



**UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA**

***LEADERSHIP DEVELOPMENT THROUGH EXECUTIVE COACHING  
PROCESS IN SELECTED PRIVATE ORGANISATIONS***

**NASREEN KHANUM BINTI NAWAB ZADAH KHAN**

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UNIVERSITI PUTRA MALAYSIA  
BERILMU BERBAKTI

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By

**NASREEN KHANUM BINTI NAWAB ZADAH KHAN**

**Thesis Submitted to the School of Graduate Studies, Universiti Putra Malaysia,  
in Fulfilment of the Requirements for the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy**

**September 2021**

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Abstract of thesis presented to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia in fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

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**September 2021**

**Chairman : Mohd Mursyid bin Arshad, PhD**  
**Faculty : Educational Studies**

Executive coaching has emerged in the human capital development practise as an effective development tool in improving leadership skills for leaders to drive organisations towards success and better performance. Despite its effectiveness, the understanding on how coaching works and how the learning process internalised within coaching came into practice remain unclear. The complexity of an executive coaching program is underestimated and not adequately understood. The ambiguity around it influenced the level of adoption among human resource practitioners which create huge loss of opportunity in the leadership development area. This study assessed executive coaching process for leadership development in order to contribute meaningfully in understanding the learning opportunities offered by the process which were supported by four research questions: (1) What is the common structure for an executive coaching program? (2) What are the diverse learning pathways in the executive coaching program? (3) How coachee learns during coaching process? and (4) What are leadership qualities that have been established as a result of the coaching process? The study adopts qualitative methodology guided by a case study approach, which analysed executive coaching program conducted by International Coaching Federation (ICF) coaches as the source of data collection. A total of eight informants participated in this study, consisting of coaches and coachees, who were interviewed on their coaching experiences to understand how the process created effective learning pathways which leads to opportunities for positive changes within coachees. Data were collected through comprehensive, semi-structured interviews, document analysis along with participant and non-participant observation related to the executive coaching program. The data were analysed further by code, categorisation and sub-themes to address the research questions to develop the main theme. Research results indicated that learnings within coaching is a dynamic process that integrates various learning opportunities. Learning happens through conscious meaning making process which connects coachee's mind and experiences. Deliberate and focused series of powerful questioning during the coaching session facilitates critical reflection in coachee's learning process to enable shift in coachee's state of mind, which underpins change in behaviour, actions, thinking, values

and expectations. The research indicates that coaching is a relational based approach supported by four important pillars to enhance effectiveness of its process; trust, chemistry, confidentiality and commitment. The trustful relationship between coach and coachee is also an important factor for ensuring successful learning in a coaching phase. This study gave new perspective towards leadership development approach which empowers coachee for their personal growth and self-development. Higher sense of empowerment indicated higher effectiveness in a change process. Main outcome of an executive coaching process is putting a thinking structure within coachee, supported by powerful questioning and reflection. Consistent practise enabled coachee to internalise the learning process and embedded the structure within them, creating sustainable change. This study offers insights on how coaching process change coachee's behaviours and actions through the development of their states of mind. Adopting the five states of mind framework as part of critical reflection provided more structured thought process to facilitate deep thinking and self-exploration which open up huge growth and development opportunities. The framework developed through this research will benefit various stakeholders including practitioners of human resources, skilled coaches and even coachees in planning and developing effective leadership programmes for optimal strategic development and personal growth.

Abstrak tesis yang dikemukakan kepada Senat Universiti Putra Malaysia sebagai memenuhi keperluan untuk ijazah Doktor Falsafah

**PEMBANGUNAN KEPIMPINAN MELALUI PROGRAM *EXECUTIVE COACHING* DI ORGANISASI SWASTA TERPILIH**

Oleh

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*Executive coaching* dikenalpasti sebagai satu bentuk program pembangunan modal insan yang berkesan dalam meningkatkan keupayaan kepimpinan bagi seorang pemimpin bagi memacu sesebuah organisasi ke arah kejayaan dan prestasi yang lebih baik. Walaupun keberkesannya diperakui, namun pemahaman berhubung bagaimana proses *executive coaching* ini berlaku dan apakah proses pembelajaran yang terlibat di dalam proses *coaching* masih tidak dapat difahami sepenuhnya. Kurang kefahaman berhubung perkara ini mempengaruhi tahap penerimaan praktis *executive coaching* ini di kalangan pegawai bahagian sumber manusia yang menyebabkan kehilangan peluang dan potensi yang besar bagi membangunkan tahap kepimpinan seseorang pemimpin.

