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The perceptions of executive coaching for career progression by public service departments in Gauteng

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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

Aim: This research was aimed at investigating perceptions about the contribution of executive coaching to career progression, by public service departments in Gauteng. It specifically targeted a sample of six Human Resource Management and Development managers (HRM&D) managers, as suitable primary sources of the data that was sought to respond to the research topic.

Research context: The context of the research was the perceived senior management incompetence within the South African public service, concomitant with the dearth of career management practices, to ensure that promotions are merit-based. In the same context, studies show that executive coaching in general, and for career progression in particular yields positive outcomes for both the employee and their employer. It was against this background that this research investigated the perceptions of public service departments, through a sample of six HRM&D managers, regarding the contribution of executive coaching to career progression.

Research Methodology: The research approach was qualitative, with semi-structured interviews being conducted with a sample of six participants.

Findings: According to this research, the HRM&D managers perceived executive coaching as potentially beneficial for career progression. Moreover, the research also found that these participants had limited understanding of both the career concept and theories, as well as the executive coaching concept and theories. These findings were determined by contrasting and comparing the participants' responses to the outcomes of the literature review on these concepts and their associated theories. However, it was found that despite their limited conceptual and theoretical understanding vis-à-vis the literature, these participants explicitly acknowledged that executive coaching could improve career progression.

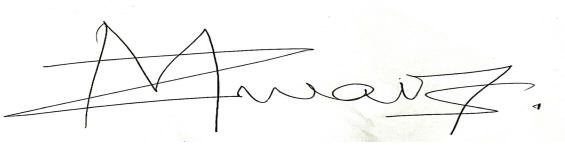
KEY WORDS: Career, Career Progression, Executive Coaching, Career Coaching

Declaration

I, Mzwandile Manto, 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 and 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.

Name: Mzwandile Manto

Signed at ……  ……..

Date: 28 November 2025

Dedication

To my Lord Yeshua M'shiha (Jesus Christ), author and finisher of my faith. You never broke your promise.

To my wife, Nozethu Manto and our children, Lukhangela, Iminathi and Olonathando, thank you for being patient with me. I know how much you missed me, even though I was present among you physically, but I am sure that if I were to sing that song by Cece Winans, *"It wasn't easy, but it was worth it",* you would be readily available as my backing vocalists.

To my dearly departed mother, Bukelwa Waphi. On 14 February 1998, as I was about to take the journey to begin my academic career at the University of Cape Town, you prayed for me. After we both said *"Amen",* you quoted Proverbs 3: 1-3, "My son, forget not my law; but let thine heart keep my commandments, for length of days, and long life, and peace, shall they add to thee. Let not mercy and truth forsake thee: bind them about thy neck; write them upon the table of thine heart."

To my dearly departed father Mncedisi Manto, I am where I am today because you never abandoned your duty as a family man and a provider.

Acknowledgement

The work of supervising students might be a regular job to Dr. Jabulile Msimango-Galawe, but to me her steady support made the difference between career progress and career failure; for this degree is the sine qua non for my career transition. I thank you Dr. J, with all my heart.

My profound appreciation to the research participants who took time off their busy schedules, most of whom even dedicated time from their evenings, to support my research effort. I thank you from the bottom of my heart.

I am moved to acknowledge, with a sense of untold profundity, the grace of Prof. Jason Cohen. Prof, thank you for affording me one more chance to finally make it to the finishing line. Your contribution, and the contribution of the above-mentioned enablers, shall echo in my future and the future of my children; for it was not for vanity that I pursued this degree – it is my means of achieving my career aspirations.

To the administrative staff of Wits Business School, your backstage support means a lot to me. Responses to emails, prompt communication and other forms of support you might consider routine to you, were the life blood of my academic career at Wits.

To Dr. Olayinka Laosebikan, MBChB (IL), DTM (Pret), MCFP (SA), FRCS (Edinburg), CEA (SA), Practice No. 088 3360. Without your medical support, I would not have made it.

To my dear friend Donovan Williams, the man who fanned my intellectual spark and continues to enrich my life with his superlative intellect.

Last but not least, I am proud to join the alumni of this prestigious institution, the University of the Witwatersrand, through Wits Business School.

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List of Acronyms

Table 1: List of Acronyms

HRD	Human Resource Development
HRM&D	Human Resource Management and Development
NSG	National School of Government
OSKAR	Outcomes, Scaling, Know-how, Affirmation, Review
Pb-CC	Purpose-Based Career Coaching
PMDS	Performance Management and Development System
RACSR	Rapport, Awareness, Clarity, Strategy, Review
SCCT	Social Cognitive Career Theory
SECM	Strategic Executive Coaching Model

1. Introduction

The first democratic elections in South Africa ushered in a new dawn that signalled freedom and equality (Cheru, 2001). South Africa was, for the first time, "alive with possibilities" as the new government by the majority promised a "*better life for all"* (Cheru, 2001; Ramutsindela, 2001; Sonneborn, 2010). The winds of change were spreading the celebratory mood across the country (Kumar, 2010). However, even amidst the jubilations, political leaders were acutely aware that gaining democracy was only a stepping stone (Eby & Morton, 2017). The main task ahead was a national reconstruction and development effort; a prohibitively mammoth task given the magnitude of the harm caused by the apartheid regime (Mboti, 2024; Taylor & Shaw, 1998).

Poverty, socio-economic inequality, no access to quality education and career opportunities, lack of proper housing, clean water, and sanitation were some of the major challenges that the newly elected government faced (Marutlulle, 2022; Phatlane, 2006). The sheer scale of the task meant that an effective public service was imperative to transform political ideals into concrete actions and outcomes (Slater, 2014; Treiman, 2005; Tshishonga, 2019). It was, and still is, incumbent on the public service to implement the state's developmental objectives to meet the needs of the citizens (Fakir, 2007; Singo & Mafunisa, 2023).

To this end, the South African government put laws and regulations in place that mandated public administration (including the public service) to be professional, effective, and efficient (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996, Section 195). To give practical effect to these laws and regulations for an effective public service, Section 4 of the Public Service Amendment Act (2007) established a training and development institution (Public Service Amendmend Act, 2007).

Nonetheless, thirty years into this era of freedom, the failure of government to serve the citizens continues to be a serious challenge (Masuku & Jili, 2019; Mubangizi, 2011). The relaxation of restrictions to promotion (for affirmative action) made the senior management echelon vulnerable to careerism (Nomarwayi & Mvenene, 2025), and unfair labour practices in respect to promotions (Moela, 2016). Although there are

many reasons for the collapse of service delivery (Breakfast, Bradshaw, & Nomarwayi, 2019), the focus of this research was on the problem of limited, or lack of career management (Nzukuma & Bussin, 2011) and perceptions about the contribution of executive coaching to mitigate the adverse outcomes of poor appointment decisions.

1.1. Purpose

The purpose of this qualitative research was to investigate the perceptions of executive coaching for career progression by public service departments in Gauteng (Republic of South Africa). This objective was achieved through interviews with Human Resource Management and Development (HRM&D) managers in these public service departments about the contribution of executive coaching to career progression.

1.2. Research context

One of the major contributors to the prevalence of senior management incompetence is the challenge of limited, or lack of career management (Chokoe, 2024), which results in poor appointment decisions (Udayar, Urbanaviciute, Maggiori, & Rossier, 2024). The ultimate outcome of incompetence within the ranks of senior management is corrosion of good governance mechanisms, which are indispensable to the delivery of good, quality public services (Thusi & Mkhize, 2022). Since incompetence within the ranks of senior management continues to be prevalent (Nzukuma & Bussin, 2011; Terblanche, Albertyn, & van Coller-Peter, 2017), there are other measures that can be explored, one of which is executive coaching (Myres, 2013). However, executive coaching should, first and foremost, be understood to overcome institutional obstacles to its implementation (Hanley, 2019; MacKie, 2014; Pandolfi, 2020b).

1.3. Research problem

The efficacy of business and executive coaching for career progression management and other employee and organisational advancement interventions, is well established (Arnold, Coombs, & Gubler, 2019; Nokhwali-Mboyi, 2018). Yet, within the South African public service there is still significant confusion about the distinction between

coaching and mentorship (Cronje, 2015; Matabooe, Venter, & Rootman, 2016). According to Cronje (2015), in a study that was conducted by Coaches and Mentors of South Africa (COMENSA) on the barriers to utilisation of coaching in the public service, 47% of respondents cited a lack of understanding coaching as one of such barriers.

It is in this context that Nicolau, Candel, Constatin and Kleingeld (2023) concluded that to "sell" executive coaching, the task of theorists and/practitioners in the field is to educate the users about its outcomes at individual levels. The cognitive-behavioural impact of coaching at individual level has an impact at organisational level; which is particularly crucial for those who influence the direction of the organisation (Kahn, 2018; Stokes, Jolly, & Cox, 2023).

Derivative from the literature on the lack of, and/or inadequate understanding of executive coaching and its benefits for individuals and the organisation, is the problem this study seeks to investigate. What are the perceptions of human resource management and development practitioners about the contribution of executive coaching to career progression?

1.4. Research objectives

The overall research objectives are:

1.4.1. To investigate the perceptions of HRM&D managers about the meaning of the career concept.

1.4.2. To investigate the perceptions of HRM&D managers about the meaning of career progression.

1.4.3. To investigate the perceptions of HRM&D managers about the meaning of executive coaching.

1.4.4. To investigate the reflections of HRM&D managers about the contribution of executive coaching to career progression.

1.5. Research questions

To operationalise these research objectives, the research questions below were formulated to guide the practical field research.

1.5.1. What are the perceptions of HRM&D managers about the meaning of the career concept?

1.5.2. What are the perceptions of HRM&D managers about the meaning of career progression?

1.5.3. What are the perceptions of HRM&D managers about the meaning of executive coaching?

1.5.4. What are the reflections of HRM&D managers about the contribution of executive coaching to career progression?

1.6. Significance of this research

In response to the continuous poor performance of government departments, owing to senior management and leadership underperformance, the National School of Government established a Professionalisation Framework (National School of Government, 2022). The purpose of the Framework is to foster professionalism on the part of public servants and to professionalise their functional categories through registration with professional bodies (e.g. Board of Personnel Managers) (National School of Government, 2022). As part of ensuring that entry into public service senior management is merit-based, the Department of Public Service and Administration introduced a Certificate (Nyukela), as a pre-requisite for entry to senior management (Department of Public Service and Administration, 2020).

The NSG is in the process of introducing executive coaching as one of its formal interventions to prepare employees for progression to senior management, as well as support those who are still new to the senior management environment (Jarbandhan, 2022; National School of Government, 2022). However, the NSG interventions are targeted at employees in other state organs (national and provincial departments, and state-owned enterprises) because that is how it is mandated and generates revenue (National School of Government, 2020). This explains why, according to Participant 2, the executive coaching that is being developed by the NSG is managed by one of its training delivery divisions, instead of its HRM&D division.

Yet, according to Shchokina (2021), executive coaching (including career coaching) is optimised by the HRM&D division, as part of the overall employee development mechanisms (Shchokina, 2021). The fundamental shortcoming of the NSG's approach to executive coaching is its defocus from the pipeline of middle managers who might be part of the reason that the department decided to intervene in the senior management and leadership crisis, in government departments (Nzukuma & Bussin, 2011; Van der Waldt, Fourie, & Van Dijk, 2021). In order to reduce senior management and leadership incompetence, executive coaching should be implemented as a career progression preparatory mechanism (Siriwardena & Rathnayaka, 2024); before middle managers are appointed into higher positions where they are likely to become part of the problem, instead of being part of the solution (Udayar et al., 2024).

According to Malatjie (2024) the public service does not yet sufficiently understand executive coaching, which is the major obstacle to the recognition and adoption of executive coaching as a formal intervention. In the context of this research, this is the crux of the matter on which its significance hinges. In this regard, it is significant to add to the few studies available, that have also ascertained a very limited and/or a lack of understanding regarding executive coaching and its application to career management, specifically pertaining to the public service (Malatjie, 2024; Manzini & Malatjie, 2023).

Furthermore, public policy makers tend to measure the significance of challenges in quantitative terms (Marais & Matebesi, 2013; Strydom, Funke, Nienaber, Nortje, &

Steyn, 2010). This study, therefore, envisages to promote interest in a mixed-method research approach, with the intention to demonstrate the magnitude of the problem by both qualitative and quantitative measures.

1.7. Research delimitations

The research did not include public service departments in other provinces, but targeted public service departments in Gauteng province of South Africa only. Public service does not include municipalities and state-owned enterprises. Administrative-level employees in the departments in which the research was conducted, were not included in this research. Heads of departments and middle and senior - managers who are not in the HRM&D function, were not included.

1.8. Definition of terms

Table 2: Definition of terms

TERM	DEFINITION
Career	A profession or line of work that an individual makes their lifetime commitment, often associated with a sense of a calling, and purpose for existing (Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997).
Career Progression	It is a phase in the continuum of career evolution, that includes choosing work (career decision-making), moving up in a profession, job or organisation, moving out, by choice, or a career transition strategy to find or create entrepreneurial work, finding work after job loss, planning for the end of paid work and the beginning of a period of generativity (focusing on the developmental issues of up-and-coming generations) (Steckler, 2010).
Career Coaching	Career coaching is a focused, result-oriented form of coaching; in which the goals are clearly defined. Achieving goals also means that a coach must prepare a client to enter the marketplace in a knowledgeable and astute way, exhibiting tactics and behaviours that are appropriate to that work culture (Steckler, 2010).

Department	“Means a national department, a national government component, the Office of a Premier, a provincial department or a provincial government component.” (Public Service Amendmend Act, 2007)
Executive Coaching	In this research, executive coaching is defined as coaching that is specific to the formal workplace, for employees who are in managerial positions and/or with executive authority to make and implement organisational decisions. It is designed to help these management and/or executive employees achieve their individual professional goals as well as organisational ones (Kahn, 2018; Kilburg, 1996a). It is a term that identifies the type of coaching used for employees in middle management and upwards, and is most effective when applied to managers and executives who are responsible for current and future success of their organisations (Stokes et al., 2023).
Public Sector	National, provincial and local government, as well as state-owned enterprises and defined by the Public Service Amendment Act (Public Service Amendmend Act, 2007) and Section 195 of the Constitution of the Republic of South Africa (Constitution of the Republic of South Africa, 1996).
Public Service	Public service of the Republic of South Africa as defined by the Public Service Amendment Act (Public Service Amendmend Act, 2007).
Public Servant	Persons who are employed, (a) in posts on the establishment of departments; and (b) additional to the establishment of departments (Public Service Amendmend Act, 2007).

1.9. Assumptions

It is assumed that the participants will be reflective, articulate and responsive to the level of richness and depth this research envisions.

1.10. Structure of the report

Chapter 1 introduces the research topic, objectives, and research questions.

The literature review, structured according to the research questions, is presented in **Chapter 2.** Each section addresses literature relevant to a specific research question.

Chapter 3 details the research methodology, including the research approach, design, data collection procedures, sampling strategy, and sample size.

A descriptive report of the research findings can be found in **Chapter 4**.

The chapter that follows, **Chapter 5**, discusses the findings, guided by the research questions and the literature review.

Lastly, **Chapter 6** presents the conclusion of the research report and recommendations for further studies.

