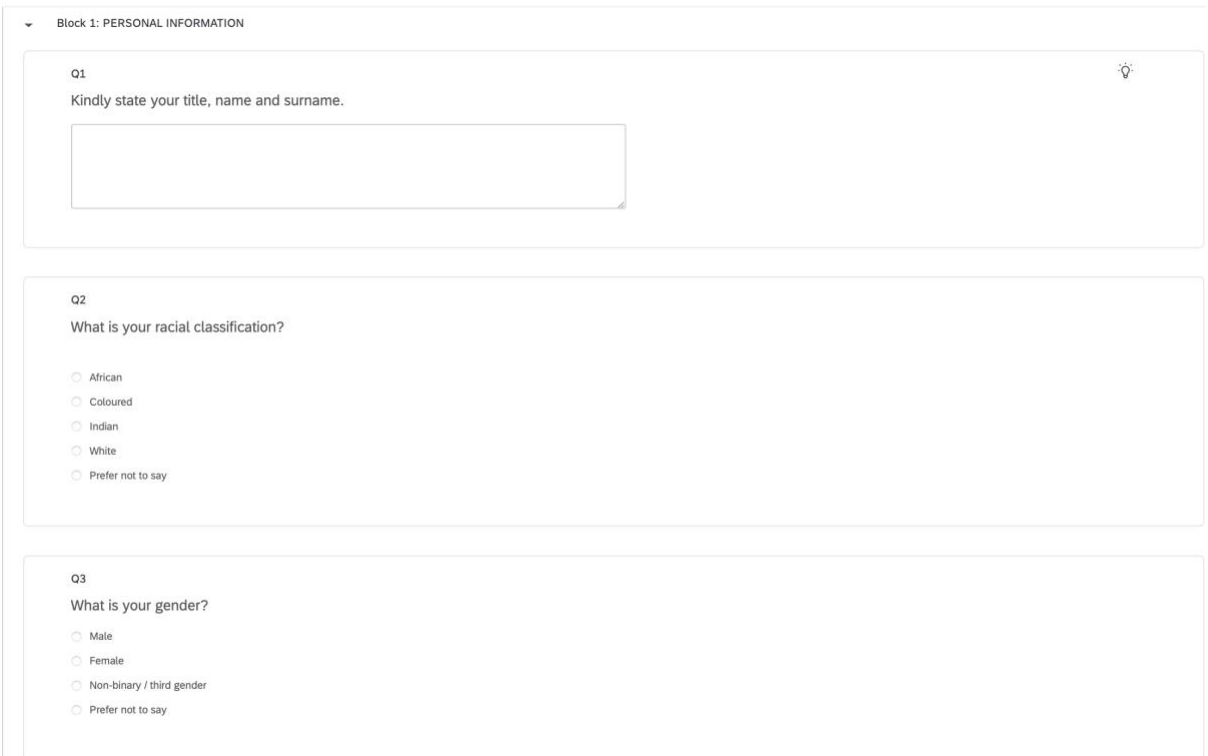
	who are transitioning into executive roles?	

Annexure 2: Research Instrument

Herewith attached is the link to the Interview questions prepared on the Qualtrics Software:https://wits.eu.qualtrics.com/survey-builder/SV_55rvyccWvQfesOG/edit?SurveyID=SV_55rvyccWvQfesOG&Tab=Builder

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Block 2: DEMOGRAPHIC INFORMATION

Q4

What is your current or past executive role title?

Q5

What was your age when you first transitioned into an executive role?

Q6

In which SA Province is your primary of work?

- Eastern Cape
- Free State
- Gauteng
- KwaZulu-Natal
- Limpopo
- Mpumalanga
- North West
- Northern Cape
- Western Cape

Q7

How long had you been with the organisation/company at the time of transition to an executive role?

BLOCK 3: PARTICIPANT'S PRE-COACHING EXPERIENCE

Q8

Can you share an account of your journey as a young transitioning executive and the circumstances that led you seeking coaching?

Q9

What were your initial objectives or expectations when you started coaching as part of the transitioning process?

BLOCK 4: PARTICIPANT'S COACHING EXPERIENCE

Q10

Would you share examples of how coaching impacted/is impacting your performance since you transitioned into the executive role?

Q11

How do you see the role of coaching in developing your leadership skills during the transition process?

Q12

In what ways did/does coaching impact your ability to cope with the challenges and the stressors associated with your new executive role?

Q13

Would you share an instance where coaching played a significant role in enhancing your decision making abilities?

BLOCK 5: PERCEIVED COACHING EFFECTIVENESS

Q14

Have there been any unexpected / unintended outcomes or benefits from your coaching experience that you would like to share?

Q15

How do you measure the success or effectiveness of coaching in your transition process, and what indicators do you use to measure improvement?

Q16

Can you reflect on any challenges or limitation you encountered during your coaching journey, and how you and your coach worked together through them?