Oleh itu, kajian ini dijalankan bagi meneroka proses *executive coaching* ke arah pembangunan kepimpinan di kalangan pemimpin. Empat soalan penyelidikan telah dikenalpasti bagi menyokong kajian penyelidikan ini yang diharapkan dapat memberi kefahaman berhubung proses pembelajaran ini dengan lebih mendalam dan bermakna: (1) Apakah struktur kebiasaan untuk sesebuah program *executive coaching*? (2) Apakah kepelbagaian bentuk dan peluang pembelajaran yang terbentuk semasa program *executive coaching*? (3) Bagaimana coachee belajar dalam proses *coaching*? dan (4) Apakah kualiti kepimpinan yang dibangunkan dalam pemimpin sebagai hasil daripada proses *coaching*? Kajian ini dijalankan menggunakan pendekatan kualitatif berunsurkan kajian kes yang meneliti program *executive coaching* yang dilaksanakan oleh *coach* yang telah diiktiraf oleh *International Coaching Federation (ICF)* sebagai konteks bagi pengumpulan data. Seramai 8 orang responden terlibat dalam kajian ini, yang terdiri daripada *coach* dan *coachee* yang ditemu bual untuk berkongsi pengalaman *coaching* mereka tentang bagaimana peluang pembelajaran dicetuskan semasa proses *coaching* yang membawa kepada perubahan positif kepada pemimpin. Data bagi kajian kes ini dikumpulkan melalui temuduga separa berstruktur yang mendalam, analisis dokumen serta disokong oleh pemerhatian turut serta semasa proses *coaching* dan bengkel pensijilan *coach* di bawah *ICF*. Data tersebut seterusnya dianalisis melalui pengkodan,

pengkategorian dan pembangunan sub-tema dan tema utama untuk menjawab soalan penyelidikan.

Penemuan hasil penyelidikan ini mendapati bahawa proses pembelajaran di dalam program *coaching* adalah satu proses dinamik yang mengintegrasikan pelbagai peluang dan proses pembelajaran. Proses pembelajaran berlaku melalui proses peningkatan kesedaran dalam diri coachee yang menghubungkan pemahaman minda dan pengalaman coachee. Siri soalan tertumpu dan teliti semasa sesi *executive coaching* memudahkan proses refleksi kritikal berlaku bagi dalam proses pembelajaran *coachee* untuk membolehkan perubahan dari segi tingkah laku, tindakan, pemikiran, nilai dan harapan. Penemuan kajian mendapati bahawa proses *executive coaching* merupakan pendekatan yang menekankan nilai perhubungan antara coach dan coachee yang didokong oleh empat tunjang iaitu kepercayaan, keserasian, kerahsiaan dan komitmen. Keyakinan terhadap kebolehpercayaan *coach* adalah amat penting dalam memastikan pembelajaran yang berkesan dalam sesi *coaching*. Kajian ini memberikan perspektif baru berhubung pembangunan kepimpinan yang memberikan pemerksaan kepada coachee untuk membangunkan diri berdasarkan keperluan pembangunan peribadi mereka. Semakin tinggi nilai pemerksaan yang dipamerkan, semakin tinggi keberkesanan proses perubahan direncanakan.

Hasil utama proses *coaching* ini adalah membentuk suatu struktur pemikiran dalam minda *coachee* yang didokong oleh soalan-soalan yang ditanya oleh *coach* dan melalui proses refleksi. Pengamalan secara konsisten membolehkan *coachee* menerapkan proses pembelajaran yang berlaku dan membentuk struktur yang berkesan dalam diri mereka bagi mewujudkan perubahan yang mampan. Kajian ini dapat memberikan pemahaman mengenai bagaimana proses *coaching* dapat mengubah sikap dan tingkah laku *coachee* melalui pembangunan pemikiran mereka. Menggunakan pakai model lima kerangka pemikiran sebagai sebahagian daripada proses refleksi kritikal dapat membentuk proses pemikiran yang lebih teratur kepada *coachee* bagi membantu pemikiran yang mendalam di samping penerokaan diri berkesan yang akan membuka peluang untuk membangunkan dan menambahaik potensi diri. Kerangka menyeluruh yang terbentuk daripada hasil kajian ini dapat memberikan manfaat kepada pelbagai pihak yang berkepentingan termasuk pengawai dan pengamal sumber manusia, *coach* yang berkemahiran tinggi serta *coachee* di dalam proses perancangan dan pembentukan program kepimpinan bagi mengoptimumkan pembangunan strategik dan perkembangan peribadi.

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This thesis was submitted to the Senate of Universiti Putra Malaysia and has been accepted as fulfilment of the requirement for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy. The members of the Supervisory Committee were as follows:

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<b>Page</b>
<b>ABSTRACT</b>	i
<b>ABSTRAK</b>	iii
<b>ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS</b>	v
<b>APPROVAL</b>	vii
<b>DECLARATION</b>	ix
<b>LIST OF TABLES</b>	xvi
<b>LIST OF FIGURES</b>	xvii
<b>LIST OF APPENDICES</b>	xix
<b>LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS</b>	xx
<b>CHAPTER</b>	
<b>1 INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Background of Study	1
1.3 Problem Statement	4
1.4 Research Gap	6
1.5 Research Questions	7
1.6 Significance of Study	8
1.7 Scope of the Study	8
1.8 Definitions of Terms	9
<b>2 LITERATURE REVIEW</b>	<b>14</b>
2.1 Introduction	14
2.2 Leadership Development and Demand for Coaching	14
2.2.1 Leadership Development	14
2.2.2 Rising Demand for Coaching	18
2.2.3 Understanding Coaching as Effective Leadership Development Intervention	20
2.2.4 Learning in Coaching	28
2.2.5 Theoretical Underpinnings	31
2.2.6 Change Process as an Outcome of Coaching	39
2.2.7 Past studies	43
2.2.8 Theoretical Framework	44
2.3 Conclusion	47
<b>3 RESEARCH METHODOLOGY</b>	<b>48</b>
3.1 Introduction	48
3.2 Overview of Research Design	48
3.2.1 Qualitative Research	48
3.2.2 Case Study Approach	49
3.3 Bounded System	50
3.4 Researcher's Role	52
3.5 Ethical Consideration	52