2. Literature Review

2.1. Introduction

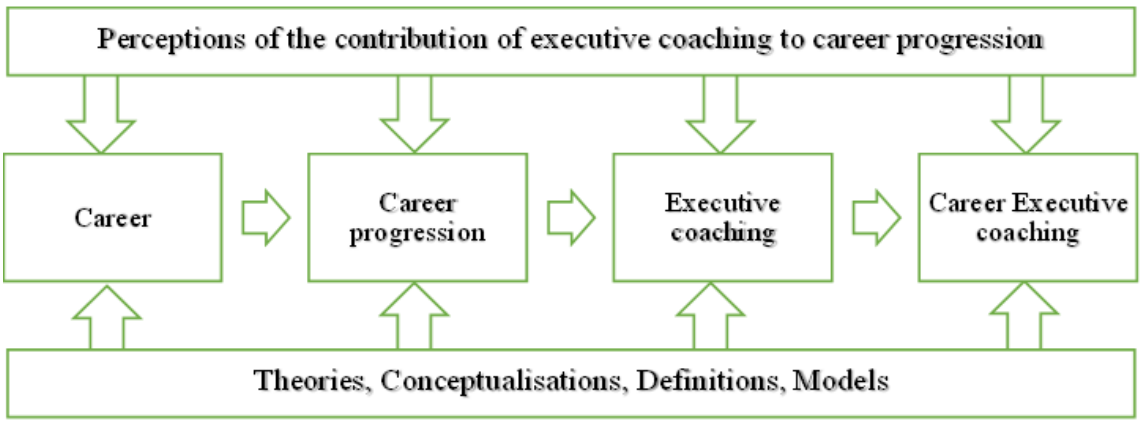
The literature review was based on the research objectives and guided by the research questions. Each research question was formulated as a heading, and the literature review was streamlined according to each research question. The key concepts that were deduced from the research topic, objectives and questions are discussed under "Background discussion" subsection of this chapter. This is followed by an exploration of theories associated with these concepts, under the "Theoretical framework" subsection.

It is argued that these concepts establish the foundation that enables fair comparative evaluation of the meaning that is ascribed to the career concept, career progression and executive coaching (Yates, 2022), by the participants who were interviewed for this research. In this study, comparative evaluation denotes the systematic cross-referencing of participants' insights on each concept with the corresponding definitions and conceptualisations that are found in the literature.

2.2. Background discussion

The conceptual components of this research are demonstrated in this subsection. The key concepts are articulated with a corresponding justification, as to why that specific concept is key. Figure 1 below illustrates this conceptual configuration.

Figure 1: Conceptual breakdown of the research topic



Source: illustration designed by the researcher/author of this Research Report

2.2.1. Career concept

One of the concepts that were derived from the research topic, objectives and questions was the career concept. To establish a common understanding and fair comparative evaluation, the meaning of the career concept is discussed, based on the literature. The career concept, as constructed and defined theoretically and through decades of studies, is the foundation for the development of career progression management; including executive coaching for career progression (Patton & McMahon, 2014; Savickas, 2013). This assertion is pivotal for the investigation of perceptions about the contribution of executive coaching to career progression. The meaning of career progression and career coaching should be anchored on career theory (Fennah, 2018; Hambly & Bomford, 2018).

2.2.2. Career Progression concept

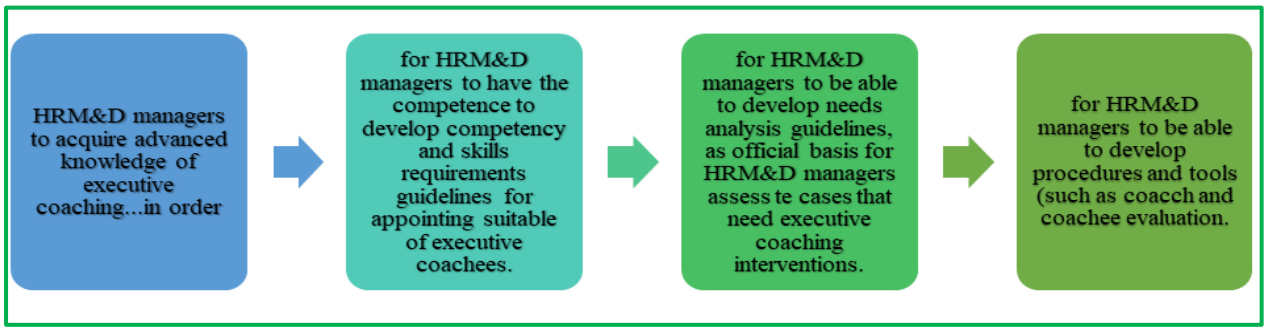
Senior management incompetence in the South African public service means that it cannot be assumed that upward mobility means career progression (Raphiri, 2022; Slater, 2014; Thusi, Matyana, & Jili, 2023). Career progression is typically associated with competence and an increase in the quantity and/or quality of productivity. Moreover, the fact that “career progression” is established on the foundations of the career concept and theory (Victor-Aigbodion & Eseadi, 2025; Young & Collin, 2004), meant that career progression had to be explored separately as well. The goal was to demonstrate that the attributes of career progression derive as much from meeting corporate performance standards (Wang, 2013), as they do from sound career theories (Sutin, Costa, Miech, & Eaton, 2009; Victor-Aigbodion & Eseadi, 2025).

2.2.3. Executive coaching concept

To implement and monitor executive coaching interventions, HRM&D managers should have an advanced understanding of the executive coaching concept (Varina, Kovalova, & Huz, 2023). In this regard, the literature that deals with executive coaching was reviewed. Its definitions and the underlying theories were explored with a view to establishing the meaning of executive coaching according to literature, against which the participants’ insights into executive coaching could be cross-referenced. Figure 1

below illustrates the way these concepts are building blocks for the conceptualisation of a competency framework for HRM&D to implement career coaching.

Figure 2:Illustration of executive coaching competency framework for HRM&D



Source: Illustration by author of this Report, content by (Retno, Samsuddin, Nitawati, Soelistya, & Putrianti, 2024a)

2.2.4. Executive coaching for career progression

According to research studies, people psychologically relate to work as either a job, a career and/or a calling (Wrzesniewski et al., 1997). Although these categories are not mutually exclusive, relating to work as “a career” was strongly associated with deeper psychological engagement and higher productivity (Duffy, Dik, Douglass, England, & Velez, 2018). It was important to review the notion of “career progression” as an extension of the career concept, especially because not all reasons for joining the public service can be defined as a “career” move (Raphiri, 2022). As demonstrated in Figure 2 above, the concepts are building blocks for the development of an executive coaching framework for career progression, as well as the theoretical grounding for this research.

2.3. Theoretical foundations

A theory is a lens through which a phenomenon is studied and explained (McMahon, 2014). It is the result of extrapolating general principles from particular cases (Mueller & Urbach, 2017; Stewart & Klein, 2016). The particular cases (findings) must be based on evidence and embedded in sound and generally accepted methods of investigation, in order to inform good theory (Besley & Ghatak, 2017; Fried, 2020; Mueller & Urbach, 2017). Against these general principles, research findings from subsequent particular cases can be tested (Collins & Stockton, 2018; Malterud, 2016).

This section explores the broader theoretical frameworks of the key concepts that guided this research.

2.3.1. Career theories

The early development of career theories can be traced to Frank Parson's career counselling methods, who postulated that sound career decision-making depends on self-understanding, understanding of the work environment, as well as choosing a career on the basis of compatibility between personality and vocational factors (McMahon, 2014). In collaboration with Hugo Munsberg, Frank Parson later developed his method to the Traits and Factor Career Theory (Faheem, 2017), as a sub-discipline within applied psychology (McMahon, 2014; Patton & McMahon, 2014; Savickas, 2013).

While Parson's influence on later career theory development and career coaching is still embraced, critiques questioned its focus on logical positivism (McMahon, 2014). It is argued that the reliance of logical positivism on static human characteristics (i.e. personality traits) tends to ignore the uniquely individual subjective agency, and concomitant idiosyncratic determinants of career construction (Patton & McMahon, 2014). Accordingly, constructivism and social constructivism career paradigms were developed, culminating in a more comprehensive and holistic paradigm for understanding how career direction is based on complex subjective processes, unique to each individual (Patton, 2019; Savickas, 2013).

These paradigms encompass the influences of personal constructivism and social constructivism on career construction (Savickas, 2013; Young & Collin, 2004). Constructivism is grounded in personal agency, meaning-making and the broader social or corporate context of meaning and action (Lent, Ireland, Penn, Morris, & Sappington, 2017).

Facilitating career choice and advancement or progression entails the opening of spaces for coachees to narrate their stories (Yates, Oginni, Olway, & Petzold, 2017). By means of analysis of these subjective narratives, the executive coach guides the career decision-making process to the point where the coachee has a clear view of their career path and what career progression means for them (McMahon, 2014;

Savickas, 2013). Since Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT) combines all career theories (Lent & Brown, 2019), the contribution of career theory to career progression was demonstrated through SCCT in this research.

2.3.2. Social Cognitive Career Theory (SCCT)

SCCT treats career construction as a cognitive process that is influenced by social and psychological contexts. In other words, a person's belief about their capabilities, as well as their values as members of society, influence their career construction (Lent & Brown, 2019; Lent et al., 2017). SCCT can be sufficiently illustrated by its three original components or models, which are: Interest, Choice and Performance (Lent & Brown, 2019).

2.3.2.1. Interest Model

According to the Interest model, interest in a particular career can be determined by self-efficacy, which is defined as a person's confidence in their abilities and their expectation of positive outcomes from that particular career (Lent & Brown, 2019).

2.3.2.2. Choice Model

Choice Model posits that choice can be determined by self-efficacy and positive outcome expectations (Lent & Brown, 2019). Basically, the more confident a person is about their abilities (self-efficacy) and anticipation of success (positive outcomes expectations) in a particular career, the more likely they are to choose it (Lent & Brown, 2019; Lent et al., 2017).

2.3.2.3. Performance Model

Performance model postulates that self-efficacy and positive outcomes expectations are determined by past performance, in so far as past performance strengthens self-confidence, leading to a belief that future career endeavours can also be as successful (Lent & Brown, 2019).

SCCT combines psychological factors (interests, skills, values) and social context (immediate environmental factors) to speculate what career direction a person might take, given the factors that are unique to them (Lent & Brown, 2019; Young & Collin, 2004).

Proposition 1: Advanced understanding of the career concept can be an indicator of the potential to adopt a career progression model for promotions.

2.3.2.4. Career Progression

In the South African public service, there is a general lack of government-wide legislative and policy framework to ensure that promotions are implemented within the bounds of career progression mechanisms (Nomarwayi & Mvenene, 2025; Raphiri, 2022; Theletsane, 2013). People who are not ready or fit are appointed to senior management positions, partly because there are no career management mechanisms to control horizontal or lateral mobility (Jarbandhan, 2022; Rust & Koketso, 2012; Zubane & Thusi, 2022). Public servants regularly use job-hopping as a strategy to secure promotions in other government departments, assuming that these departments might overlook their short tenure in their previous roles, when assessing their readiness for advancement (Hall, Morgan, & Redelinghuys, 2022; Nzukuma & Bussin, 2011).

Yet, career progression is on its own defined scholarly on the foundations of sound career theory (McMahon, 2014; Van der Heijden et al., 2020). A cursory review of how career progression is defined identifies horizontal or vertical mobility within the same profession (Abbott, Goosen, & Coetzee, 2013; Abga & Bello, 2023; Ahmed, 2019). Notwithstanding the merits or demerits of this broad definition, literature demonstrates that as a construct, career progression is more complex (Otu, 2024b).

For example, at a certain point during their life span, some people shift from self-centred construction of career progression, when faced with what they might consider a calling that transcends their personal interests (Savickas, 2013; Stevens, 2024). In such instances, it is not uncommon for people to decide that career progression is a move to a fulfilling career for them, even if available employment in the job market pays less than what they earn in their current career (Guinness, 2018; Otu, 2024a;

Victor-Aigbodion & Eseadi, 2025). In such instances, career coaching often employs coaching methods that afford the coachees the space to narrate their life or existential stories to reveal the kind of work and work environment that could meet the psychological, emotional and intellectual needs of that individual (Parker, 2016; Yates et al., 2017).

Some people derive fulfilment from helping others (Peak & McGarty, 2025), a theme that could be linked to community activism as a career option (Bosanquet & Rytmeister, 2017; Valocchi, 2013). One of the key functions of executive coaching in this instance, is helping coachees to develop the courage to transition into the careers that are aligned to their subjective sense of purpose and calling (Fennah, 2018; Parker, 2016; Victor-Aigbodion & Eseadi, 2025).

This means that the executive coach can also identify instances of career displacement or misalignment (Brand, 2004), thus creating an environment where organisations put the right people in the right positions, at the right time (Deshwal, 2015), while meeting the career needs of the individual coachees. It is worth noting that career coaching, in this instance, demonstrates awareness that career progression does not always have to be within the current occupation of the coachee, and therefore, a potential for career change must be explored (Akkermans, Richardson, & Kraimer, 2020).

Proposition 2: Advanced understanding of career progression can be an indicator of the potential to institutionalise career coaching for fruitful promotions.

2.4. Perceptions of HRM&D managers about the meaning of executive coaching

2.4.1. Overview of executive coaching

2.4.1.1. Executive Coaching Definition

Understanding executive coaching and how it works is crucial for the success of programmes that promote its usage in organisations (Turner, 2003). In terms of what

executive coaching is about, there are many different, albeit overlapping, executive coaching definitions (Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011). For this research, the definitions that were considered sufficient to illustrate executive coaching were those articulated by Kilburg (1996a) and Kahn (2018). The reason for selecting the two is that they highlight the fact that executive coaching is a workplace intervention, targeted at individuals with managerial and executive authority, through an intimate professional relationship between the coach and the coachee (Kahn, 2018; Kilburg, 2007). Executive coaching is defined as "a helping relationship formed between a client who has managerial authority and responsibility in an organisation, and a consultant who uses a wide variety of behavioural techniques and methods to help the client achieve a mutually identified set of goals; to improve his or her professional performance and personal satisfaction, and consequently, to improve the effectiveness of the client's organisation within a formally defined coaching agreement" (Kilburg, 1996a, p.142). The Worldwide Business Coaches Association defines business (executive) coaching as "a process of engaging in meaningful conversation with individuals in businesses, organisations and institutions of governments, with the goal of promoting success at all levels of the organisation by affecting the actions of those individuals" (Kahn, 2018,p. 2).

While the coaching process is between the coach and coachees, executive coaching is geared towards benefiting both the coachee and their organisations (Kahn, 2018; Pandolfi, 2020b). Business and/or executive coaching are defined in slightly different ways (Joo, Sushko, & McLean, 2012; Pandolfi, 2020a). However, the definitions cited above sufficiently grasp the essence of executive coaching (Kahn, 2018; Khalique, Khan, & Saini, 2024; Kilburg, 2007). It is for this reason that, in this study, the inclusion of other definitions was not considered necessary to demonstrate what executive coaching entails.

In addition, a few executive coaching models were selected, with a view to illustrating some principles pertaining to executive coaching in practice.

2.4.1.2. Selected Executive Coaching Models

The inclusion criteria for the selected executive coaching models are that:

- They are more relevant to the professional and corporate nature of executive coaching. The professional and corporate nature of executive coaching is encapsulated in the definition of executive coaching, which for the purpose of this research was derived from Kilburg (1996a), Kahn 2018 as well as Stokes, Jolly and Cox (2023). However, the list of these relevant coaching models is not exhaustive, in the sense that it does not include all the coaching models that fit this inclusion criterion.