Q17

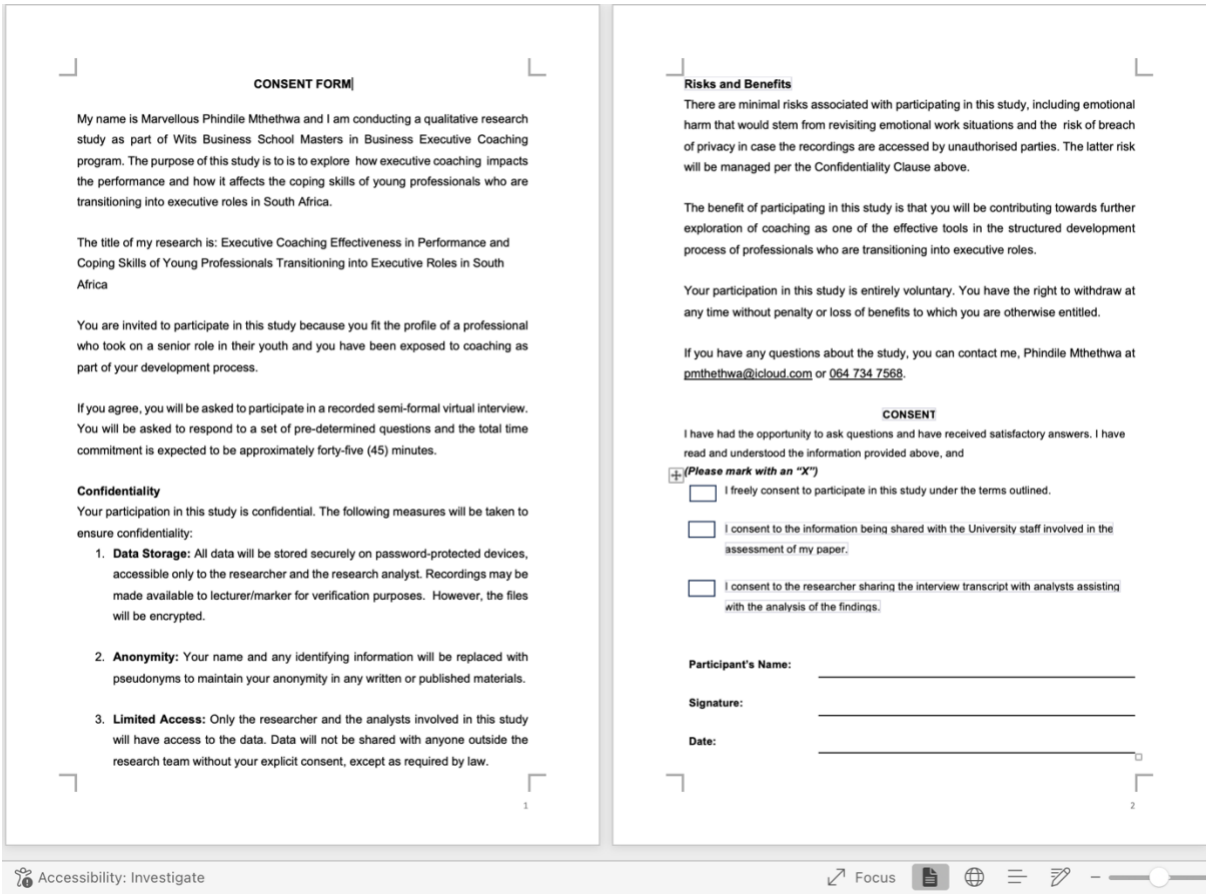
Is there anything else you would like to share about your coaching experience or its impact on your professional and/or personal life that we have not covered in this interview?

End of Survey

We thank you for your time spent taking this survey.

Your response has been recorded.

Annexure 3: Consent Form by Participant



CONSENT FORM

My name is Marvellous Phindile Mthethwa and I am conducting a qualitative research study as part of Wits Business School Masters in Business Executive Coaching program. The purpose of this study is to is to explore how executive coaching impacts the performance and how it affects the coping skills of young professionals who are transitioning into executive roles in South Africa.

The title of my research is: Executive Coaching Effectiveness in Performance and Coping Skills of Young Professionals Transitioning into Executive Roles in South Africa

You are invited to participate in this study because you fit the profile of a professional who took on a senior role in their youth and you have been exposed to coaching as part of your development process.

If you agree, you will be asked to participate in a recorded semi-formal virtual interview. You will be asked to respond to a set of pre-determined questions and the total time commitment is expected to be approximately forty-five (45) minutes.

Confidentiality

Your participation in this study is confidential. The following measures will be taken to ensure confidentiality:

1. **Data Storage:** All data will be stored securely on password-protected devices, accessible only to the researcher and the research analyst. Recordings may be made available to lecturer/marker for verification purposes. However, the files will be encrypted.

2. **Anonymity:** Your name and any identifying information will be replaced with pseudonyms to maintain your anonymity in any written or published materials.

3. **Limited Access:** Only the researcher and the analysts involved in this study will have access to the data. Data will not be shared with anyone outside the research team without your explicit consent, except as required by law.

1

Risks and Benefits

There are minimal risks associated with participating in this study, including emotional harm that would stem from revisiting emotional work situations and the risk of breach of privacy in case the recordings are accessed by unauthorised parties. The latter risk will be managed per the Confidentiality Clause above.

The benefit of participating in this study is that you will be contributing towards further exploration of coaching as one of the effective tools in the structured development process of professionals who are transitioning into executive roles.

Your participation in this study is entirely voluntary. You have the right to withdraw at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you are otherwise entitled.

If you have any questions about the study, you can contact me, Phindile Mthethwa at pmthethwa@icloud.com or 064 734 7568.

CONSENT

I have had the opportunity to ask questions and have received satisfactory answers. I have read and understood the information provided above, and

(Please mark with an "X")

☐ I freely consent to participate in this study under the terms outlined.

☐ I consent to the information being shared with the University staff involved in the assessment of my paper.

☐ I consent to the researcher sharing the interview transcript with analysts assisting with the analysis of the findings.

Participant's Name: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

2

Accessibility: Investigate

Focus