3.6	Activities Before Conducting Field Work: Identification of Informants	53
3.6.1	Sample Selection	53
3.6.2	Inclusion Criteria for Selection of Informants	54
3.6.3	Exclusion Criteria for Selection of Informants	55
3.7	Activities During Field Work: Data Collection	55
3.7.1	Pilot Study	55
3.7.2	In-depth Interview	56
3.7.3	Field Observation	57
3.7.4	Researcher as Instrument	58
3.7.5	Document Analysis	59
3.8	Data Analysis and Interpretation	59
3.8.1	Data Analysis	59
3.8.2	Data Management	60
3.8.3	Transcription of Interview	60
3.8.4	Analysis of Interview	61
3.8.5	Validity and Reliability	62
3.9	Reaching Saturation Point	65
3.10	Conclusion	65
<b>4</b>	<b>FINDINGS AND DISCUSSIONS</b>	<b>66</b>
4.1	Introduction	66
4.2	Detail of Informants	66
4.3	Research Question 1: What is the basic structure for an executive coaching program?	68
4.3.1	Pre-Coaching	69
4.3.2	During Coaching	79
4.3.3	Post Coaching	84
4.4	Research Question 2: What are the diverse learning pathways in the executive coaching process?	88
4.4.1	Support Emotional development	88
4.4.2	Positive Leadership Ecosystem	92
4.4.3	Enhance leader's cognitive ability	105
4.4.4	Positive drive to learn and re-learn	111
4.4.5	Embrace coaching principle in daily life	117
4.4.6	Continuous support for change	121
4.5	Research Question 3: How Coachee Learn in a Coaching Process?	129
4.5.1	Adapting flexibility in their approach	129
4.5.2	Encouraging continuous craftsmanship spirit	137
4.5.3	Enhancing self-efficacy for growth and improvement	141
4.5.4	Increasing consciousness and mindfulness level	145
4.5.5	Valuing Interdependence relationship between people surroundings	152
4.6	Research Question 4: What are the leadership qualities develop in leaders?	157
4.6.1	Becoming more engaging	157
4.6.2	Breakthrough self-improvement	161
4.6.3	Consciously upholding the good leadership spirit	168

4.7	Conceptual Framework from the Research Findings	174
4.8	Summary	177
<b>5</b>	<b>CONCLUSION, IMPLICATION, AND RECOMMENDATION</b>	<b>178</b>
5.1	Introduction	178
5.2	Summary	178
5.3	Conclusion	180
5.3.1	Support Emotional Development	181
5.3.2	Positive leadership ecosystem	181
5.3.3	Enhance cognitive ability	182
5.3.4	Positive drive to learn and re-learn	182
5.3.5	Embrace coaching principle in daily life	182
5.3.6	Continuous support for change	182
5.4	Implication	185
5.4.1	Implication for Knowledge	185
5.4.2	Implication for Practise	186
5.5	Recommendation	187
5.5.1	Personal Coaching Session for Executive Level	187
5.5.2	Managerial level to be certified as coaching	187
5.5.3	Empowerment in decision making	187
5.5.4	Incorporating five states of mind framework into reflection process	188
5.6	Recommendation for Future Research	188
5.7	Closing	189
	<b>REFERENCES</b>	<b>190</b>
	<b>APPENDICES</b>	<b>216</b>
	<b>BIODATA OF STUDENT</b>	<b>293</b>
	<b>LIST OF PUBLICATIONS</b>	<b>294</b>

## LIST OF TABLES

Table		Page
2.1	Summary of Various Definition of Executive Coaching	19
2.2	Definition of State of Minds	41
3.1	Codes for Participants' Identification	53
4.1	Profile of Informants	67





## LIST OF FIGURES

<b>Figure</b>		<b>Page</b>
2.1	The 5 Basic Phases of Coaching Conversation	27
2.2	Learning is The Product of The Relationship Between Socially Formed Truth and Reflection That Leads to Awareness (Illeris, 2003) That Could Be Increased By Intrinsic Enforcement	30
2.3	Influencing Factors Between Cognition, Environment and Behaviour In Social Learning Process	33
2.4	Elements of Social Learning Internalise in a Coaching Process	33
2.5	Kolb's Experiential Learning Theory	36
2.6	3R's practise in Double Loop Coaching Process	39
2.7	Theoretical Framework	47
4.1	Activities Carried Out During Pre-Coaching Program	79
4.2	Activities Carried Out During Coaching Program	84
4.3	Activities Carried Out At Post Coaching Program	87
4.4	Basic Structure of Executive Coaching Program	88
4.5	Findings on Learning Pathways Through Emotional Development For Coachee's Learning	92
4.6	Findings on Learning Pathways Through Positive Leadership Ecosystem For Coachee's Learning	93
4.7	Findings on Learning Pathways Through Enhancement Of Coachee's Cognitive Ability For Coachee's Learning	106
4.8	Learning Pathways Through Positive Drive To Learn And Re-Learn For Coachee's Learning	112
4.9	Learning Pathways Through Embracing Coaching Principle In Daily Life For Coachee's Development	117
4.10	Learning Pathways Through Continuous Support For Change For Coachee's Development	122
4.11	Diverse Learning Pathways in Coaching	129