- They are better suited to the objective of providing examples of coaching in a professional and career context.

2.4.1.2.1. Strategic Executive Coaching Model

The Strategic Executive Coaching Model (SECM) is a structured coaching model aimed at facilitating the growth and development of executives in organisations (Koortzen & Oosthuizen, 2010). The Strategic Executive Coaching Model is implemented through particular steps. The steps described in this Report were sourced from Koortzen and Oosthuizen (2010).

Step 1: Careful contracting

Establish an atmosphere that encourages open dialogue, transparent communication, and constructive feedback. Genuine communication and feedback help define the framework for the executive coaching journey. This is accomplished through the following carefully agreed objectives during the contracting phase:

a. Clarify the factors that contribute to success in the current and future role.

b. Set clear boundaries regarding confidentiality.

c. Determine the specific organisational outcomes expected from the coaching process.

d. Confirm the compatibility and chemistry between the coach and the coachee to ensure trust and rapport can be built.

Addressing these areas enables alignment between business objectives and individual expectations, fostering a setting where organisational goals can also be met. Therefore, it is essential that the objectives of this initial step are finalised before commencing one-on-one coaching sessions.

Step 2: Comprehensive assessment

The coachee (manager or executive) should undergo a thorough assessment process involving interviews and formal evaluation tools. The purpose is to identify the gap between their current and desired performance levels, and to determine how well they align with the business context, required leadership competencies, and expected organisational outcomes.

This in-person assessment involves interviewing key stakeholders—including direct reports, peers, supervisors, and clients—and observing the coachee in their day-to-day activities. Such direct engagement enables the coach to explore issues in depth, resulting in a rich, both quantitative and qualitative, baseline profile.

Furthermore, the assessment provides insight into the coachee's strengths and weaknesses. It identifies strengths that can be leveraged during the coaching process, while also highlighting the areas that require focused development to ensure meaningful progress throughout the executive coaching journey.

Step 3: Feedback dialogue and action planning

<u>3a. Feedback dialogue</u>

The purpose of the feedback dialogue is to revisit the objectives and ground rules established at the start of the coaching process. It is essential to adequately prepare the coachee (manager or executive) for this discussion, so they are ready to listen, remain open, and accept the feedback. This preparation supports their ability to embrace the forthcoming action plan.

Feedback sessions should take place outside of the normal office environment to create a relaxed setting with minimal interruptions. In this neutral space, the coachee can more comfortably express views that may differ from their current self-perception.

The coach's role is to carefully guide the feedback process, helping the coachee interpret the qualitative and quantitative data in the feedback report, and manage any potential negative emotional responses. This is achieved by maintaining objectivity and consistently referring back to business needs, desired results, and leadership competencies. These are then compared to the coachee's current performance. Ultimately, this approach ensures that the feedback discussion remains aligned with the broader organisational objectives.

3b. Action Planning

The action plan should be centred on behaviours that directly support the achievement of organisational objectives. It must include:

- The coachee's current strengths and their relevance to the organisation.
- Areas requiring development.
- The specific interventions to address those development needs.
- The coaching style most suitable for the development process.
- Recommendations for active or experiential learning.
- Methods by which the coachee's direct reports, supervisors, colleagues, and other stakeholders can provide support.
- The approach for conducting follow-ups with stakeholders.
- Key milestones already achieved as well as those still to be reached.

Once finalised, the action plan should be shared with the stakeholders involved from the outset of the coaching process. Their validation confirms that the action plan aligns with their expectations and reassures the coachee of this alignment. Additionally, since these stakeholders were part of the assessment stage in step 2, their involvement in the validation process increases the likelihood that changes in the coachee's behaviour will benefit all parties.

Step 4: Active learning

Once the key stakeholders approve the Action Plan, various development strategies are identified and pursued. The executive coach's responsibility is to facilitate and enhance the application of these strategies, which may include methods such as active learning, role-playing, case studies, video feedback, shadowing and journaling. In addition, customised developmental programmes and team interventions are recommended to further reinforce the executive coaching journey.

Step 5: Reviewing and sustaining success

More or less six months after the initial assessment, a follow-up evaluation is conducted to measure the impact of the executive coaching process on both the individual and the organisation. This review should acknowledge the progress achieved while also highlighting any areas that still require development.

The findings are communicated to all relevant stakeholders to ensure ongoing support for the coachee and to verify that the outcomes continue to align with the organisation's objectives. It is further recommended that the executive coach be evaluated as part of this process to guarantee the overall quality of the coaching engagement.

2.4.1.2.2. OSKAR Model

The OSKAR is an outcomes-focused coaching model (Passmore & Sinclair, 2020). This approach begins with the exploration and articulation of the desired outcomes from the coaching programme (Passmore & Sinclair, 2020; Samuel, 2024). In the initial "Outcomes" phase, the coach guides the client to envision their ideal future through targeted questions such *as what success means to the coachee* (Samuel, 2024). This process helps clients clarify their goals and track progress (Adams, 2022).

Since many clients may struggle with self-awareness or articulating their aspirations, the coach uses structured questioning—sometimes drawing on existential themes—to support deeper reflection and long-term goal setting (Stevens, 2024). The acronyms and their explanations are shown in Table 3 on the next page.

Table 3: OSKAR Executive Coaching Model

OSKAR Coaching Model				
Outcome	**Scale**	**Know-how**	**Affirm & action**	**Review**
Desired outcomes for the coaching session and the overall goals	Assess the present circumstances on a scale from 0-10. This assists in measuring the progress and understanding where one currently stands.	Assess present skills, knowledge and resources. Reflect on past accomplishments	Affirm current skills and capabilities to boost self-confidence to succeed in a particular career. Action plans must be in place for the actual implementation of goals towards the desired outcome.	Identify areas for improvement and make strategic and operational adjustments if necessary.

Source: table by author, content by Samuel, Julie (2024)

2.4.1.2.3. RACSR Model

The RACSR model was initially proposed by Ting and Riddle (2006) as a set of five broad behavioural categories, referred to as critical components (Oktaviani & Lantu, 2024). This framework was designed to offer a clear and practical structure for understanding the different behaviours that managers can readily comprehend (Kolb, 2021). Within these categories, the RASCR Framework identifies more detailed behaviours that managers demonstrate during managerial coaching. The RASCR framework further breaks down the five high-level critical components of managerial coaching into nine competencies, each associated with specific behaviours (Ting & Riddle, 2006). The components of the RACSR Coaching Model are tabulated below.

Table 4: RACSR Executive Coaching Model

RELATIONSHIP	**ASSESSMENT**	**CHALLENGE**	**SUPPORT**	**RESULTS**
The relationship constitutes a fundamental element in any coaching process between leaders and their team members. Developing a strong partnership is essential for effective coaching.	Assessment represents the second critical component of this framework. It centres on helping employees interpret feedback provided during regular daily interactions with managers and on assisting them in	The objective of challenge in coaching is to develop a clear vision of what is achievable by questioning existing limitations and exploring new possibilities. Executive coaches	Support serves as the third essential element in the development process. Without it, even a well-structured approach may falter; with it, stability and the capacity to sustain progress are achieved.	Results are achieved through a balanced integration of assessment, challenge, and support within the context of an effective relationship. The fifth

This dimension comprises three core elements: rapport, commitment, and collaboration. Within this framework, the relationship aspect consists of two components: 1. *Establishing Boundaries* This involves defining roles and clarifying the purpose of the coaching relationship. Behavioural indicators include clarifying supervisee expectations, discussing confidentiality and information sharing among stakeholders, defining roles, setting ground rules, establishing session formats and agendas, and managing time effectively. 2. *Building Trust* This component entails behaviours that foster the exchange of information, ideas, emotions, and insights.	gaining new perspectives for problem-solving. The primary elements of assessment are: 1. *Creating Awareness Through Feedback* This process aids individuals in using self-reflection to gain clarity about their current situation. The exchange of feedback is vital for productive mentoring and coaching relationships, and fostering awareness through feedback is a key aspect of coaching assessment. 2. *Encouraging Self-Discovery* This involves promoting new ways of thinking that enable employees or coaches to actively explore and understand themselves. It includes clarifying current strengths, weaknesses, values, beliefs, and potential.	facilitate this by posing questions, encouraging innovative ideas, and helping to eliminate barriers for employees. The main components of challenge are: 1. *Challenges Thinking and Assumptions* This involves questioning the employee in a non-judgmental manner, promoting alternative ways of thinking, using generative questioning techniques, and pushing boundaries for both supervisors and supervisees. 2. *Promotes Practice* This encourages experimentation with new tools, models, or approaches and involves conducting feed-forward rehearsals with the supervisee during supervision sessions.	Support plays a crucial role in development, as employees or coaches feel motivated by the active involvement of managers. The key components of support include: 1. *Listening For Understanding* Ineffective listening can lead to defensive reactions that hinder learning. In contrast, a coaching executive coach focuses attentively on the coachee in a non-judgmental and empathetic manner, seeking to understand not only the facts but also the individual's perspective and emotions. This includes observing how information is conveyed, body language, and what remains unspoken. 2. *Sustaining Momentum* At this stage, executive coaches/coaching managers help individuals stay motivated throughout the change process.	element, referred to as result, focuses on developing a clear development plan. This includes setting specific objectives and identifying the behaviours employees need to adopt to achieve them. <u>Establish Goals</u> The aim of this competency is to help individuals set ambitious and meaningful goals that enhance their performance. Employees or coaches are encouraged to identify which goals will create the greatest impact and define the exact actions required to reach them.

Sources: table by author of this Report, content by Ting and Riddle (2006), Oktaviani and Lantu (2024)

2.4.2. Overview of executive career coaching paradigms

Career coaching provides tailored-made assistance to help individuals to recognise their strengths, consider their options, and improve their career decision-making (Fennah, 2018; Hambly & Bomford, 2018; Otu, 2024b; Yates et al., 2017). Consistent with constructivist paradigms of career choice and advancement, career coaching is unique in its acknowledgement and incorporation of religious and cultural beliefs, as

significant factors in career exploration and progression (Fennah, 2018; Otu, 2024a; Victor-Aigbodion & Eseadi, 2025). These are the subjective experiences that are also recognised in Social Cognitive Career Theory (Lent & Brown, 2019; Lent et al., 2017; McMahon, 2014). The career coaching model that incorporates all the elements of Social Cognitive Career Theory is Purpose-based Career Coaching (Otu, 2024a). It is for this reason that Purpose-based Career Coaching (Pb-CC) was the only focus to illustrate how executive coaching operates in the domain of career coaching.

2.4.2.1. Purpose Based Career Coaching (Pb-CC)

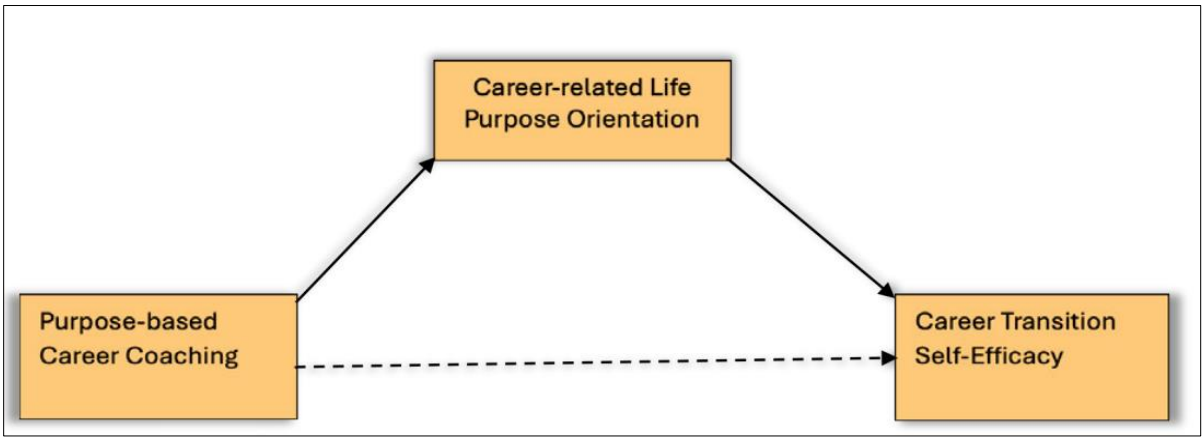
Careers that are deeply connected to a sense of purpose typically result in greater job satisfaction (Guinness, 2018; Leider, 2015; Otu, 2024a). Therefore, discovering fulfilment in one's career can be derived from matching career choice and progression to a person's subjective sense of purpose (Ahn, Dik, & Hornback, 2017; Duffy et al., 2018). Methods for personal reflection are applied to help the individual navigate through the journey of self-discovery, leading to a clearer view of their identity (Guinness, 2018; Wu, Hu, & Zheng, 2019). This journey is vital as it encourages individuals to scrutinise the motivations driving their career choices (Guinness, 2018; Otu, 2024b; Victor-Aigbodion & Eseadi, 2025), which is especially important in the context of materialist and self-serving career compromise within the South African public service (Raphiri, 2022). Are people following paths that reflect their individual agency, or have they simply adopted careers influenced by adults during their formative years (Esfahani, Zahrakar, & Samiei), or is the move a career compromise (Raphiri, 2022)?

A narrative discourse serves as an essential medium for clients to convey their life themes from which their career options may be delineated and analysed to identify career options that fit their unique proclivities (Lent & Brown, 2019; Victor-Aigbodion & Eseadi, 2025). The role of the executive coach includes analysing this discourse, facilitating discussion, and practicing active listening (Yates et al., 2017).

In terms of origins, the Purpose-based Career Coaching was developed by Mkpoikanke Sunday Out, in 2016 (Victor-Aigbodion & Eseadi, 2025). By the originator's own admission, the Model is not popularly known although it is being

academically accepted as another contribution to the existing paradigms of career coaching (Otu, 2024a). It was selected for the purpose of this research because of prevailing misalignment between career aspirations and actual roles occupied. This phenomenon is described as “career compromise”, and has a negative impact on task and organisational performance (Raphiri, 2022).

Figure 3:Purpose-based Career Coaching Model



Sources: Victor-Aigbodion and Eseadi (2025)

Figure 3 above illustrates the way the intersection between life purpose, life purpose based career choice and life purpose based career coaching (Victor-Aigbodion & Eseadi, 2025).

Table 5 below illustrates the components of Purpose-Based Career Coaching

Re-imagining	**Spiritual Engagement**	**Personal Reflection**	**Career Exploration**	**Recognition**	**Matching**
The authentic envisioning process helps clients reframe the possibilities of finding careers that resonate with their life’s purpose. It encourages a re-assessment of the relationship between where one desires to be and where they ideally should be.	In this phase, the coaching method fosters reflection on existential, spiritual, religious or cultural influences. It provides the coachee with the chance to anchor their sense of purpose withing their spiritual beliefs.	Methods for personal reflection are applied to help the individual through the journey of self-discovery, which can lead to a clearer view of one’s identity. This journey is vital as it encourages individuals to scrutinize their motivations driving their career choices.	This stage builds on the foundation laid by the previous phases, as it emphasizes investigation an individual’s sense of purpose and self-efficacy.	The recognition process aligns with Social Cognitive Career Theory by utilizing predictors of career selection, such as personality traits, abilities, interests, a personal sense of calling, and social-environmental factors.	This phase represents the peak of the earlier stages. Personal characteristics (such as traits, self-efficacy and interests) are evaluated to find careers that most appropriately match an individual’s profile

Source: table by author of this Research Report, content by Out, M (2016)

Proposition 3: Advanced understanding of executive coaching can be an indicator of the potential to competently apply it to career progression

2.5. Reflections of HRM&D managers on the contribution of executive coaching to career progression.

Studies show that employees in organisations that invest in their career progression show higher levels of commitment (De Vos & Cambré, 2017; Retno et al., 2024a).Their commitment, in turn, enhances their contribution to overall organisational performance (Ali, Mahmood, & Mehreen, 2019). Although many organisations tend to leave it to the employees to manage their own career progression (Kaye & Giulioni, 2012), there is a shift towards a collaborative approach between the employer and the employee (Nowakowski, 2022; Retno, Samsuddin, Nitawati, Soelistya, & Putrianti, 2024b). Organisational Career Management (OCM) is being revitalised as a mechanism for the employer to support their employees' career progression (Bagdadli & Gianecchini, 2019). OCM involves the employee, HRM&D managers and line managers (Bagdadli & Gianecchini, 2019). Line managers facilitate conversations with the employees to understand their career aspirations (Bagdadli & Gianecchini, 2019). They convey these aspirations to the HRM&D divisions, whose role is to facilitate structured career conversations and interventions.

These conversations usually involve consulting Performance Management and Development System (PMDS) from which HRM&D is able to draw insights about the current professional and personal behavioural patterns of the employee (Mphahlele & Dachapalli, 2022). Some of the issues that HRM&D learn from the PMDS, include overall motivation or lack thereof in their current roles, so that poor performance is not rewarded with promotion in the same role where the employee demonstrates poor performance (Sulkhanishvili & Kharadze, 2025).

The line manager and HRM&D manager may brief the executive coach, professionally and without prejudice. The employee is briefed on the developmental areas and career direction that were identified during supervision by the line manager as well as PMDS report from the HRM&D managers (Pellegrini, Rizzi, & Frey, 2018). This creates an

environment where the coaching process is based on realities surrounding the professional and personal dynamics of the employee, within the confines of the organisational environment (Hasmawati, Winarti, Jumriani, Akbardin, & Kallabe, 2024).

Proposition 4: HRM&D managers play a central role in organisations where career management is institutionalised

2.6. Conclusion of literature review

The review of literature has demonstrated that the concepts of career, career progression, executive coaching and career coaching are foundational to the study about the contribution of executive coaching to career progression. It has been deduced from this literature review that these building blocks of career coaching needed to be part of the research questions, in order to: (1) illustrate that career coaching is indispensably linked to career concepts and theories, as well as career progression and, (2) ensure that the participants applied their minds to the research topic with a bottom-up approach to career coaching, meaning the appreciation of what it means for work to be considered a career. It was this theoretical and conceptual background that shaped the interviews, data analysis and interpretation of this study.

Table 6 on the next page is the Consistency Matrix, the purpose of which was to maintain the alignment between the topic, research objectives and questions as literature was being navigated; thus, generating literature-based propositions that are aligned to the topic.

Table 6: Consistency Matrix

Research Objectives	Research Questions	Propositions	Literature	Source of Data	Data Analysis
1. To investigate the perceptions of HRM&D managers about the meaning of the career concept.	What are the perceptions of HRM&D managers about the meaning of the career concept?	Advanced understanding of the career concept can be an indicator of the potential to adopt a career progression model for promotions.	(Patton, 2019; Patton & McMahon, 2014; Samuel, 2024; Savickas, 2013; Wiernik & Wille, 2018; Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997; Yates, Oginni, Olway, & Petzold, 2017)	Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions, through an Interview Guide	Thematic Analysis
2. To investigate the perceptions of HRM&D managers about the meaning of career progression.	What are the perceptions of HRM&D managers about the meaning of career progression?	Advanced understanding of career progression can be an indicator of the potential to institutionalise career coaching for fruitful promotions.	(Abga & Bello, 2023; Arnold, Coombs, & Gubler, 2019; De Vos & Cambré, 2017; Essandoh, Kwao, Asandem, Boateng, & Arthur, 2023)	Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions, through an Interview Guide	Thematic Analysis
3. To investigate the perceptions of HRM&D managers about the meaning of executive coaching.	What are the perceptions of HRM&D managers about the meaning of executive coaching?	Advanced understanding of executive coaching can be an indicator of the potential to competently apply it to career progression	(Cilliers, 2005; Kahn, 2018; Kilburg, 1996, 2007; Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011)	Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions, through an Interview Guide	Thematic Analysis
4. To investigate the reflections of HRM&D managers about the contribution of executive coaching to career progression.	What are the reflections of HRM&D managers about the contribution of executive coaching to career progression?	HRM&D managers play a central role in organisations where career management is institutionalised	(De Vos & Cambré, 2017; Ellinger & Kim, 2014; Faheem, 2017; Gabriel, Moran, & Gregory, 2014; Gould-Williams, 2003; McDonald & Hite, 2023)	Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions, through an Interview Guide	Thematic Analysis

3. Research Methodology

This chapter presents the research paradigm, approach, sampling size and sampling methods, as well as data collection and interpretation procedures.

3.1. Research paradigm

The objective of this research is to investigate the perceptions of HRM&D managers in the public service, about the contribution of executive coaching to career progression. As the term “perception” implies, research that relies on verbal information drawn from the subjective experiences and perceptions of others, is phenomenological (Pilarska, 2021). Furthermore, epistemology acknowledges that, to study social phenomenon, is to delve into people’s subjective experiences, interpretations and idiosyncratic perspectives on the phenomenon being studied (Cal & Tehmarn, 2016).

The research journey was, in essence, phenomenological, insofar as it delved into the internal mental spaces of the participants as primary sources. It is worth noting, however, that non-verbal cues are also observed and reported in the findings chapter. Non-verbal cues are an integral part of, and an advantage, for qualitative research as they add to the richness of data (Reay, Zafar, Monteiro, & Glaser, 2019; Rennie, 2012; Saldana, 2011). An example of the non-verbal cues included are sighs of dejection, followed by a pessimistic answer to the question (as will also be indicated in the findings chapter).

3.2. Research approach

Research that relies on other people’s inner experiences, meaning-making and personal perspectives is best approached as a qualitative process (Oranga & Matere, 2023; Rennie, 2012; Turner III, 2010). The richness of content from personal experiences of multiple primary sources was not only the goal of this research, but also a necessity to achieve comprehensive data capable of sufficiently addressing the research questions (Barrett & Twycross, 2018; Moser & Korstjens, 2018).

3.3. Population and sample

3.3.1. Population

Kazerooni (2001) makes an important distinction between the population and the sample drawn from that population (Kazerooni, 2001). The reason for mentioning the population in this research, was broader population where further investigation may be conducted on the subject of this research (Majid, 2018). Put differently, the participants' perspectives can be traced to the broader environment that shaped their experiences, and therefore, potentially encourage other researchers to expand the scope to other stakeholders (i.e. heads of departments) within that population (Arias-Gómez, Villasís-Keever, & Miranda-Novales, 2016; Barreiro & Albandoz, 2001; Majid, 2018). The population of interest in this research were the public service HRM&D managers in Gauteng province.

3.3.2. Sample

The sample consisted of six HRM&D managers in public service departments based in Gauteng province. The inclusion criteria is derived from the research questions and who, in the study population, can be deemed experientially equipped to provide relevant answers pertaining to the research questions (Marshall, 1996). The ideal sample, according to Mweshi and Sakyi (2020) consists of people who are articulate and introspective enough to provide rich descriptions of their experiences (Mweshi & Sakyi, 2020). This study zoomed into the perceptions of human resource management and development managers with specific reference to the contribution of executive coaching to career progression. It, therefore, required managers in the field of human resource management and development exclusively. It was reasonably assumed, based on their relative seniority, that this sample consisted of people who were perceptive, "articulate and introspective enough to provide rich descriptions of their experiences" (Mweshi & Sakyi, 2020). The profile of the participants is provided on Table 5 on the next page.

Table 5: Participant Profile

Participants' professional profiles	Job functions
Middle and Senior Managers of Human Resources and Development	Development of policies and procedures for bursaries, internship programmes, human resource development. Development of Workplace Skills Plans, Implementation of Skills Development Facilitation targets. Identification of priority skills for the department. Manage recruitment and selection processes, probation, service benefits, employment equity, labour relations, grievance management. Facilitate organisational restructuring processes. Over implementation of government policies on recruitment, promotions, transfers. Coordinate short courses. Develop Human Resource Plans for the department and HRD strategies and plans.

3.3.3. Sampling method

A purposive sampling method was utilised, leading to the identification of HRM&D managers in public service departments based in Gauteng province. The initial plan was to contact them telephonically from HR contacts listed in the public service vacancy circular. This method was not successful. A snowball approach (Naderifar, Goli, & Ghaljaie, 2017), was successfully used as an alternative. The first contact was a former colleague of the researcher, which was a strictly professional relationship. She agreed to participate in her capacity as Deputy-Director for Human Resource Management and Development. This person then provided two other contacts, who in turn became part of the six participants for this study.

3.3.4. Sample size

The general guidelines or practice regarding the sample size in qualitative research is saturation (Hennink & Kaiser, 2022), which means the point beyond which no new insights are being gained from continuing the research beyond a certain number of people (Guest, Namey, & Chen, 2020).

The sample for this research consisted of six managers from six government departments in the Gauteng province. With this sample it was possible to reach saturation in terms of data that was collected. This can be attributed to fact that the sample was homogenous (Aldiabat & Le Navenec, 2018), in terms of their job descriptions. In addition, they operate within the same policy, procedural and legislative frameworks. The human resource management and development field in the South African public service derives its mandate from the same legislations. Examples include Section 195 of the Republic of South Africa, Public Service Amendment Act (2007), Public Administration and Management Act (2007) as well as the White Paper on the Transformation of the Public Service, Employment Equity Act.

3.4. Research instrument

An interview guide was more suitable for ensuring that the participants expressed themselves in a natural conversational style (Barrett & Twycross, 2018; Turner III & Hagstrom-Schmidt, 2022).

The interview guide, which is included as Appendix B, was developed from the research questions. It served as a prompt to elicit responses as much as possible, while also keeping the conversations from straying too widely from the research questions.

3.5. Procedure for data collection

The data was collected from six participants through one-on-one meetings via MS Teams. An interview guide was developed around the research questions. The MS Teams application recorded the proceedings and transcribed the interviews at the same time. The video feature on MS Teams was switched off, as one way to keep the participants'' identities anonymous and to ensure that the gaze of a stranger does not disrupt the thought processes – especially because there were cases when the participants would ask for time to find the “right” English words or phrases to express what they were thinking.

The audio recordings and the transcripts were the basis of transcription of the data into MS Word text. In many instances, the MS Teams transcripts distorted the verbal inputs of participants. To compensate for this defect, it became necessary to listen to each audio recording and correct the distortions in the text. Eventually, through this process, the quality of the textual representation of data was achieved.

3.6. Data analysis and interpretation

3.6.1. Analysis

The method that was used to analyse the data to make it meaningful was thematic analysis. Thematic analysis is a systematic method that is useful for sorting and creating meaning and coherence from a large volume of textual data, transcribed from interviews (Saldaña, 2021; Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019). Thematic analysis aims to generate themes, which are also integral to the data interpretation process (Braun & Clarke, 2012; Kiger & Varpio, 2020). Themes are generated from the textual data by means of coding segments or units of data from the interview transcripts (Saldana, 2011; Vaismoradi & Snelgrove, 2019; Wæraas, 2022). Modified by adding “and/or” to accommodate the elements of coding procedure from Saldana (2011), the following coding steps according to Braun and Clarke (2012).

1. Familiarization with the data
2. Coding process
3. Generating of themes and/or categories
4. Reviewing themes and/or categories
5. Defining and naming themes
6. Writing up

3.6.2. Data interpretation

The approach to data was interpretive and constructive in nature (Ningi, 2022). Interpretively, the participants’ views were critically evaluated against the literature review and the research questions (Mezmir, 2020; Reay et al., 2019). The parallel constructivist process was the meaning-making thought process undergirding the choice of responses that were considered to be more relevant to the literature and

research (Mezmir, 2020; Ningi, 2022). Suffice to indicate that in vivo coding and verbatim illustrations affords the reader first-hand exposure to the words of the participants (Hayre, 2021), thus enabling trustworthiness of the interpretation in terms of its alignment to the actual inputs of the participants (Abraham et al., 2021).

3.7. Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness was one of the major considerations in this research, as it relates to both the integrity of the research report and the researcher. The discussion of this important value in qualitative research is based on the guidelines by Tracy and Hinrichs (2017) on the criteria for qualitative inquiry (Tracy & Hinrichs, 2017).

From the interviews to data analysis and interpretation, care is taken to not deviate from the research approach and design. There was no deviation from the interview guide, in so far as its proper utilisation to prompt and then allowing for the participants to respond in a way akin to storytelling. By means of verbatim inclusion and in vivo coding, the research demonstrates authenticity. Using an exclusively deductive approach to coding was prevented, although it seemed convenient. The reason for putting inductive coding first was to ensure that any issues that arise from the data are not excluded because of not fitting pre-existing codes.

The topic of this research is relevant, given the current crisis of governance and its impact on service delivery. Executive (career) coaching is needed in the public service, now more than ever, especially because promotion on the basis of political connections needs to be curtailed. Executive coaching has significant potential to persuade ethical career ambition, as in most cases, the issue of ethics does not feature in the daily lives of public servants. This topic is also of interest to public policy makers, who are aware that the poor are mostly affected by inadequate governance, but had not been made aware of alternative mechanisms to turn the tide on the incompetence of senior management in the public service.

Self-reference effect in a research, according to Tracy and Hinrichs (2017), is integral to the declaration and credibility because these values refer primarily to the integrity of the researcher (Passmore & Sinclair, 2020; Tracy & Hinrichs, 2017). The

researcher's 14 years of work experience in the public service exposed him to the dearth of ethical consciousness, especially when it comes to career ambition. Nonetheless, the researcher took care not to allow his own ethical convictions to blur the line between being a student and former colleague. In terms of data, while saturation was reached with only six participants, its volume necessitated long hours and days to ensure that an authentic research report is submitted.

3.7.1. Transferability

Research findings are transferable if they can be applied to the same context, but on a different sample (Adler, 2022; Anney, 2015; Bhattacharya, 2017). As mentioned before, the sample was homogeneous in terms of their functions and participants being members of the public service. The methodology, research approach, design, data analysis and interpretation were implemented rigorously to ensure that the findings reflect the interviews.

According to Tracy and Hinrichs (2017), "transferability is achieved when the story of the research overlaps with their own situation" (Tracy & Hinrichs, 2017). Studies suggest that this criterion can be achieved in the South African public service, based on other researchers' studies on the topic of career management practices and impact on poor senior management appointments (Chokoe, 2024; Nokhwali-Mboyi, 2018; Raphiri, 2022).

3.7.2. Credibility

Tracy and Hinrichs (2017) also posits that verbatim quotations (in chapter 4) and in vivo coding were intended to show the stakeholders that the report is credible (Tracy & Hinrichs, 2017).