4.12	Outcome of Coaching – Becoming More Engaging	157
4.13	Conceptual Framework on How Coachee Learn Within the Coaching Process	177



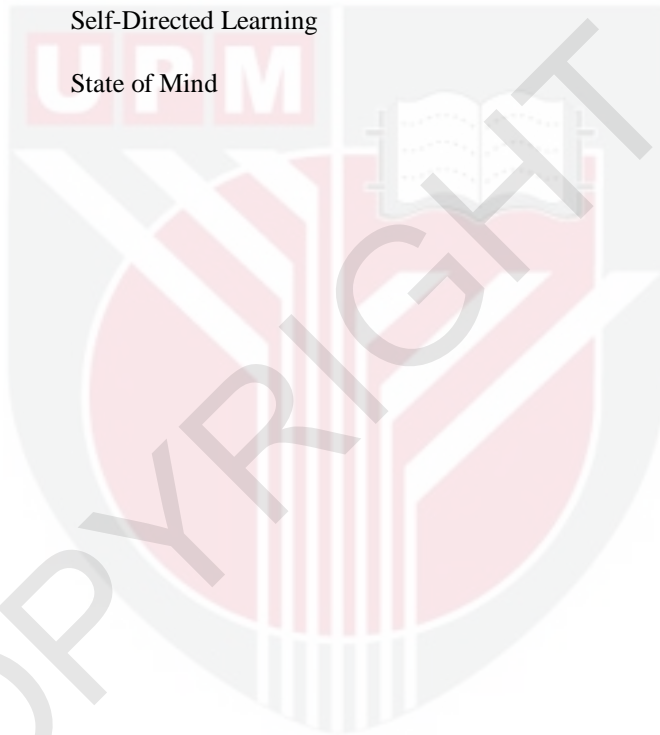
## LIST OF APPENDICES

Appendix		Page
1	Interview Protocol	216
2	Participative Observation Protocol	220
3	Research Data	221
4	Consent Approval to Participate in the Study for the Purpose of Data Collection	288



## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

ACC	Associate Certified Coach
ICF	International Coaching Federation
LD	Leadership Development
MCC	Master Certified Coach
PCC	Professional Certified Coach
SDL	Self-Directed Learning
SoM	State of Mind



# CHAPTER 1

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1 Introduction

This chapter will include background of the study, problem statement, the significance of research as well as scope and limitations in conceptualising learning pathways in the executive coaching process for leadership development. The demanding and continuous change of today's business environment drives demand and pressure for more effective leadership development program in every organisation. Coaching has emerged in the human capital development practice as an effective development tool in improving leadership skills for leaders to drive organisations towards success and better performance. Currently, as a newly emerging tool, the practice of coaching is evolving faster than its theoretical foundation. Due to limited research on coaching, this practise is inadequately understood which slows its implementation at commercial scale. Understanding learning pathways in executive coaching program is crucial in giving appropriate expectations and knowledge of how coachees learn and develop their leadership skills from the process to the coaching sponsors and even to the coachee themselves (Anderson & Anderson, 2016; Zenger & Stinnett, 2010). As such, this study is hoped to build understanding and to support the practise of coaching to increase its effectiveness.

### 1.2 Background of Study

The dynamic nature of today's businesses, work environment, economic circumstances, demanding operational conditions, call for organisations to take the necessary steps in identifying ways and formulate strategies to overcome adversities to maintain competitiveness (Terrell & Rosenbusch, 2013; Killian, 2010; Verlander, 1999). The relentless changes in the business environment today increase demand and pressure for continuous leadership development programs in an organisation (Terrell & Rosenbusch, 2013; Cacioppe, 1998).

Organisations are beginning to recognise that complex adversities require a diverse set of skills from a leader to evolve and react to the changing complexities of the environment dynamics (Terrell & Rosenbusch, 2013). Past researches have shown that organisational success depends very much on the leadership and expertise of its leader and people (McDermott, Kidney, & Flood, 2011; Agle et al., 2006; Bougae, 2005; Waldman et al., 2004). The fast-moving landscape is a challenge for leaders to stay abreast and strive to know more. Therefore, organisations provide key leaders with leadership development programmes to accelerate the learning process and reinforce leadership skills (Turner, 2003).

According to Killian (2010), investing in leadership growth is one of the most positive and effective way to promote organisational performance (Barner & Higgins, 2007; Bougae, 2005; Cacioppe, 1998) to achieve company's goals and to enhance its sustainability and long-term success (Jonsen, 2012; Zenger & Stinnett, 2010; Killian, 2010; Barner & Higgins, 2007; Richards, 2006). This represents a rising degree of investment value in the leadership development programme by businesses and organisations (McDermott, Kidney, & Flood, 2011; Barner & Higgins, 2007; Bougae, 2005; Martineau & Hannum, 2003; Verlander, 1999).

It is imperative for leaders to devote their time for continual and cumulative leadership development (Mostovicz, Kakabadse, & Kakabadse, 2009) to strengthen their leadership qualities and expand their horizons and experiences to new concepts and directions (Cacioppe, 1998). Most successful companies and organisations have effective leadership programmes ingrained in their organisations. Most accomplished organisations are founded based on a clear direction and objectives by the top management which create firm principles for the organisation's development (Cacioppe, 1998).