3.7.3. Dependability

For the findings to be dependable, the researcher must be able to demonstrate that they correspond with the data that was collected (Janis, 2022). Correspondence with

the data was demonstrated in several approaches, including verbatim and in vivo excerpts of the participant's' words.

3.7.4. Confirmability

The research can be confirmed if a third party (another researcher), determines that the interpretation of data and the findings are based on the data collected (Anney, 2015). This might be done by a process of audit trail, where one follows the steps taken by the researcher, from the formulation of the questionnaire to data collection (Shenton, 2004). The data is stored in audio recording and transcripts.

3.8. Study limitations

Study limitations in qualitative research are defined as risk factors that are outside the control of the researcher, which could nonetheless affect the credibility, transferability and dependability of the study (Theofanidis & Fountouki, 2018).

In this research, one of the issues that could affect transferability is locality. Due to differences in organisational cultures in other provinces, the fear of authority could compromise the truthfulness of the participants' answers. Since the interviews were conducted via MS Teams, the same medium could adversely affect concentration levels and freedom of expression on the part of the officials who work in open plan workstations.

3.9. Ethical consideration

Axiology is associated with a qualitative research approach. Axiology refers to the researcher's own worldview, assumptions and biases (Richards, 2022). The participants were allowed to provide their layperson's views about the concepts in this research. There was no intention to confirm the propositions by influencing the understanding of the participants about the concepts in the research. In terms of participation in the research, the participants were provided with the participant information sheet, which, among other things, assured them that they could withdraw from the research if they so wished at any time. Another key aspect was guaranteeing their anonymity, which is critical given their candid views about their organisations. To

further guarantee their anonymity, the video feature of the application was switched off in all of the interviews.

Bell and Bryman (2007) list eleven ethical considerations when researchers undertake studies as harm to participants, i.e. dignity, privacy, informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, deception, affiliation, honesty and transparency, reciprocity, and misrepresentation. Pursuant to these ethical considerations, 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. Furthermore, participants were made aware, in advance, about the Wits Business School ethics binding the conduct of the researcher. The ethical clearance certificate, which is included as Appendix D, was also provided to the participant, as evidence that the ethical requirements were officially binding.

Lastly, integrity with data analysis and interpretation was brought to bear. This was to ensure that the research findings are not misleadingly incongruent to the data – intentionally.

4. Presentation of Findings

4.1. Introduction to Findings

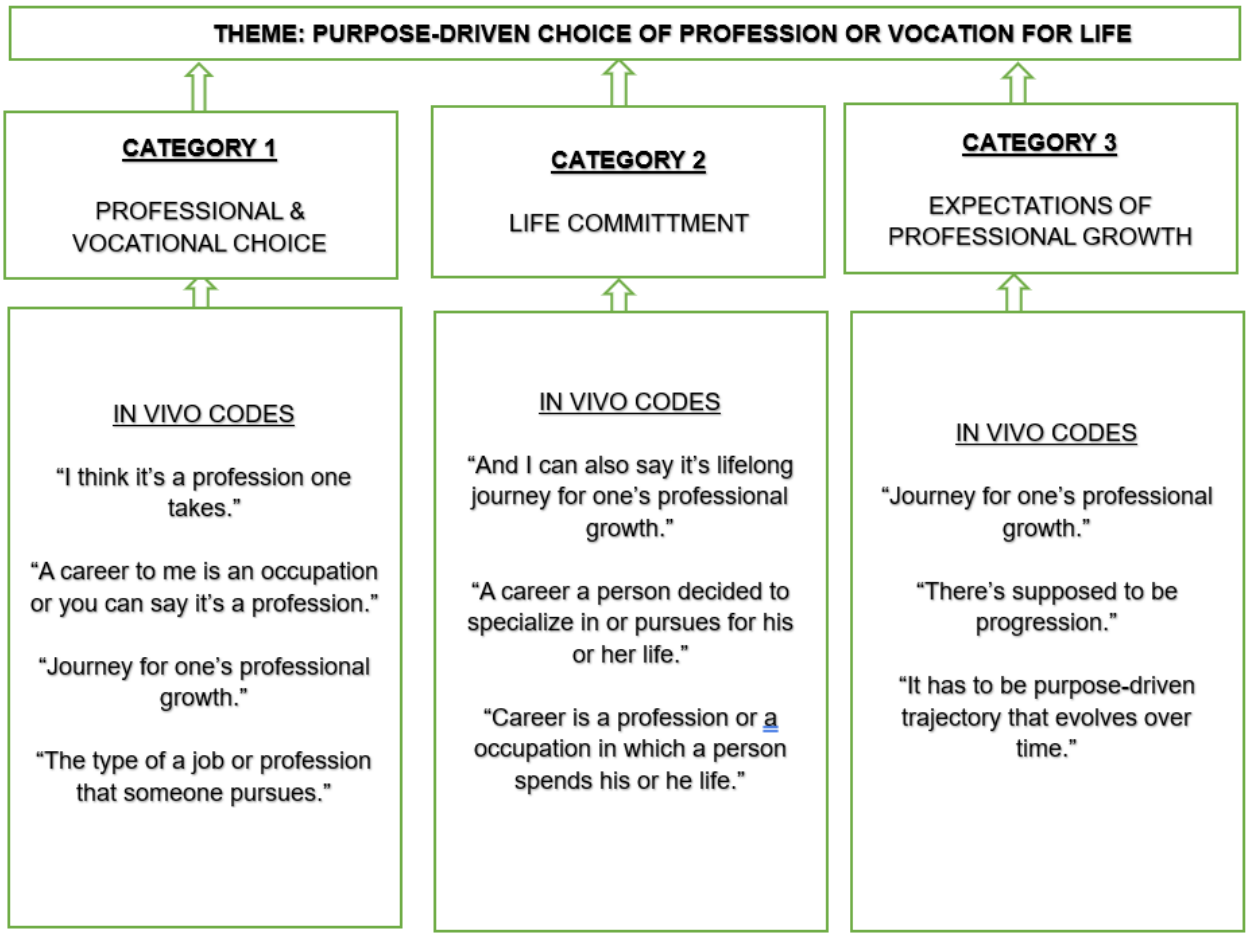
The findings of this qualitative research are presented in this chapter. In terms of approach, the presentation is descriptive, in line with the qualitative framework that guided this research process (Ningi, 2022; Sutin et al., 2009). Coding for this research was a mix of inductive and deductive methods (Williams & Moser, 2019). The former allows the codes and themes to emerge from the data, while the latter means that codes are pre-defined from theory and/or literature (Bernauer, 2015; Khandkar, 2009). In terms of the inductive coding process, in vivo method was preferred. In vivo coding or open coding is described by Saldana (2021) as ”a word, short phrase from the actual language found in the qualitative data record; the terms used by the participants themselves” (Saldaña, 2021, p. 91). (Bernauer, 2015; Khandkar, 2009).

Coding with this method is by means of direct textual quotations (in short segments) of participants’ words (Bernauer, 2015; Khandkar, 2009). These in vivo codes generated categories, and themes emerged from those categories. On the next page begins the main presentation of findings, through the codes, categories and themes that were generated and analysed.

4.2. Findings pertaining to Research Question (RQ) 1: Perceptions about the meaning of the career concept

Figure 4 below shows the codes, categories and the theme that developed from the data collected from the research participants. The question was about their perception of the career concept.

Figure 4:RQ 1 Codes, Categories and Theme



It was observed that all of the participants associated the career concept with merit, competence and productivity. Most of them lamented the recruitment and promotion practices in their departments. They indicated that promotions are not implemented based on career-pathing, which most of them indicated was non-existent. Instead, there was a sense of over-reliance on interviews. It was also mentioned that there were many instances where people did well in interviews but then proved to be incompetent in terms of the work for which they were appointed. Below are verbatim remarks illustrating the sentiments of the participants.

In terms of the perception of the career concept, the following remarks were made by the participants.

Participant 2	“I think it's a profession that you choose to follow. Whether it's in administration, academy or science or in general. And then you get a foundation. You are groomed, you start getting your foundation, you are learning on-job training.”
Participant 3	“I can say either way, it can be a profession or an occupation in which a person spends his or her life.”
Participant 5	“It has to be purpose driven trajectory that evolves over time. And I can also say it's also a lifelong journey for one's professional growth”

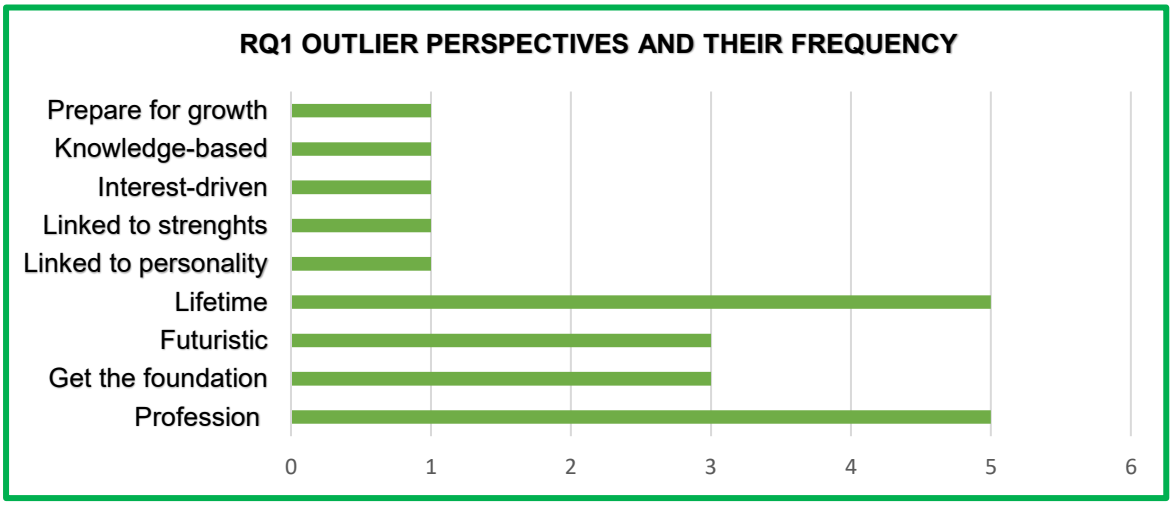
A follow-up question was whether the participants believed that the words “career” and “vacancy” should be used interchangeably. The background to this question is that the Department of Public Service and Administration uses the term “vacancy” in their job advertisements. The objective of posing this question was to verify whether their responses to the questions about the career concept were an indication of their genuine beliefs the career concept. All the participants categorically objected to the idea that the two terms should be used interchangeably.

Participant 1	“The words vacancy and career are two different things, and in terms of a career, a career is about your future to become a better person in the future and uh if then uh compels motivate you to take um training that's is going to empower you to become that better person in the future, whereas a vacancy is just a position.”
Participant 3	“For me, vacancy is something empty. It’s something that is not occupied.”
Participant 4	“Not at all. Not at all. Because vacancy is like an opening where the position is not occupied by anybody.”

Participant 2	“Yes, there should be a distinction because when they talk about vacancy, they talk about a certain post at a certain level where it was evaluated, indicating what qualification is needed, what experience is needed, certain, let's say, maybe three to five years’ experience.”

Figure 5 on the next page presents the outlying perspectives and their frequencies. They are presented to give the reader of this report as much exposure as possible to the primary data, since not all data collected was enough to form, or to be included, in categories and/or themes.

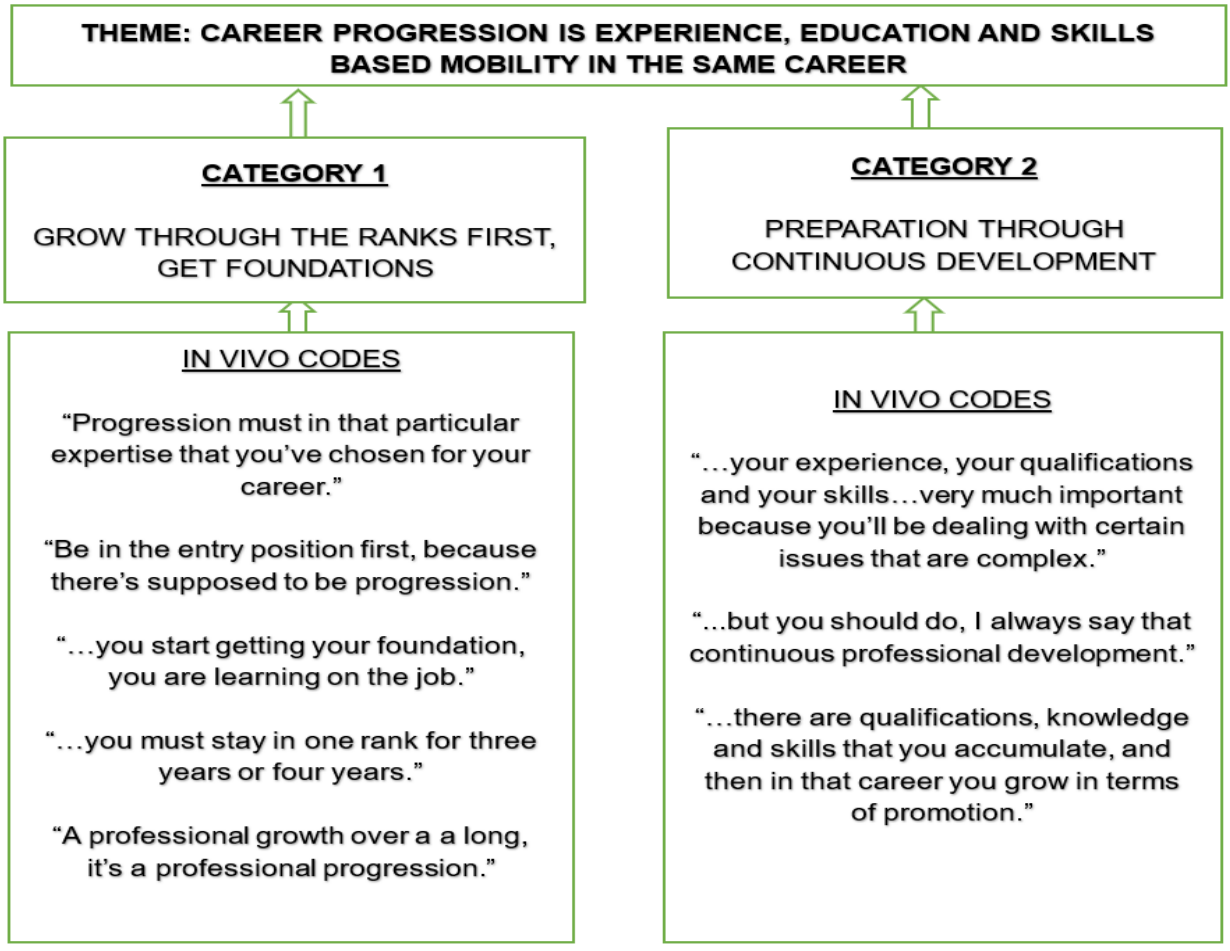
Figure 5: Outlier perspectives and their frequency



4.3. Findings pertaining to Research Question (RQ) 2: Perceptions about the meaning of career progression

Proposition 2 was based on the question about career progression. The objective of the question was to establish whether, in the participants' departments, career progression was consistent with the literature. According to the literature, career progression ordinarily results in career satisfaction and more productivity. Figure 6 below shows the codes, categories and the theme that emerged from the data collected from the participants.

Figure 6: RQ 2 Codes, Categories and Themes



The participants associated career progression with professionalism, qualifications, skills and the willingness to start a career from the foundation. They indicated that, in the public service, in general, employees get promoted too early to senior management positions. As a result, incompetence within the ranks of senior management is prevalent. The major contributory factors to promotions of this nature,

according to the participants, are the lack of a government-wide and mandatory system of career progression management. This system would enable government departments to verify if a job applicant had spent enough time in their current department to acquire the necessary experience that is essential to be appointed into a senior management position. Below is a selection of verbatim quotations from the participants. Where some parts of the quotations are underlined, the purpose is to make it easy to identify the parts of the quotations that best illustrate the findings they are intended to substantiate.

Participant 3 "Like I've described the career now to say, you know, occupation or a profession that one pursues for a certain period of time, you know, with a particular path of training to pursue, you know, progression is in that particular expertise that you've chosen as one's life."

Another issue that was raised is the importance of getting the right foundation at one level, before moving to the next or a higher level.

Participant 2 "People are jumping from one level to another. So, this person already, in his or her career, something is broken. They didn't allow this person to grow within their salary levels. There's a reason why there's level six there's level seven, there's level eight."

Participants also emphasised that career progression is associated with the accumulation of years of experience within the chosen professional field. It is not uncommon in the public service for employee to accumulate experience in one field, but when they decide to transfer to a different one, they are appointed.

Participant 2 "Like I've described the career now to say, you know, occupation or a profession that one pursues for a certain period of time, you know, with a particular path of training to pursue, you know, progression in that particular expertise that you've chosen as one's life."

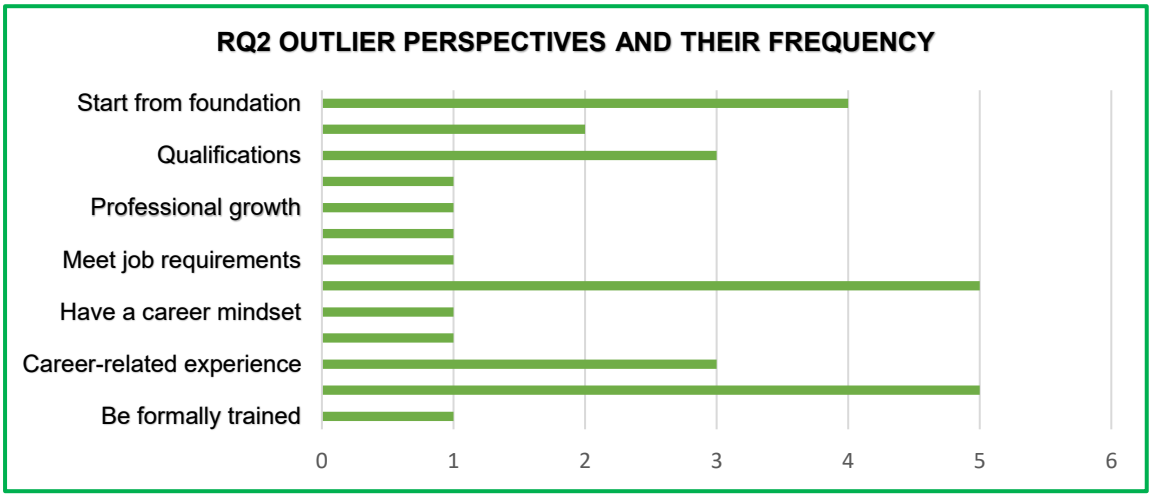
It was clear that the participants were displeased about the current promotion practices in their departments. They believed that there was an over-reliance on interviews.

Furthermore, they believed that being prepared for career progression would be a fruitless exercise, since there was no guarantee that an employee would be ultimately appointed to the senior management post for which they are being prepared.

The reason for this observation is that, according to the legal framework of government appointments in the public service, it is a requirement that a vacant position must be open for competition. So, the position into which an internal candidate should progress is subject to competition from both internal and external candidates. In many instances, according to the participants, the candidate who performed the best during the interview process, is taught how to do the work by the internal employee, who should have been the one to be appointed to that position. This adversely affects the morale of internal staff members and reduces their motivation to participate in career progression coaching.

The perspectives that were not sufficiently distributed to be categories and themes are shown in Figure 7. They are presented to maximise direct exposure to the participants' responses.

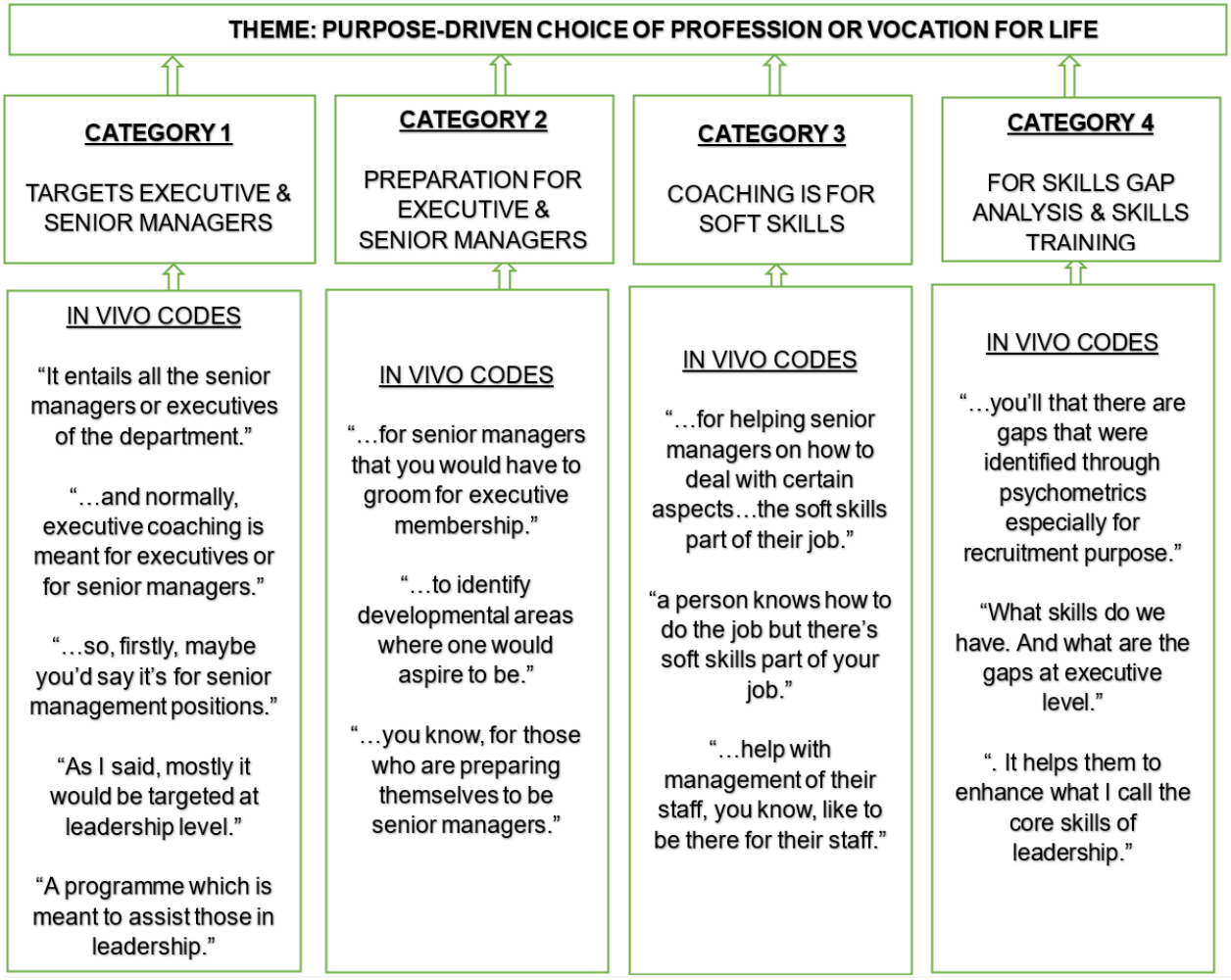
Figure 7: RQ 2 Outlier perspectives and their frequency



4.4. Findings pertaining to Research Question (RQ) 3: Perceptions about the meaning of executive coaching

Proposition 3 was based on the question about the perceptions of the participants in terms of their understanding of the meaning of executive coaching. Figure 8 indicates the codes, categories and themes that emerged from the data collected from the participants.

Figure 8: RQ 3 Codes, Categories and Themes



One of the key questions for this research was centred broadly around executive coaching. This question was meant to assess the participant's perception or understanding of the term "executive coaching." Almost all of the participants began with the assertion that executive coaching is targeted at senior managers or executives of the department. According to several participants, executive coaching is used to help senior managers to identify areas in which they would require further development.

Participant 1	“Hmm. Okay, in my own understanding, I think the executive coaching um I think each and every organization or department has the executives, if I may put it that way. I think the executive coaching it will entail all the the senior managers or the executive the executives of the organizations.”
Participant 2	“Is to assist. People at executive level or senior managers how to deal with certain aspects.”
Participant 5	“You know, I always say that it depends as well, because an executive coaching is normally meant for leadership skill enhancement, you know, or, you know, personalised development, customised to address specific needs.”

What was also prominent in the responses, was that executive coaching is about helping the senior managers to develop soft skills, not related to the actual job content. According to several of the participants, senior managers already know their job content, they just need to be coached on the soft skills pertaining to their job.

Some of the examples of soft skills that were mentioned were people skills, diversity management and budget management. One participant believed that executive coaching could be used to enhance supervision skills, including how to manage other employees, performance management, and budget management. They also suggested that coaching can be used as a tool to supervise diversity management, thus a tool for overall people management skills. Their emphasis on soft skills, not job contents, is demonstrated in the following in vivo excerpts.

Participant 2	“The soft skill part of their job. Now remember the understanding is that a person knows how to do the job. For example, if you are a medical doctor, a senior medical doctor, you know everything about medicine. But there's this soft skill of managing others.”
Participant 3	“You go to the competence assessment of your executives. And say “this is the problem” when it comes to finances, we we are not doing well when it comes to corruption, we need ethics. When it comes to people's management, we are bullying people”

One participant argued that executive coaching also assists in preparing an employee for exposure to the duties of a senior manager that they aspire to become. An example was allowing those employees to attend parliamentary portfolio committees and be able to respond to parliamentary questions. The context for this assertion is the fact that only members of the top tiers in the organisational hierarchy are allowed to attend parliamentary portfolio meetings.

Participant 6	“My my little understanding of coaching is that it would really assist quite a lot in terms of a number of things like for example, you know, if you are on-boarding new employees, it would really assist you know.”
Participant 4	“And even executive coaching, to be honest with you, I don't limit it to an extent that I exclude business coaching, because I know that business coaching is central, because it will help them to define clear vision.”

Interestingly, one participant indicated that, in her government department, executive coaching is implemented. According to her, the department contracted a pool of external coaching services. The participant asserted that, whenever the department determines that a certain area might be effectively addressed through executive coaching interventions, they draw from that pool of executive coaches. She further mentioned that her departmental policy on contracting executive coaching was to assign the coachee to a matching coach. Their main criteria, according to her, was that an executive coach must have job knowledge of the coachee’s role in the department. She also mentioned that her department trains internal staff members on executive coaching, especially those who are close to retirement.

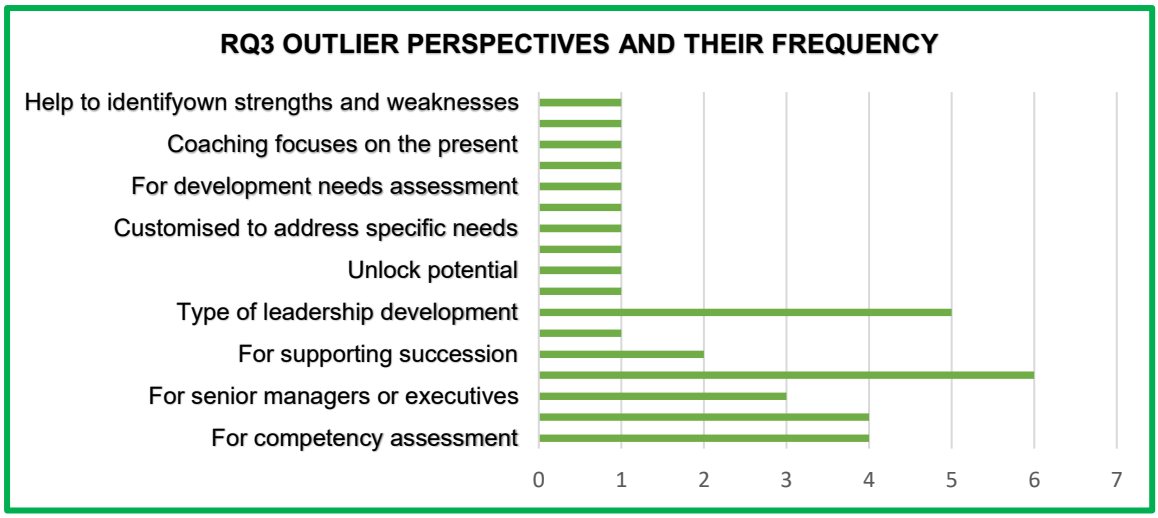
Participant 3	“And then those who are going on pension for succession plan, we pay them. We call them and say come back Mrs X, train our people. You've been a CFO for 10 years. What are the do's and don'ts?”

Overall, the participants demonstrated limited understanding of executive coaching, compared to how executive coaching and career coaching are defined in literature.

This knowledge deficit, however, did not curb the participants' interest in executive coaching in general, and its particular application to career progression.

Figure 9 below presents the outlying perspectives and their frequencies. They are presented to give the reader of this report as much exposure as possible to the primary data, since not all data collected was enough to form, or to be included, in themes.