In leadership development, some common approaches include educational programme, training, rotation of work, special assignments or projects, 360-degree assessment, feedback and mentoring just to name a few (Terrel & Rosenbusch, 2013; Cacioppe, 1998). However, the conventional approach alone is no longer sufficient to build the skills needed to meet the demanding world that demands a more proactive approach to change within the company (Jonsen, 2012).

Many organisations are prepared to invest on selected high performing individuals for talent management programme in order to prepare potential leaders whom will add high growth value to the business (Barner & Higgins, 2007). This inclination has therefore created demand for coaching to arise (Bougae, 2005) and has expanded rapidly. Coaching is recognised as an effective management intervention for improvement in overall performance, growth and efficiency for leaders and decision makers (Mavor, Sadler-Smith, & Gray, 2010; Zenger & Stinnett, 2010; Bougae, 2005).

Coaching can be incorporated as part of strategic human resources process, namely for leadership development and enhancement, talent management, competencies development and transformation (Rock & Donde, 2008). Some major organisations around the world have deployed customised internal and external coaching programme for leaders to facilitate problem solving through action learning via coaching process (Fulmer, Stumpf, & Bleak, 2009).

It has been proven that effective coaching could lead to better organisation performance (Barner & Higgins, 2007) which acts as stimulator for transformation in organisation (Bougae, 2005; Verlander, 1999). It is reported that organisations led by top executives

that are supported by coaching programme were 13 times better off than their rivals to achieve financial success (Development Dimensions International, 2015).

According to the International Coaching Federation (ICF), the definition of coaching is "being in partnership with the clients to inspire them to maximize their professional and personal potential in a thought-provoking quote and creative process". Based on Carl Rogers' facilitative learning theory (1951), a coach acts as a mediator in the process of coaching to promote learning, whilst supporting the principle that a coachee has the drive and is capable of finding own answers to solve problems. In practise, coach is expected to help others to realise what they have not realised about themselves (Zenger & Stinnett, 2010), where individuals take a pause and objectively analyse themselves from a third-party point of view (Gloss, 2012). Successful coaches are able to reinforce and stimulate new and positive conviction system. By implementing powerful questioning method, coach challenge the old belief system which limits a coachee's full potential (Gloss, 2012; Barlow, 2005).

Coaching is based on diverse foundation theories, including psychology, management, philosophy, social sciences and many other fields (Mihiotis & Argirou, 2016, Rekalde, Landeta & Albizu, 2015; Wildflower & Brennan, 2013). Coaching is accepted as a fluid communication process between coach and coachee to discuss topics raised by the coachee which promotes self-reflection to analyse and understand issues better. A coaching session conducted without a fixed preset agenda or model allows open communication (Celoria & Hemphill, 2014) and promotes flexibility based on coachee's needs (Toit, 2017).

Arnold (2016) reiterated that a coaching model act as guideline based on coach preferences and work as a guiding principles for inexperienced coach to conduct a coaching session (Arnold, 2016). It is however not compulsory for it to be incorporated within a coaching framework in a coaching session. Many coaches profess that they do not use any particular models in their coaching, but depends on their previous experiences and instincts to determine the necessary approach depending on the situation (Arnold, 2016). However, Barners and Higgins (2007) argued that coaches are inclined towards a certain approach used during their coaching process based on their comfort and familiarity.

Learning is the result of the interaction between coach and coachee and its activities (Speltz, 2013). It is an activity of stimulation and effect. Therefore, it is crucial to understand the coaching process from both perspectives; coach and coachee (Speltz, 2013) while ensuring coherence of the coaches' actions as stimulus which effects coachee's learning (Celoria & Hemphill, 2014).

Understanding learning pathways in executive coaching programme is crucial in giving appropriate expectations on coaching and knowledge on how coachees learn and develop their leadership skills from a coaching process to the coachee and also to the coaching



sponsors (Anderson & Anderson, 2016). Based on inputs from the practise, lack of understanding on how learning took place in coaching create misunderstanding and unrealistic expectation on how coaching process able to facilitate enhancement of leadership skills in leaders. This study aims to conceptualise learning pathways in an executive coaching process for leadership development from the experience of coach and coachee throughout the coaching process that could trigger change and enhance the capacity and potential of coachees.

Among the learning outcomes that are evident from coaching are becoming a more effective leader, taking self-ownership in determining changes to grow and be developed, self-realisation on actions and effects, improved communication skills, and better work relationship with people and ability to solve problem in more systematic and analytical way (Anderson & Anderson, 2016). Anderson & Anderson (2016) emphasised that no tangible result will be observed if a coachee does not embark on meaningful learning in the entire coaching process. Changes only occur when something has been learned throughout the entire process as a result of coaching (Anderson & Anderson, 2016).

### **1.3 Problem Statement**

This research promotes development of leaders and the continuous development of leadership through executive coaching. There are different types of leadership interventions commonly used to improve the skills of leaders in different situations to adapt and meet the needs of each organisation (Terrell & Rosenbusch, 2013; Gan & Chong, 2015; Mavor, Sadler-Smith & Gray, 2010). According to Zenger and Stinnett (2010), coaching practise is unique where the process allows coachee to solve problems themselves, think objectively, learn to make bold decisions, being efficient and taking ownership of their development process, as he made a reference to the quote “Give a man a fish and you will feed him for a day but teach a man to fish, and you feed him for a lifetime”. Notwithstanding of the values it holds, the implementation of this approach were taken aback due to inadequate understanding of its process which create huge loss of opportunity in the leadership development area (Zenger & Stinnett, 2010).