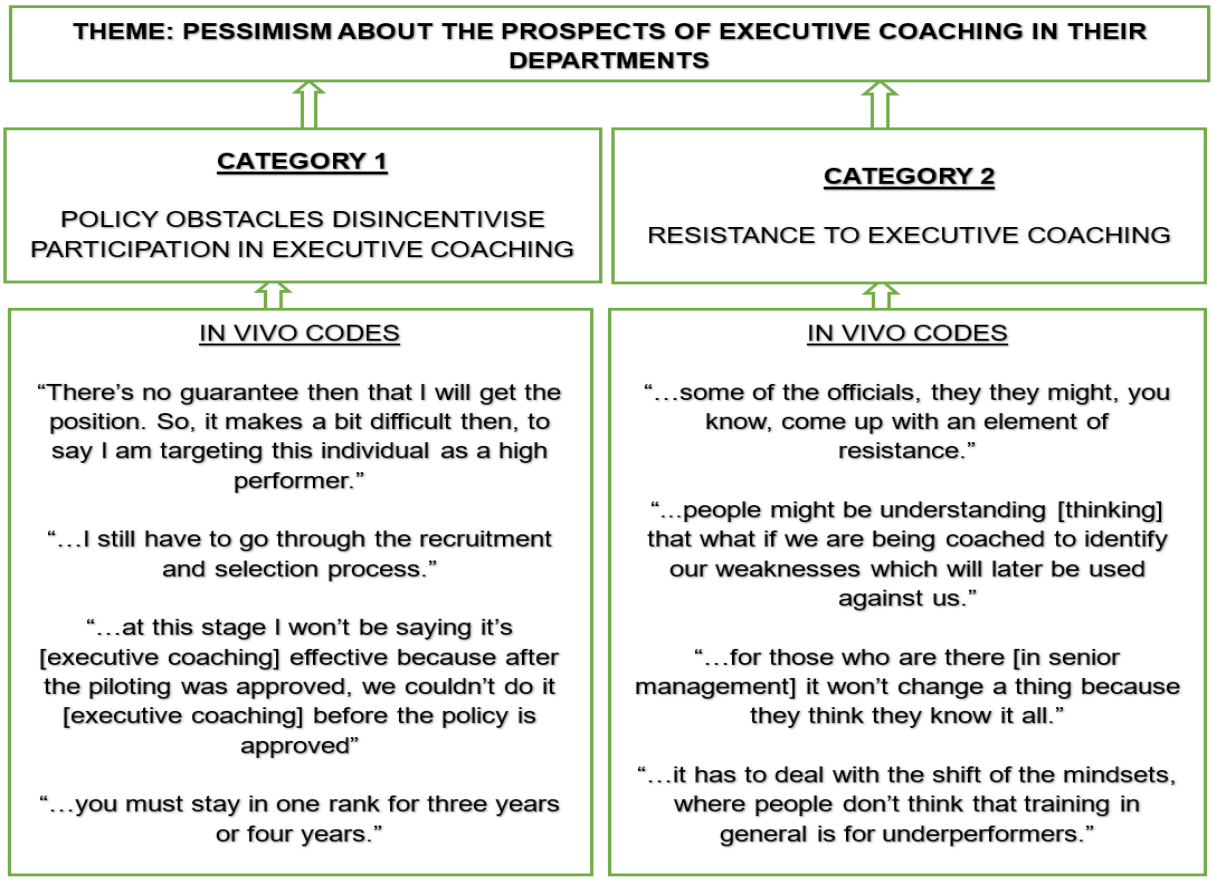
Figure 9: RQ 3 Outlier perspectives and their frequencies



4.5. Findings pertaining to Research Question 4: Reflections on the departmental utilisation of executive coaching

The question around this proposition was covered in three sub-categories: departmental utilisation, value for money and promotion of executive coaching in the respective departments of the participants. Figure 10 below indicates the codes, categories and themes that emerged from the interviews.

Figure 10: RQ 4 Codes, Categories and Theme



Departmental utilisation

Only two departments had executive coaching programmes underway. Besides that, there was a general feeling of pessimism with regards to the prospects of executive coaching in their respective departments. One of the issues that was raised, was that executive coaching can improve career progression. However, there are no guarantees of succession to the next levels. This, according to the participant, was because South African labour laws require that jobs must be advertised to the public. That means that job applicants are given equal opportunities to compete for these

positions, irrespective of whether the job applicants are internal staff members in that department, or not.

Moreover, the implementation of equity labour laws precludes the possibility of being appointed on the basis of being developed or groomed within the department. If the position is designated for a certain category of previously disadvantaged groups, anyone who is not in that category, cannot be promoted without violating labour laws. With a tone of despair, Participant 5 summed up the issue as follows:

Participant 5	"…with us it's very different because I might be a high performer, but that is no guarantee that I will be appointed there because in terms of the regulations and the Acts, I must still undergo your, your, your recruitment and selection process. Which of course, there is no guarantee then that I will get the position 'cause."

Participants were asked whether they believed executive coaching could contribute to career development and to elaborate on the mechanisms by which it may do so. One participant argued that executive coaching would be effective only for those who are still aspiring to be senior managers or executives. Her view was that even senior managers who aspire for higher positions, do need executive coaching. However, she noted that some senior managers in the public service tend to overestimate their expertise, despite evident gaps in certain competencies and skills.

During the interview process it was established that, in two of the departments, executive coaching is being implemented. Nonetheless, one of the two departments focuses on employees of other government departments as it is mandated to offer education, training and development interventions on a revenue generation basis (National School of Government, 2020). The other department reportedly utilised a pool of external coaches, who are contracted when the department determined that executive coaching is more suitable in certain people-development instances. For instance, in the case of competencies and skills assessment, they are contracted to support the programme.

However, there was a general pessimism detected about executive coaching becoming a fully-fledged programme in their respective public service departments.

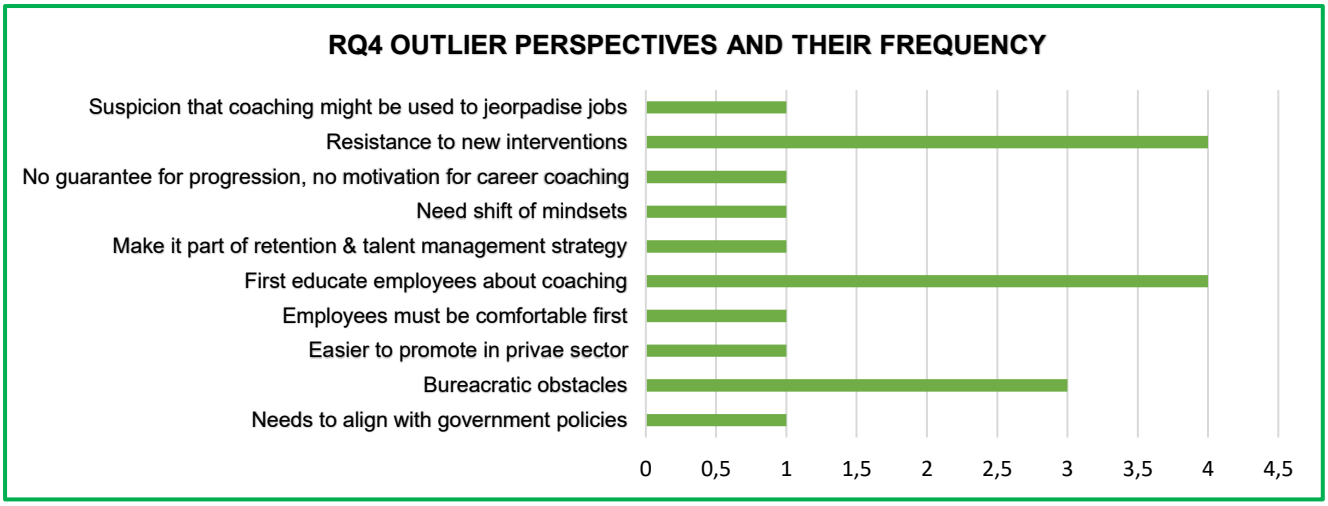
Participant 6	"…people might think what if we are being coached with the aim of identifying weaknesses which will later be utilised against us because I know that with coaching, yes, there's that element of sensitivity."
Participant 5	"Hey bhuti wam (my brother), I'll be honest with you... It's the painful part about Government. You are on your own. So, it's it's just I I don't know how I can put it. It's it's. Yeah, it's one of those things that you must find yourself and whatever."
Participant 2	"You know, for those that are preparing themselves for senior managers Because their mindset is still that I'm not yet there and I want to get there. It will work because it's all about the mindset but those who are there because they think they that they know it won't change anything it will be a certain percentage."

Value for money

The positive sentiment about executive coaching was universal. It was considered as "an investment because by developing people internally you are saving a lot of money on recruitment and advertise them" (Participant 5). While the participants expressed the belief that executive coaching could add value to their departments, they were pessimistic about the prospects of its adoption. Bureaucracy, which includes long approval processes, was one of the cited obstacles. They were also sceptical that their departments understood what executive coaching entailed. Some felt that executive coaching could be treated with suspicion, as an instrument to identify their weaknesses and those weaknesses could be used to jeopardise job security. Their tone indicated that they did not believe that the promotion of executive coaching would be successful in their departments.

Figure 11 on the next page shows the perspectives and their frequency, which were not reflected in the coded data, categories and themes. They are presented as outliers to maximise exposure to the data collected from participants.

Figure 11: RQ 4 Outlier perspectives and their frequency



4.6. Conclusion

In Chapter 4, the findings from the interviews with the research participants were presented. The questions to which the participants were responding to referred to their perceptions about the meaning of the career concept, career progression, executive coaching in general, and career coaching in particular. It also focused on their reflections on making use of executive coaching for career progression in their respective departments. The breakdown of the conclusions is presented for each Proposition, as reflected below.

4.6.1. Conclusions pertaining to perceptions of the career concept

The participants' understanding of the career concept was conceptually inadequate compared to the career concepts and theories in Chapter 2. However, they demonstrated that the view of jobs and vacancies should be career oriented. They were of the opinion that the career concept represents professionalism, knowledge and skills. It was also their view that a career mindset is preferable because it indicates more psychological engagement with the work. They lamented the current promotion practices, which they believed allowed for people to apply and be appointed to senior management positions without the foundational experience required to do well in those positions.

4.6.2. Conclusion pertaining to perceptions of career progression

The participants were requested to provide their perspectives about career progression. This question was posed against the backdrop of the reportedly incompetent promotions to senior management positions in the public service, resulting in poor organisational performance.

What transpired during the interviews, when the participants were asked about the meaning of career progression, were examples and requirements. The participants did not have the textbook or scholarly insight of the career progression concept, as it is linked to the career concept according to literature. They associated it with pre-requisites such as career-specific experience and qualifications.

4.6.3. Conclusion pertaining to perceptions of executive coaching

The question around executive coaching had two dimensions. First, it dealt with executive coaching broadly. Second, it dealt with the application of executive coaching to career progression. The participants did not have the depth of knowledge that is found in literature. Their perceptions of executive coaching and career coaching ranged from: (1) the target groups of executive coaching, (2) executive coaching is exclusively for soft skills, (3) executive coaching can be utilised for supervising staff with empathy and (4) as a means to expose aspiring senior managers to the functions of senior managers, as a way or preparation plan for progression.

4.6.4. Conclusions pertaining to perceptions of departmental utilisation of executive coaching

The underlying research question had three aspects: (1) departmental utilisation, (2) value for money and (3) promoting executive coaching in their departments. When it came to departmental utilisation of executive coaching, only two participants indicated that executive coaching is used in their respective departments. One department indicated that executive coaching is implemented through a pool of external coaches on the one hand. On the other hand, she indicated that the staff members who are approaching their retirement age are trained to prepare them for recruitment but are

encouraged to return to their departments. Based on their experience and expertise, they then become executive coaches.

However, the second department that utilises executive coaching has recently institutionalised it. Nonetheless, it is not integrated into the HRM&D processes of the department, and it is not located in the HRM&D division. Since the department is a training institution, executive coaching is more outward-looking, in the sense that it is targeted at its client departments. In both cases, executive coaching is not directly and explicitly designated for career progression internally.

The rest of the participants indicated that executive coaching did not exist in their departments. They were pessimistic that it would be adopted in the near future. One of the participants indicated that there would be a need to educate the department about what executive coaching entails, since an intervention of its nature could be met with suspicion. One participant remarked that employees could think that executive coaching was intended to identify their weaknesses so that the department, which is the employer, could use those weaknesses against them.

In relation to value for money, there was no ambiguity that executive coaching is a worthy investment. One of the participants even remarked that preparing internal candidates for progression, or not having to dismiss the under-achievers, could save their department the cost of recruitment. In terms of promoting executive coaching in the respective departments, the departments expressed willingness to do so. However, they had no confidence that their efforts would be useful.

5. Discussion of Findings

Literature has demonstrated that incompetence at senior management echelons can be harmful to organisational performance, and service delivery (Jarbandhan, 2022; Masuku & Jili, 2019; Raphiri, 2022). Yet, the problem of appointing people who are not fit or competent for senior management is not being adequately addressed (Raphiri, 2022). This points to a number of factors, political and institutional (Shava & Mazenda, 2021). Nonetheless, the efficacy of executive coaching on productive career management (including progression) is well established according to literature (Parker, 2016; Victor-Aigbodion & Eseadi, 2025; Yates et al., 2017). The theories and models underpinning both executive coaching and the career concept elucidate the potential of these two interventions – combined - to resolve the challenge of damaging senior management appointments (Ebner, 2021; Hambly & Bomford, 2018; Parker, 2016). However, neither career management nor career coaching are being utilised uniformly across government in South Africa (Chokoe, 2024). This research sought to establish if executive coaching is understood and what opinions did the research participants have about the contribution of executive coaching to career progression. This chapter discusses the findings from this conceptual context

5.1. Introduction

The findings from this qualitative study were presented in chapter 4. The approach to the presentation was descriptive, which means that there was no assessment or evaluation made as yet. In this chapter the findings are discussed interpretively in accordance with the qualitative approach of this research (Reay et al., 2019). The frame of reference for interpretive discussion consists of findings from the literature review and the research questions. The discussion of findings is presented through one proposition at a time. The literature review demonstrated that the career concept is a complex construct that germinated from multi-disciplinary studies to understand the subjective and objective processes involved when work is characterised as a career (McMahon, 2014). It was also noted that, conceptually, the term “career” is the foundation of career management interventions (Wiernik & Wille, 2018). Therefore, the inclusion and separate treatment of the career concept was a conceptual necessity for this research.

5.2. What are the perceptions of HRM&D managers about the meaning of the career concept?

The participants understood the career concept in terms of peripheral aspects such as a profession that requires qualifications and work experience in the same field. Furthermore, the meaning they attributed to the career concept was about being in one position for a number of years before advancing to the next level. Overall, the participants demonstrated no understanding of the career concept that was commensurate with the literature. The key elements of the career concept and theories include the psychological, social and vocational elements. These are some of the key issues that HRM&D should understand in order to assess the motives and suitability of a candidate for career progression. However, the participants could not demonstrate that they would be able to evaluate whether candidates are suitable for promotion or their motives for seeking promotion. The failure of the participants to demonstrate a deeper understanding of the career concept is a challenge, because this demonstrates that they are not in a position to develop even a basic checklist to assist them in assessing whether a candidate's mindset is career oriented.

5.3. What are the perceptions of HRM&D managers about the meaning of career progression?

Career theories are indicating that career construction and progression can stem from changes in the social environment of individuals. This refers to the impact that such changes can have on the cognitive processes as one contemplates career progression (Lent et al., 2017; McMahon, 2014). This again means that the executive coach should facilitate personal narrative development where life themes influence the direction of the career conversation (Fennah, 2018; McMahon, 2014; Passmore & Lai, 2020). Through discourse analysis, the executive coach would be in a better position to facilitate a process of exploring other opportunities outside of one's current discipline or their organisation (Parker, 2016).

The participants did not understand the meaning of career progression in accordance with literature. They limited their meaning to qualifications, experience, job

requirements and performance-based merit. This knowledge gap poses a challenge when it comes to the assessment of the motives for seeking career progression. Seeking career progression, in itself, begs the question as to whether the employee is psychologically career oriented. If the assessment of career progression readiness were based on literature, that would minimise incompetence within the ranks of senior management in the public service. Furthermore, a career progression framework that is based on literature could also give employees direction in terms of which career paths would suit them. This could be done by facilitating the process by subjectively constructing a career, whilst being conscious of the external social and vocational environment.