Coaching is still viewed as an under examined field due to limited empirical research on executive coaching (Gan & Chong, 2015; Ellinger & Kim, 2014; Latham, 2006; Linley, 2006). Development of coaching is currently a very practise oriented programme where its practise is evolving faster than the theoretical foundation. Practitioners gave minimal attention in understanding the learning process within coaching (Wildflower & Brennan, 2013; Kombarakaran et al., 2008; Peterson & Kraiger, 2003) while focusing on commercially adopted module to carry out the programme, leaving a clear knowledge gap in understanding how the process facilitate leaders to learn to be better.



The ambiguity around it influenced the level of adoption among human resource practitioners in choosing appropriate development programme for their organisation. Gan & Chong (2015) asserted that the identity boundaries of executive coaching still remains unclear especially in understanding why and how coaching works (Gan & Chong, 2015; Boyce, Jackson & Neal 2010; Feldman & Lankau, 2005). The sceptism around coaching evolved around how do coachee learn when coach were not supposed to provide answers and recommendation to the issues brought to the table. The complexity of an executive coaching programme is underestimated and still not adequately understood (Brazillian Administration Review, 2017).

Main source of knowledge on this field is backed by articles produced by practitioners and personal testimonies (Boyce, Jackson & Neal 2010). It also depends heavily on knowledge from other fields, including psychology, leadership and more (Wildflower & Brennan, 2013). This study is expected to fill the void and enhance a deeper understanding and build upon current knowledge on coaching by conceptualising learning pathways in the executive coaching process for leadership development from the experience of coach and coachee. This will help to lay greater foundation in understanding on how executives will be able to learn from the coaching process. Past researches mainly focusing on the outcome of coaching which recognised positive changes in leaders in many ways (Karlsen, 2016).

This practise is familiar among contemporary organisations (Brazillian Administration Review, 2017; Sherman & Freas, 2004) yet getting slow traction in being adopted commercially in other organisations. Going beyond the traditional approach, the practise of coaching is not adequately understood by many which discourage its implementation within organisations. Maltbia et al. (2016) argues that coaching offers diversity in learnings as it draws knowledge from multiple disciplines. However, this complexity at times create confusion among potential clients whether to adopt this intervention. Sceptism around its process create doubt on its efficiency. Human resource practitioners face difficulty justifying need for a coaching programme in organisation when the context of learning opportunities within the coaching process is not clear. Conceptual clarity is required to understand what are the learning opportunities emerged from the process, to build in-depth understanding regarding the process.

Simultaneously, concerns by many were that the coaching field is unregulated and the practise is not validated by empirical studies and only driven by its commercial values (Walling, 2015; Wildflower & Brennan, 2013). As such, theoretical foundation and empirical studies are needed to support the development of its practise to be an efficient instrument to develop leadership competencies in leaders (Walling, 2015; Wildflower & Brennan, 2013; Anderson & Anderson, 2011). The multiplicity of approaches in coaching open up huge learning opportunities for coachee which could be projected as its potential return on investment for companies in term of leadership development. Coaching intervention is a dynamic process which integrates various learning theories (Fazel, 2013). There are many theories on how people learn and it is useful to understand its application in a developmental programme to optimise the learning process. Different individuals have different way of learnings and it is interesting to see how coaching

process could cater and serve different learning needs. Knowledge gathered from this study would fill up the knowledge gap between practise and its theoretical foundation which broaden the perspective of management and human resource practitioners towards coaching intervention. This will facilitate the decision making process to accelerate the implementation of executive coaching in any organisation as part of the leadership development programme. Once fully understood, it reflects the worthiness of the programme given the enormous value and opportunities that it holds.

#### **1.4 Research Gap**

Previous studies on executive coaching were more focused on developing best practises and standards of coaching, identifying core skills and competencies, understanding experience of coaches and developing profesional identity and practise of coaching (Maltbia et al., 2014; Drake, 2008; Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001). Despite the escalating success of personal coaching and the significant potential it holds as a vehicle for effective learning, the process of learning in coaching is little understood and learning theories make up only a small part of the evidence-based coaching literature (Maltbia et al., 2014). Cox et al. (2014) explains that the interdisiplinary nature of coaching create confusion and lack of clarity on the value of coaching and its process (Robson, 2011). The lack of clarity put off deep understanding and defer theory-building, empirical research, executive coaches development even the development of practise (Maltbia et al., 2014).

Many prior studies did not emphasised on learning process in coaching, rather giving more focus on the operational and logistical aspects of coaching. There are significant need to advocate more clarity in coaching and to give greater focus on the process of learning since the existing coaching literatures tend to underestimate the role of coaching in human learning and development (Bachkinova, Spence & Drake, 2017).

In response to the limited understanding of coaching within learning context, this study is therefore deem necessary to demonstrate the coaching value by establishing diverse learning pathways internalised within the process that can be linked to established bodies of learning theories (Bachkinova, Spence & Drake, 2017). This research reviewed and made meaning of the rich experience of coachees to identify and understand the learning process which will be inputs to solidify the practise in future and increase its effectiveness. There are still insufficient knowledge to provide understanding on the coaching practise due to its complexity and variety of different approaches (Greif, 2017; (Brazillian Administration Review, 2017).

The disconnect between the practise of coaching and theories of learning lead a coaching process to become a mechanical process where coaches conduct coaching program by being guided by some models without even understanding the internalised learning pathways. Maltbia et al. (2014) highlighted that the knowledge and understanding of learning opportunities within coaching would be very beneficial to practitioners as it

enables them to better prepare as a coach and strengthen their expertise to reflect professionalism.

The main research gap that needs to be addressed in this study is to understand learning pathways in the executive coaching process to fill up the void of knowledge gap in understanding how learning happens within the process. It is crucial to have an intelligible conceptual model to minimise complexity and ambiguity on how learning within coaching process is effective in transforming the learnings into meaningful leadership improvements. This knowledge will spark interest in human resource practitioners and management to start appreciating the value of coaching intervention.

The main objective of this study is to conceptualise learning pathways in the executive coaching process for leadership development which examines the coaching process in great detail by making meaning from the experience of the coach and coachee. Coaching process is a means to an end that provides learning opportunities for leaders; however, the effectiveness is dependant on individual's learning experiences based on interpretation, preferences and commitment to the process (Merzirow, 1978).

## **1.5 Research Questions**

The research consists of four (4) research questions as follows:

### **1. Research Question 1:**

What is the basic structure for an executive coaching program?

### **2. Research Question 2:**

What are the diverse learning pathways in the executive coaching program?

### **3. Research Question 3:**

How does a coachee learn in a coaching process?

### **4. Research Question 4:**

What are the leadership qualities established as a result of the coaching process?

## **1.6 Significance of Study**

This study is timely, in response to the rising demands of coaching as an effective leadership development tool in the corporate world. Contribution of the present research can be divided into two; theoretical viewpoint and and from practical perspectives. This research will be offering insights on the practise and knowledge of coaching in the area of leadership development.

Theoretically, the research will conceptualises the learning theories within the practise of coaching and putting the process of learning into context. This study will gain new understanding on the application of various learning theories in a leadership development program. The could provide solid theoretical foundation to support practitioners to optimise the learning by taking into account principles of learnings in designing their approach during the coaching process (Anderson & Anderson, 2011). Connecting coaching practise and learning theories is a vital move towards raising the coaching value for coachees. Coaching will become effective if only it could address coachee's learning needs. This study will provide theoretical foundation in term of application of learning theories in a leadership development programme. It offers descriptive framework on learning opportunities that could be optimised to support leadership development in a coaching process. The framework developed from this research will be able to provide holistic view in understanding how the learning process took place within coaching. This will provide significant contribution especially towards practise where it brings more analytic knowledge for practitioner as part of the foundation of a coaching knowledge that will support and enhance coaches' coaching approach. This framework will provide a clearer guidance for coaches in designing an effective coaching method to make sure that coachee's learning needs are addressed. In sum, this research integrates theoretical foundation into the coaching practise which support meaningful learning and supports coach professional conduct to produce anticipated outcomes.

## **1.7 Scope of the Study**

The study will be an impetus for better understanding of coaching practise as the leadership development intervention among human resource practitioners, management, coach and even coachee. The research is not seeking to develop a coaching model to cater for coachee's learning needs. In particular, the study aims to layout the learning pathways within coaching that will be the guiding principle for coach to design their action and approach to simulate coachee's learning.

The scope of study is defined in the context of leadership development program. It is confined geographically to a case study in Malaysia. The case study is set within a bounded system that concentrates on executive coaching process implemented at the selected private organisation due to limited implementation and low awareness of coaching in the public sectors. The study delves into the theoretical and practical perspectives to understand the foundation of coaching intervention to support coachee's

learning. In doing so, comprehensive learning framework will address the gap in term of theoretical application and practise gap that hinder the implemantation of coaching at commercial scale in organisation in Malaysia. Currently, this field is supported by articles by practitioners and personal testimonials. Empirical research that illustrate the learning context remains inadequate. This study utilises in-depth interview analysis and meaning making process of coaching experiences from eight informants.

Three coach and five coachee were selected as informants based on their direct participation in the coaching process. In-depth interviews with both coach and coachee captured the perspectives of the stimulus and the recipients of the coaching interventions. This is in line with the qualitative case study approach of using multiple sources of information in data collection process to provide in-depth knowledge on the learning process within coaching. The primary method of data collection process involves semi-structured, face to face interviews with the informants on the field.

Another significant parameter for purposeful sampling of this research is that the informants either have completed or currently engaged in coaching program. One drawback for this study is that it requires long-term commitment to the data collection process. This relates to the essence of the coaching process where the coaching relationship must be built on trust and confidence before the coachee feels secure to discuss any concerns or problems. The researcher would also require permission from the coach and coachee to observe and record the coaching sessions.

In an attempt to acquire comprehensive knowledge from the coachee, it is best to assess the process over a period of time once confidence, relationship and chemistry have been established (Bozer, Sarros & Santora, 2014). Valid findings were recorded after the third engagement on the basis that certain degree of comfort and trust has been established between the coach and coachee and comfortable having the researcher around. As such, interviews were recorded only after the third sessions. Informants' coaching experience must not be more than a year to avoid missing important details of the process. Apart from that, other limitation of the study is that the effectiveness of coaching, dependant very much on the coaching relationship between coach and coachee.

## **1.8 Definitions of Terms**

### **1. Coach**

Coach in this study refers to a trained professional accredited under the International Coach Federation (ICF) who offers coaching services to executives to promote their skills in order to be a better leader who contributes to an improvement in their overall performance and organisational objectives. (Kilburg, 1996; Peltier, 2001; Ting, 2006).



In the context of this research, coach referred to certified coach under International Coaching Federation. All coaches participated in this study are certified under International Coaching Federation (ICF) with level of certification of Professional Certified Coach (PCC). This is to maintain some level of standardisation in term of program and level of professionalism of the practitioners.

Coaches are also required to have at least 3 years experience conducting executive coaching program in Malaysia as part of their practise. This is because conducting executive coaching program and other form of coaching program are different in nature and involve different level of coachee.

## **2. Coachee**

The term coachee in this study refers to the person being coached, who participates in executive coaching with a view to enhancing his or her leadership skills in order to be able to lead and improves his or her overall performance (ICF, 2008). Coaches in this study represent individuals who have participated in the coaching programme administered by accredited coaches registered under the International Coaching Federation (ICF). Coachees are only restricted to executive level at organisation that used executive coaching as their leadership development strategy.

## **3. Executive Level**

The word executive is said to have originated from a Medieval Latin word “exsequi” which means ‘follow up, carry out, punish’. As an adjective, the word executive came from a Latin word “executivus”, from the same root word of “exsequi”. Cambridge Dictionary defines executive as high-ranking individuals, who makes decisions and execute measures especially in business. It refers also to an individual or group of people with a supervisory or administrative authority in an organisation. Another definition includes the government division responsible for enforcing policies and laws.

In the setup of a company, an executive refers to a person with a senior management role or leaders who operate a company or a business. In this analysis, the executive refers to several level management hierarchies within an organization, including middle managers and the 'C-suite' level (CEO, COO, CFO, etc.).

## **4. Coaching**

International Coaching Federation (ICF), 2005 defines coaching as:

"Partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that encourages them to optimise their personal and professional capacity. Coaching is a client driven process"

The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development (CIPD), 2009 has a more elaborated definition:

“Coaching is about improving the skills and expertise of an individual to enhance their job performance and eventually contribute to organisational goals. It strives for high performance and workplace improvement, but can also affect the private life of a person. It typically takes a limited time and focuses on specific competences and objectives.”

## **5. Executive Coaching**

A well-recognised definition of coaching by Killburg (2002) who elaborated the definition as:

“Executive coaching is the assistance between a client with managerial authority and accountability in a company and a consultant who uses a wide range of behavioural strategies to help the client achieve a mutually defined set of goals that maximise their professional performance and personal satisfaction within a formally defined coaching agreement”.

Executive coaching term used in this research refers to coaching program carried out for coachee which is holding executive position in their professional field or workplace. The executive coaching program is designated to support the coachee in the area of leadership development.

## **6. Learning Path**

Poell and Krogt (2010) defined learning path as “a set of learning-relevant activities that are both coherent as a whole and meaningful to the learner”. In the context of this research, learning path relates to the learning opportunities created by the coach based on their approach in the coaching process which drive coachee’s learning that allow changes to take place within coachee.

## **7. Coaching Tool**

Coaching tool is a tool to make coaching simpler and to produce the desired result. For example, personality assessment and profile evaluation, structured questionnaires, models, framing statements and others are coaching tool examples.

## **8. Coaching Technique**

Coaching strategy is the personal competence of a coach to know how best to use the resources efficiently. This affects the coachee directly as it determines coaching experience and impact on the coachee (Rostron, 2013).

## **9. Coaching Process**

The coaching method is a system in which coaching communication has taken place step by step to achieve the desired result. The coaching process is structured to help adult learners improve their skills and develop their change management strategy.

## **10. Coaching Conversation**

Coaching conversation is a one-to-one interaction that influences a person's comprehension, learning, behaviour and development. Coaching conversation can take place within different time frames and in different contexts, which is characterised by the effect that the conversation has on the person being coached. (Starr, 2016).

In an effort to operationalize the coaching communication process, Starr (2016) clarified that coaches must use effective listening and questioning, provide constructive challenge or observations, and provide coaching input. A successful coach encourages conversations that increase the understanding, perspectives and choices of the person in a situation.

Coaching conversation captured in this study is in the context of communication between coach and coachee in a one-to-one coaching session that addresses any issues or challenges that coachee brought to the session.

## **11. Leadership Development**

Leadership development is characterised as a programme or activity that focuses on expanding people's capabilities to become better leaders by improving individual leadership and attitudes. Effective leadership learning programmes must clearly identify how and what participants will learn from the process and identify the models and strategies that will be used during the process. (Killian, 2010).

Leadership development context in this research refers to development program that is design as leadership development tool to support executives in improving themselves and at the same time fulfill the organizational requirement.



## 12. Learning

Gagne (1976) defined learning as:

“A change in human disposition or capacity that occurs over a period of time and is not easily ascribable to growth processes. The form of progress called learning is seen as a behavioural change, and the assumption of learning is made by comparing what behaviour was likely before the person was put in a "learning situation" and what behaviour can be displayed after treatment.”

Learning context used in this study is that learning is a knowledge and competence process that leads to a shift in human ability, beliefs, abilities and interests as a result of experience that improves and strengthens the potential for better success. As such, the changes seen in coachee after participated in the coaching program is an evidence that learning has taken place effectively within the process.

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