5.4. What are the perceptions of HRM&D managers about the meaning of executive coaching?

Executive coaching is also defined as “a helping relationship formed between a client who has managerial authority and responsibility in an organisation, and a consultant who uses a wide variety of behavioural techniques and methods to help the client achieve a mutually identified set of goals; to improve his or her professional performance and personal satisfaction, and consequently, to improve the effectiveness of the client’s organisation within a formally defined coaching agreement” (Kilburg, 1996b, p. 142). The Worldwide Business Coaches Association defines business coaching as “a process of engaging in meaningful conversation with individuals in businesses, organisations, institutions of governments, with the goal of promoting success at all levels of the organisation by affecting the actions of those individuals” (Kahn, 2018, p. 2).

Based on the above definition of the concept and process of executive coaching, the perceptions of the participants reflected a sore lack of knowledge about executive coaching.

5.5. What are the reflections of HRM&D managers about the contribution of executive coaching to career progression?

The question pertaining to this proposition covered three sub-categories. The purpose was to draw out as much information as possible, since this is the ultimate objective of the research. The sub-categories are each addressed below.

Value for money

All the participants readily concede that executive coaching provides measurable value for money. Several participants also suggested that executive coaching has the potential to reduce recruitment costs within the public service sector.

Departmental utilisation of executive coaching

The participants' perspectives indicated pessimism regarding the likelihood of their departments adopting executive coaching, which may be attributed to a limited understanding of the concept among both participants and government leadership. The lack of recognition of executive coaching's value presents a significant barrier to its adoption. Additionally, organisations must first identify and acknowledge their challenges to be motivated to pursue such solutions. These sentiments were consistently reflected in the interview responses.

5.6. Conclusion of Chapter 5

In conclusion, this research showed that there is a significant knowledge gap between the literature and the knowledge of the participants regarding executive coaching. While the participants indicated interest in executive coaching and its application to career progression, their conceptual understanding was lacking. They could not articulate the career concept, career progression, executive coaching and career coaching at a scientific level as demonstrated in literature. There is, therefore, a need for more investment in the knowledge acquisition about executive coaching, which is

not impossible, given that the participants were positive about executive despite their knowledge deficit.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

6.1. Introduction

The chapters on research objectives, literature review, findings and discussion of findings are the basis of this chapter on conclusion and recommendations. The research objectives sought to determine the perceptions of HRM&D managers about the contribution of executive coaching to career progression. The literature review elucidated the efficacy of executive coaching and career coaching in ensuring that career progression benefits the individual, their organisation and its service beneficiaries. Based on literature review and the field research through interviews, the findings chapter presented the insights of the respondents who were interviewed for this research. A detailed discussion of these insights, compared and contrasted to literature review findings, was presented in chapter 5.

This chapter presents the conclusions and recommendations. The conclusions are presented separately for each of the questions and the proposition for each question is included. Adding the proposition is intended to give context to the content of the conclusion, as well as indicate the possible answer (in the form of a proposition) to each question.

6.2. Conclusion of Research Question and Proposition 1

Question 1: What are the perceptions of HRM&D managers about the meaning of the career concept?

Proposition 1: Advanced understanding of the career concept can be an indicator of the potential to adopt a career progression and coaching model to promotions**.**

Proposition 1 was based on the career concept, which, according to literature, is the foundation of career management and career coaching. Furthermore, according to literature, people who view their work as careers as opposed to jobs, demonstrate higher levels of productivity and career fulfilment. The participants who took part in this

research demonstrated limited understanding of the career concept relative to the scholarly definition of the term. While this might diminish the potential to fully understand why the public service parlance should be careers rather than vacancies, they had a general, but firm idea that careers, not jobs, are important for the public service. One of the arguments was that career mindsets tend to be more productive and less self-serving, as opposed to those who ambitiously seek senior management positions for which they are not qualified. This indicates that individuals possessing comprehensive knowledge of the philosophy underlying career phenomena may be equipped to actively pursue and promote effective career management.

6.3. Conclusion of Research Question 2 and Proposition 2

Question 2: What are the perceptions of HRM&D managers about the meaning of the career progression concept?

Proposition 2: Advanced understanding of the career concept can be an indicator of the potential to adopt a career progression and coaching model to promotions**.**

Career progression is embedded in career theories and associated with higher productivity and job satisfaction. Whether vertical or horizontal, job mobility that is based on career management (including progression), is associated with positive results for both the individual and their employer organisations. The South African public service is faced with the challenge of vertical mobility to senior management positions by careerists who are not suitably qualified for senior management positions. It was, therefore, important to explore the notion of career progression with the participants, to establish their understanding of this concept. The aim was to investigate whether they understood that career progression means meritocratic career mobility. This is different from the distorted meaning of promotion in the South African public service.

The participants understood and appreciated that career progression is the principle and framework that should inform upward mobility to senior management positions. In the same vein, they were of the view that career coaching should be implemented in

the absence of organisational career management in many public service departments.

6.4. Conclusion of Research Question 3 and Proposition 3

Question 3: What are the perceptions of HRM&D managers about the meaning of executive coaching?

Proposition 3: Advanced understanding of the career concept can be an indicator of the potential to adopt a career progression and coaching model to promotions.

There is ample evidence of the efficacy of executive coaching, including career coaching. Career coaching theories demonstrate the formidability of career coaching in guiding career choices in the process of career progression. Studies that have been conducted indicated it is mostly in the private sector that executive coaching is being used extensively in South Africa. Yet, given the pervasive senior management incompetence in the public service, executive coaching would be justifiably expected to be prominent in the public service as well. While the participants demonstrated interest in the intervention of executive coaching for career progression management, they demonstrated elementary understanding of executive coaching. Some of them confused it with performance management. To many of them, the function of executive coaching was to address soft skills or even serve as a mechanism for employee supervision. This is indicative of the necessity to introduce executive coaching extensively in the public service.

6.5. Conclusion of Research Question 4 and Proposition 4

Literature indicates that, in organisations that have institutionalised executive coaching, HRM&D personnel plays a central role (Hernaus, Pavlovic, & Klindzic, 2019; Walker-Fraser, 2011). Together with line managers, they organise executive coaching interventions for employees, for purposes that include career aspirations and progression (Murphy, 2005). Although two participants indicated that executive coaching was implemented in their departments, none of the participants played a central role in the implementation of executive coaching. Besides those two

departments, the rest do not utilise executive coaching. Without the buy-in and institutionalisation of executive coaching by the top leadership in the public service, the participants were frustratedly sceptical that this intervention had good prospects of being adopted in the public service.

6.6. Recommendations

6.6.1. Introduction

The literature review, read in conjunction with the problem statement, indicates that certain changes should take place in terms of senior management appointments. The efficacy of executive coaching and career coaching indicates that the problems identified in chapter 1 of this Report can be avoided. Basic understanding and appreciation of the value of executive coaching and career coaching can trigger interest in the utilisation of these interventions. This is why the main thrust of this research was to establish that understanding and appreciation. This enquiry culminated in the findings in chapter 4. The recommendations that are being presented culminate from those findings.

One of the lessons learned during the interviews is that public service recruitment, selection and promotion policies disincentive participation in career-progression interventions. One poignant example was that, regardless of being prepared for senior management, there is no guarantee that an employee will be appointed to that position. Public service vacancies are open to internal and external competitors, and whoever performs well during the job interviews is offered the position, irrespective of whether they are an internal or external candidate. Another participant added (independently) an additional aspect to this practice. She revealed that there are many cases where the best interviewee proves to be incompetent on the job and compensate for their incompetence by delegating their functions to the sub-ordinates (some of whom may have been internal candidates for the same position). The following recommendations are offered.

6.6.2. Recommendation for public policymakers

In order to improve the morale of the public servants, policy obstacles to career progression must be addressed. One of the lessons learned from this research is that the public service has no line of sight in terms of career pathing. Put differently, they do not see themselves beyond the positions they occupy, except through entering the race for available opportunities. It is, therefore, highly recommended that the public service explores and utilise executive coaching. Executive coaching is unique in its capability to expand the career horizons of people, beyond their present employers and careers (Otu, 2024b).

6.6.3. Recommendations for further research

Policy makers tend to place more premium on quantitative research (Tracy & Hinrichs, 2017). It is, therefore, recommended that further research on this subject matter makes use of a mixed method (qualitative and quantitative) approach. In this way, the quantitative magnitude of the problem, as well as the explanatory strength of qualitative research on causality, are capable of persuading the policymakers to take executive coaching seriously.

6.6.4. Professionalisation of executive coaching

It was apparent during this research that the lack of recognition of executive coaching as a profession was a factor in its underutilisation in the public service. Professionalisation of executive coaching, meaning registration with duly recognised professional bodies compatible in status with organisations such the South African Nursing Council or the Health Professions Council of South Africa, can enhance this.

Popularity of executive coaching alone is not enough to make substantial inroads within an extensively regulated environment such as the public sector (national and provincial government departments, municipalities and state-owned enterprises). From the perspective of the state, public expenditure is regulated by the Public Finance Management Act and Procurement laws and regulations. These legislative

frameworks impose stringent rules about the quality of service procured from public funds. The determination of quality of services is determined by general norms and standards, as well as registration with professional bodies that are duly authorised to enforce those norms and standards, including professional codes of conduct – on service providers.

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APPENDIX A: Consent Form

TITLE OF PROJECT	The perceptions of executive coaching to career progression by government departments in Gauteng
NAME OF RESEARCHER	Mzwandile Manto
STUDENT NUMBER	743254

I,		agree to participate in this research project. I agree to the following:

(Please circle the relevant options below)

The research study was explained to me. I understand what this study is about.	YES NO
I understand that I can volunteer to take part in the study	YES NO
I agree that the interview may be audio recorded	YES NO
I agree that direct quotations from my interview may be used by the researcher in their research report	YES NO
I agree that my participation will remain anonymous (my name or other identifying data will not be used by the researcher in their research report)	YES NO

I agree that other researchers may use the information I provide in my interview (depending on their own ethics clearance being obtained) but my name and any personal information will not be used or passed on	YES NO

	Signature
	Name of the participant
	Date
	Signature
	Name of the researcher
	Date

APPENDIX B: Interview Guide

<table>
<tr><th colspan="2">PARTICIPANT PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">OPENING REMARKS: Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. My name is Mzwandile Manto. I am studying towards a Master of Management in Business and Executive Coaching at Wits Business School. I am conducting research to investigate the perceptions, views and opinions of human resource management and development managers about the contribution of executive coaching to career progression in their departments. I am interviewing 6 people (including yourself). The interview is based solely on your perspectives, views and opinions. There are no wrong or right answers. So please feel free to express your opinions, views, beliefs or hopes regarding executive coaching for career progression. Your identity and the information you provide during the interview will be strictly confidential. I am bound by the ethical guidelines of the University. I need to record the interview so that I gather all the data from it, for analysis. The recordings will be for the purpose of this research only and will be treated with strict confidentiality.</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="2">Management level (middle or senior) and general overview of their day-to-day function (to leverage on their current scope of work to keep their focus on areas they might skim through</td></tr>
<tr><th>RESEARCH QUESTIONS</th><th>INTERVIEW PROMPT QUESTIONS</th></tr>
<tr><td>What are the personal perspectives of Human Resource Management and Development Managers about executive coaching in the workplace.</td><td>1. How would you define executive coaching in your own words?

2. What do you believe are the main benefits of executive coaching?

3. Have you or someone you know worked with an executive coach? If so, how was your experience or theirs?

4. What specific outcomes would you hope to achieve through executive coaching?</td></tr>
<tr><td>How do Human Resource Management and Development Managers perceive the contribution of executive coaching to career progression?</td><td>1. Do you believe that executive coaching can contribute career progression? Why or why not?</td></tr>
</table>

PARTICIPANT PROFESSIONAL BACKGROUND	
	2. In your view, how does or can executive coaching contribute to career progression to senior positions within an organization? 3. What expectations would you have from an executive coach if you were seeking career progression through coaching?
What are their observations about the extent of departmental utilisation of executive coaching for career progression?	1. Do you think your department would get enough value from executive coaching to justify the costs associated with it? 2. Presently, are you of the opinion that executive coaching is being utilised for career progression (namely, preparing employees for senior management and/or those who are new in senior management roles)? Please elaborate. 3. How would you promote executive coaching as a tool for career progression within the organization?

APPENDIX C: Consistency Matrix

Research Objectives	Research Questions	Propositions	Literature	Source of Data	Data Analysis
1. To investigate the perceptions of HRM&D managers about the meaning of the career concept.	What are the perceptions of HRM&D managers about the meaning of the career concept?	Advanced understanding of the career concept can be an indicator of the potential to adopt a career progression model for promotions.	(Patton, 2019; Patton & McMahon, 2014; Samuel, 2024; Savickas, 2013; Wiernik & Wille, 2018; Wrzesniewski, McCauley, Rozin, & Schwartz, 1997; Yates, Oginni, Olway, & Petzold, 2017)	Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions, through an Interview Guide	Thematic Analysis
2. To investigate the perceptions of HRM&D managers about the meaning of career progression.	What are the perceptions of HRM&D managers about the meaning of career progression?	Advanced understanding of career progression can be an indicator of the potential to institutionalise career coaching for fruitful promotions.	(Abga & Bello, 2023; Arnold, Coombs, & Gubler, 2019; De Vos & Cambré, 2017; Essandoh, Kwao, Asandem, Boateng, & Arthur, 2023)	Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions, through an Interview Guide	Thematic Analysis
3. To investigate the perceptions of HRM&D managers about the meaning of executive coaching.	What are the perceptions of HRM&D managers about the meaning of executive coaching?	Advanced understanding of executive coaching can be an indicator of the potential to competently apply it to career progression	(Cilliers, 2005; Kahn, 2018; Kilburg, 1996, 2007; Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011)	Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions, through an Interview Guide	Thematic Analysis
4. To investigate the reflections of HRM&D managers about the contribution of executive coaching to career progression.	What are the reflections of HRM&D managers about the contribution of executive coaching to career progression?	HRM&D managers play a central role in organisations where career management is institutionalised	(De Vos & Cambré, 2017; Ellinger & Kim, 2014; Faheem, 2017; Gabriel, Moran, & Gregory, 2014; Gould-Williams, 2003; McDonald & Hite, 2023)	Semi-structured interviews with open-ended questions, through an Interview Guide	Thematic Analysis

APPENDIX D: Ethical Clearance

Graduate School of Business Administration
University of the Witwatersrand, Johannesburg

Wits Business School

Wits Business School Ethics Committee
Constituted under the University Human Research Ethics Committee (Non-Medical)

Ethics Clearance Certificate

Ethics protocol number: WBS/BE743254/533

This certificate is only valid with a legitimate ethics protocol number and signed by the Researcher (below).

This certificate is only valid if accompanied by formal permission from the relevant stakeholder(s).

Project title	The perceptions of executive coaching for career progression by public service departments in Gauteng
Investigator / Researcher	Mr Mzwandile Manto
Nature of Project	MM (Business & Executive Coaching)
Decision of the Committee	Approved, provided stakeholders and participants are guaranteed confidentialty.
Issue Date of Certificate	26/03/2025
Expiry date	Date of submission of the project / research report
Chairperson	Dr Ayanda Magida ☎ +27 11 717 3953 ✉ ayanda.magida@wits.ac.za

Declaration by Researcher

One copy must be signed by the Researcher and returned to the Chairperson of the Wits Business School Ethics Committee.

I fully understand the conditions under which I am authorized to carry out the abovementioned research and I guarantee to ensure compliance with these conditions. Should any departure to be contemplated from the research procedure as approved I undertake to resubmit the protocol to the Committee.

Signature

27 March 2025
Date: