

Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice

ISSN: 1752-1882 (Print) 1752-1890 (Online) Journal homepage: <https://www.tandfonline.com/loi/rcoa20>

Executive coaching during organisational change: a qualitative study of executives and coaches perspectives

Katrin Bickerich, Alexandra Michel & Deirdre O'Shea

To cite this article: Katrin Bickerich, Alexandra Michel & Deirdre O'Shea (2018) Executive coaching during organisational change: a qualitative study of executives and coaches perspectives, *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*, 11:2, 117-143, DOI: [10.1080/17521882.2017.1407806](https://doi.org/10.1080/17521882.2017.1407806)

To link to this article: <https://doi.org/10.1080/17521882.2017.1407806>



Published online: 11 Dec 2017.



Submit your article to this journal [↗](#)



Article views: 2608



View related articles [↗](#)



View Crossmark data [↗](#)



Citing articles: 1 View citing articles [↗](#)



Executive coaching during organisational change: a qualitative study of executives and coaches perspectives

Katrin Bickerich^a, Alexandra Michel^a and Deirdre O'Shea^b

^aDepartment of Work and Organizational Psychology, Institute of Psychology, University of Heidelberg, Heidelberg, Germany; ^bDepartment of Personnel & Employment Relations, Kemmy Business School, University of Limerick, Limerick, Ireland

ABSTRACT

The aim of this qualitative interview study was to explore the change-coaching process as perceived by middle management executives and coaches using an inductive approach. We interviewed both executives and coaches about their experience of organisational change, and the role of coaching as a developmental tool for executives when managing change initiatives. Thematic analysis revealed distinct perceptions of coaching across the stages of the coaching process, including pre-coaching (phase 1), during coaching (phase 2) and post-coaching (phase 3). Pertaining to the pre-coaching phase, executives spoke of their demands during change and the benefits of coaching for meeting their goals, which motivated the choice to engage in coaching. During coaching, executives' expectations for coaching focused on their reactions to change and their need to engage in leadership behaviour. Referring to the post-coaching phase executives anticipated outcomes of the change-coaching process included both organisational (implementing change) and social (managing others through change) outcomes. Coaches spoke of their role in facilitating the executive to develop behaviours and coping skills to manage the change process (self-management). From the findings, we developed a conceptual model of change-coaching (C-C) across the three phases, which will serve as a guide for future research.

ARTICLE HISTORY

Received 21 September 2015
Accepted 16 November 2017

KEYWORDS

Change management; coach; executive; executive coaching; organisational change; qualitative interview study

Practice points

- To which field of practice area(s) in coaching is your contribution directly relevant? The practice area is executive coaching during organisational change with the aim to advance the design and implementation of change-coaching processes.
- What do you see as the primary contribution your submission makes to coaching practice? This paper emphasises the demands, reactions and needs of middle management executives during times of organisational change. For coaching practitioners, this research provides insights facilitating the expansion of their understanding of the expectations and anticipated outcomes of change-coaching.

- What are its tangible implications for practitioners?
 - (a) Change-coaching serves as a helpful individual intervention for middle management executives who are leading and managing a change process.
 - (b) Throughout the change-coaching process, coaches must have a clear understanding of the organisational coaching culture, leadership approach, change process, change structure and change goals.
 - (c) Change-coaching has the primary role of helping executives clarify their emotional stress factors, reflect on their attitudes and change appraisals, cognitions and emotions.

Introduction

The increasingly complex business world forces organisations to undergo frequent changes in organisational strategies, practices and structures or leadership responsibilities (Oreg, By, & Michel, 2013). For successful organisational change, executives must develop their leadership and change management competencies to meet the changing environment (Rafferty, Jimmieson, & Restubog, 2013). Emerging research (Bickerich & Michel, 2016; Grant, 2014; Kombarakaran, Yang, Baker, & Fernandes, 2008) demonstrates that coaching is an effective intervention to develop skills, attitudes and behaviour change among executives during change, which we refer to as change-coaching from here onwards. However, these studies have not examined the coaching process itself; thus, analysing both executives' and coaches' perspectives is likely to provide new insights. Middle management executives are often charged with communicating and translating top management visions and goals (Rafferty et al., 2013) and providing employees with a compelling rationale for change (Herold, Fedor, Caldwell, & Liu, 2008). Middle managers are executives from all levels of management between the supervisory level and the top of the organisation (Wooldridge & Floyd, 1990) or as those above first-level supervision and below the leadership (Dopson & Stewart, 1990). When we refer to executives in this study, we are including middle managers and project managers. The challenges associated with the responsibility of implementing change mean that this cohort may be especially vulnerable to negative change-related outcomes and, thus, could benefit from the reflection and support given by change-coaching. Therefore, the aim of this study was to gain a deeper understanding of how executives experience organisational change and how change-coaching may support them. To achieve these aims, we conducted a qualitative interview study, using thematic analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008).

The challenges of organisational change for executives

Organisational change is defined as 'any adjustment or alteration in the organization that has the potential to influence the organization's stakeholders' physical or psychological experience' (Oreg et al., 2013, p. 4). Leading and managing organisational change requires political and organisational actions as well as decision-making (Yukl, 2006). Particularly in times of uncertainty, executives must be able to lead change by communicating positive visions and inspiring enthusiasm (Stober, 2008). While top management executives have

strategic tasks, middle managers must be more hands-on and deal with employees' resistance or conflicts in relation to change (Rafferty et al., 2013). They should be employee-oriented and create supportive and trustful organisational cultures to help employees deal with disadvantages that may arise from changes (Oreg, Vakola, & Armenakis, 2011). Although executives might be highly committed to the change, it is essential that they are alert to possible negative emotions among employees (Huy, 2002). In addition, workplace change processes can negatively impact employees' mental health, physical health and work-related well-being (Michel & Morales-Gonzalez, 2013). In this study, we focus on executives who are faced with organisational change initiatives from their top management and are 'sandwiched' between hierarchical levels and employees. They have to manage the change, but at the same time, they are recipients of the change themselves.

The need for executive development and adjustment during organisational change

Although executives are required to manage and implement change, they are themselves employees and experience many of the same reactions that they are tasked with managing for their direct reports. Thus, organisational change may bring many challenges to their self-management skills.

First, in line with person–environment fit (P–E fit) theory (O'Reilly, Chatman, & Caldwell, 1991), they might find that their abilities and values fail to fit with novel organisational demands and values. In many cases, executives find themselves sandwiched between the need to implement new change-related decisions and a mismatch with their own values and abilities. In times of change, 'it is safe to assume that realignments or reassessments of the relationship between persons and their work-place environment' may arise (Caldwell, Herold, & Fedor, 2004, p. 868). Depending on change processes and dispositional traits such as resistance to change (Oreg, 2003; Turgut, Michel, Rothenhöfer, & Sonntag, 2016), executives can find it challenging to cope with their own uncertainties and misfits with regard to changing organisational values, for example. Not knowing how the change will affect their careers can also be highly stressful (Bordia, Hunt, Paulsen, Tourish, & DiFonzo, 2004).

Second, executives may experience mixed positive and negative emotions during organisational change. Change typically brings both continuity – such as consistent employee behaviour and thinking (Huy, 2002) – and discontinuity – such as unpredictable events – so that executives may become subject to psychological symptoms such as high perceived uncertainty and loss of control (Lindorff, Worrall, & Cooper, 2011). If employees perceive that change threatens their future security and working conditions, they will feel negative emotions such as anger, disappointment, anxiety and frustration, causing them to lose confidence in the company and to retreat (Kiefer, 2005).

Change-coaching as an intervention for executive development and adjustment during organisational change

Coaching is a 'one-on-one relationship between a client and a coach that facilitates the client becoming a more effective leader' (Ely et al., 2010, p. 585). Coaching focuses on different topics, including organisational change initiatives, from which individual

intervention strategies can be derived. Coaching during change may help executives to develop a repertoire of crisis resiliency and value-directed change management skills (Moran, 2011). In this paper, we specifically focus on individual change-coaching, which aims to help executives manage and guide employees through change. It facilitates executives developing their own coping and self-management skills and encourages them to take responsibility for themselves. Therefore, change-coaching as an intervention should support executives to develop both leadership and management skills required to design change processes, communicate change visions and make fair decisions. Change-coaching may help them reflect and find fit with changing organisational values, or alternatively, to decide if the personal change is in order. Moreover, negative emotions often accompany organisational change (Duijts, Kant, van den Brandt, & Swaen, 2008), and meaning making is an aspect of dealing with change (van den Heuvel, Demerouti, Bakker, & Schaufeli, 2013). Thus, it would seem important that executives and coaches are willing to address executives' emotional reactions and change-related appraisals during any change-coaching in order to provide support for maintaining emotional balance according to a wide range of conflicting emotions and ambivalence (Huy, 2002).

Aims of the present study

Currently, only a few empirical studies on coaching during change have been conducted (Grant, 2014). Past research has demonstrated that coaching can have positive effects, for example, on leadership skills and well-being (Jones, Woods, & Guillaume, 2015; Theeboom, Beersma, & van Vianen, 2014). It may also positively influence executives' reactions during change and build their self-efficacy (Grant, 2014; Grant, Curtayne, & Burton, 2009; Kombarakaran et al., 2008). However, to the best of our knowledge, studies have not yet explored an overall change-coaching process evaluation from the perspectives of both executives and coaches. Process evaluation is an essential element of examining 'complex interventions that have multiple interacting components' (Jayaprakash et al., 2016, p. 802) and exploring the context in which interventions are implemented. In this study, we examined coaching as an intervention in the context of organisational change. However, 'there is a need to open the "black box" and explore the processes that influence intervention outcomes' (Nielsen, Taris, & Cox, 2010, p. 221). We aimed to develop a more comprehensive understanding and identify key process factors for successful change-coaching. Thus, we investigated the viewpoints of executives involved in organisational change and the perspective of experienced coaches by using an inductive approach. We used qualitative methodologies to analyse the coaching process from multiple perspectives (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) and identify key themes important across different phases of the change-coaching process (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008; Krippendorff, 2004). Despite the acknowledgement in similar areas such as mentoring, that it is important to gain insights from different perspectives (Eby, Butts, Durley, & Ragins, 2010; Godshalk & Sosik, 2003), our study is the first to examine the overall change-coaching process from the perspective of both the executive and coach. Using semi-structured interviews, we investigated three main research questions:

- What are the demands executives face during organisational change that may be addressed through change-coaching?
- How do coaches support their coachees during organisational change?
- What are the similarities and differences in the change-coaching results that coaches report and executives expect?

Investigating these three questions and moving beyond previous research, our research contributes to a better understanding of how executives perceive their demands during organisational change and how coaches describe their own self-perception as supporter (phase 1 – pre-coaching), executives desired coaching content and ways to address these in the change-coaching process (phase 2 – during coaching) and outcomes of the change-coaching process (phase 3 – post-coaching). Finally, from our findings, we aim to derive a conceptual model of the change-coaching process from the perspective of coaches and executives to inspire further qualitative and quantitative research designs.

Methods

Process evaluation provides information about inhibiting and facilitating factors of an intervention (such as coaching), which is useful to improve the development and implementation of future improvements and applications (Strijk, Proper, van der Beek, & van Mechelen, 2011). This approach was particularly suitable for investigating our research questions, and thus, we used an inductive qualitative research design to evaluate the change-coaching processes in detail and to identify characteristics of the process by interviewing both executives and coaches. Qualitative methodological strategies can help researchers to understand complex social processes (Willig, 2009) and phenomena about which little is yet known (Glaser & Strauss, 1967) – such as change-coaching. Our qualitative methodological approach, utilising an ‘open-ended inquiry about a phenomenon of interest’ (Edmondson & McManus, 2007, p. 1160), was appropriate to investigate our research questions, and represented good methodological fit, given the nascent stage of research in this area.

Context and sampling

Our sample comprised participants who volunteered for the research by responding to advert and through personal contacts of the researchers who were contacted and asked if they would participate. We recruited the interview partners through the human resources departments or directly via email and online networking. To address our research questions, we selected participants with first-hand experience of organisational change or change-coaching, who were middle management executives or coaches. All executives who participated in the study had experiences in change processes such as, strategic change (e.g., internationalisation), resource change (e.g., introduction of new persons, processes or technologies) or structural change (e.g., changes in the organisational structure). All coaches, who participated were required to be a member of an accredited coaching association, have a coaching qualification and several years of experience in change-coaching. Due to the generally low willingness of coaches and their clients to participate in research and the high confidentiality in coaching processes (de Haan,

Duckworth, Birch, & Jones, 2013), the interviews were conducted separately with a sample of executives and a sample of coaches.

We did not determine a priori how much data we wanted to collect, but we started with an estimate of 10–12 interviews in each group, based on previous coaching interview studies (e.g., Augustijnen, Schnitzer, & Van Esbroeck, 2011). During the interview phase, the response to the study call was quite high and after the first interviews, it became clear that new themes continue to emerge, and so, we extended the sample size. To assure the generalisability of the interview results and ensure a breadth of experiences and data across our research questions, we selected a heterogeneous group of participants in terms of organisational sectors and changes processes in the executive group and in terms of background and qualifications in the coaches group. During the data collection period, an interview was conducted with all persons who fulfilled our criteria, and all data were included in the analysis.

Thus, in selecting executives, we chose individuals based in private sector organisations undergoing a change from different industries in Germany and Switzerland including automotive, laboratory technology, chemistry, finance, commerce and real estate as organisational sectors. In selecting coaches, we selected qualified and experienced coaches, who were self-employed and autonomous.

Participants and recruitment procedure

From August to December 2011, we conducted 33 semi-structured, confidential interviews with both executives ($N = 15$) and coaches ($N = 18$). Tables 1 and 2 outline information regarding each sample.

The executive group included low to middle management executives (5 females and 10 males; averaged nine years of management experience) from 9 business organisations such as the automotive or technology industry. One-third ($N = 5$) of the executives interviewed had 10 subordinates or less; one-third had 10–50 subordinates and one-third had more than 50 subordinates. We deliberately chose individuals, who were not currently being coached because to answer our first research question, the focus in the executive sample was on their demands and needs for a change-coaching. Eight executives had prior experience of being advised by a coach; seven had no such experience.

For the coach group, we recruited and interviewed 18 coaches (3 females and 15 males with an average of 15 years of experience as a coach) from the German Coaching Association (DCV) or German Federal Association of Coaching (DBVC) by contacting the associations directly with the request to inform their members, e.g., via mailings. Six coaches had degrees in psychology; five had degrees in pedagogy; three had degrees in sociology and seven had degrees in business administration. Four had PhDs. In addition, through continuing education, 10 had systemic consulting and/or coaching training; 5 had training in neurolinguistic programming; 3 had training in group dynamics and 2 had training in transaction analysis.

Data collection through semi-structured interviews

We conducted semi-structured, confidential interviews, which were 20–40 minutes in duration. For practical reasons of time scheduling, we also conducted one 80-minute group

Table 1. Sample of executives.

Size of the organization	Organizational sector	Number	Organisational function	Gender	Years of management experience	Number of subordinates	Previous experience with coaching	Need for change-coaching	Change-coaching as helpful
Less than 10,000 employers	Chemistry real estate/ architecture	E 2	Head of project management	Male	4	23	Yes	Yes	Yes
		E 8	Team leader	Female	10	15	Yes	Yes	Yes
Between 10,000 and 50,000 employers	Laboratory technology	E 10	Project manager	Female	3	5	None	Yes	Yes
		E 3	Production manager	Male	15	–	None	None	Yes
		E 4	Head of order processing and service administration	Female	12	9	None	Yes	Yes
		E 5	Production manager	Male	30	200	Yes	n/s	None
		E 6	Project manager in quality management and practical process improvement	Female	6	4	None	Yes	Yes
		E 7	Project manager in practical processes, improvement and software implementation	Male	–	–	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Finance	E 9	Head of department business development	Female	–	60	None	Yes	Yes
More than 50,000 employers	Technology	E 13	Project manager in standardising HR processes	Male	9	10	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Commerce	E 15	Head of talent management	Male	5	6	Yes	None	Yes
		E 1	Alliance manager software	Male	12	30	None	None	Yes
	Real estate/ architecture	E 11	Head of business development, quality and business excellence	Male	20	2000	Yes	Yes	Yes
	Information technology	E 12	Head of learning & development	Male	8	–	Yes	n/s	Yes
	Automotive	E 14	Head of IT	Male	5	50	None	None	Yes

Note: E = Executive, n/s = no statement.

Table 2. Sample of coaches.

Number	Studies and qualifications	Developments/further education in	Gender	Years of working as coach	External/ internal
C 1	Pedagogy	Neurolinguistic programming (NLP), organisational development, creative methods and body therapy	Female	10	External
C 2	Business administration/PhD management experience		Male	15	External
C 3	Psychotherapy, business administration/PhD	Systemic coaching, group dynamics	Male	28	External
C 4		Coaching, mediation, supervision, body therapy	Male	8	External
C 5	Psychology, experience as an internal personnel and organisational development	Systemic consultant, NLP, person-centred psychotherapy,	Male	13	External
C 6	Sociology, business administration, experience as an internal personnel and organisational development	Systemic coaching and organisational consulting	Male	2 External/ 20 internal	External
C 7	Social pedagogy	Systemic coaching, NLP	Male	15	External
C 8	Educational psychology/PhD		Female	25	External
C 9	Business administration, educational psychology	Systemic consultant and coaching, group dynamics, personnel and organisational development	Male	25 Internal/ 17 external	External
C 10	–	Group dynamics, supervision	Male	10 Internal/ 25 external	External
C 11	–	Systemic coaching	Male	2	External
C 12	Occupational therapist	NLP, systemic psychotherapy	Female	12	External
C 13	(1) Business administration (2) Psychology, MA in national relations and diplomacy (3) industrial sales	(1 + 3) Systemic consultant and coaching	Male, male, female	16, 1, 10	External
C 14	Independent contractor, international management responsibility	Systemic consultant and coaching, MBTI	Male	20	External
C 15	Psychology	Coaching	Male	–	Internal/ external
C 16	Pedagogy, psychology, sociology	Group dynamics, Gestalt therapy	Male	30	Internal/ extern
C 17	Psychology, business administration, Japanese studies/PhD	Theme centred interaction, transactional analysis	Male	14	External
C 18	Commercial training manager, experience as an internal personnel and organisational development	NLP, systemic consultant and coaching, transactional analysis	Male	25	Internal

Note: C = Coach.

interview with three coaches (working together in a coaching-company and who requested this approach), which is dealt with in the analysis as one case. The interviews comprise broad, open-ended questions related to our research aims (e.g., addressed to the executives ‘Which challenges confront you in the current change processes?’ and to the coaches ‘Why do you think individual coaching is needed in times of organizational change?’). The [appendix](#) provides the interview guides. Our open questions allowed interviewees to tell their stories freely and to describe their subjective perspectives of any

aspect they might deem relevant. The interviews were conducted by the first author, who used the pre-defined interview guides to ensure that all aspects of the research questions were addressed and that the answers were comparable. In developing the questions, we drew on the previous literature (Ting, 2006) and reviewed them as a research team. The interviews were conducted via telephone, except for face-to-face interviews with four coaches and one executive.

Data analysis procedure

All interviews were audiotaped and later transcribed verbatim. This resulted in 16 hours and 235 transcribed pages of primary source material, which was analysed using the coding software MaxQDA 10. Ideal data analysis and interpretation requires that one research team member outside the actual data collection should help interpret findings (Eisenhardt, 1988). Thus, the second author controlled the study process and added fresh interpretations. Guided by recommended strategies for thematic analysis (Elo & Kyngäs, 2008), we followed an iterative approach, travelling back and forth between the emerging theory, the extant literature and our data (Elsbach & Kramer, 1996). Our primary aim was to reduce the volume of qualitative data to a more manageable level by identifying parts of the transcripts that were most relevant to our research questions. We used a coding scheme that emerged over time by matching parts of the text (e.g., a phrase, sentence or paragraph) into broad codes.

Early iterations

As is common in qualitative data analysis (Miles & Huberman, 2007), we first independently reviewed the data by identifying key themes inductively. Then we began to develop definitions of each theme. We reached agreement on 150 key themes to be used in coding the data (e.g., 'success factors in change-coaching'). Thus, in this first phase, we identified key themes related to executives demands during organisational change and coaches' self-perceptions (phase 1), coaching foci and ways to address these in the change-coaching process (phase 2) and expected outcomes (phase 3).

Middle iterations

In this phase, we filtered and then coded the content based on lower level subcategories categories developed from the collected data. To clearly assign subcategories, we defined each key theme (e.g., 'success factors in change-coaching') and subcategory (e.g., 'clarification of coaching contract') specifically and supported them with a short description for coding rules (e.g., statements that were mentioned in connection to coaching success) and anchor examples (e.g., 'When I explicitly receive a request to act as a coach in the context of change, I need to be very careful defining the target. What does the company want and what do I want as a consultant? Very often, I find myself with a double function: as a consultant in the change process and as a coach. (C 17)'). In the next step of data reduction and processing, we identified the most meaningful interview passages, which allowed us to match the text units by codes and, independently, review each text unit for each code.

Later iterations

In later iterations, we revised the category system and text material twice. In finalising the coding, we included 778 interview passages that at least two members of the research team, the first author and a research associate, had agreed upon. A third team member, the second author, interpreted the findings and initiated new directions. During this step, we compared the individual codings and discussed discrepancies until consensus and agreement was established. Finally, we again reviewed the data, focusing more intently on identifying the linked themes between the coach group and the executive group and on identifying superordinate categories (e.g., 'coaching elements for transfer and sustainability') that helped organise the data. These higher level categories provide the framework for presenting our results and the basis for the conceptual model arising from our findings.

Findings

In the interpretation of our results, we focused on addressing our three research questions: (1) What are the demands executives face during organisational change that may be addressed through change-coaching? (2) How do coaches support their coachees during organisational change? (3) What are the similarities and differences in the change-coaching results that coaches report and executives expect? While answering these questions, we focused on three phases of the change-coaching process: pre-coaching (phase 1), during coaching (phase 2) and post-coaching (phase 3). In addition, a further aim of the study was to develop a conceptual model of change-coaching including the three phases of a coaching process from executives' and coaches' perspectives (see [Figure 1](#)). We frame the analysis of the themes within each of the three coaching phases as outlined in [Figure 1](#). As we demonstrate below, our findings reveal that executives and coaches have both congruent and divergent views of the change-coaching process.¹

The change-coaching process: phase 1 – pre-coaching

Executives' perspective

We asked executives to focus on tasks and demands that they experience during organisational change, and their perceptions about the adopted utility of coaching in leading and managing these changes. The interview analysis revealed three key tasks: about half of the executives had to introduce new procedures, technologies or programmes. One-third reported managing change processes in connection with downsizing and staff reductions, plant closures or outsourcing. Four executives reported that they had to create new organisational structures and introduce new management levels. Resulting from these key tasks, executives aim to address the following coaching-relevant demands in a change-coaching process.

Executives' demands. This category includes situations and challenges during change processes that executive perceived as difficult to cope with and had expectations that change-coaching would address. The findings point out the following themes: (1) change management, (2) change leadership and (3) self-management as demands

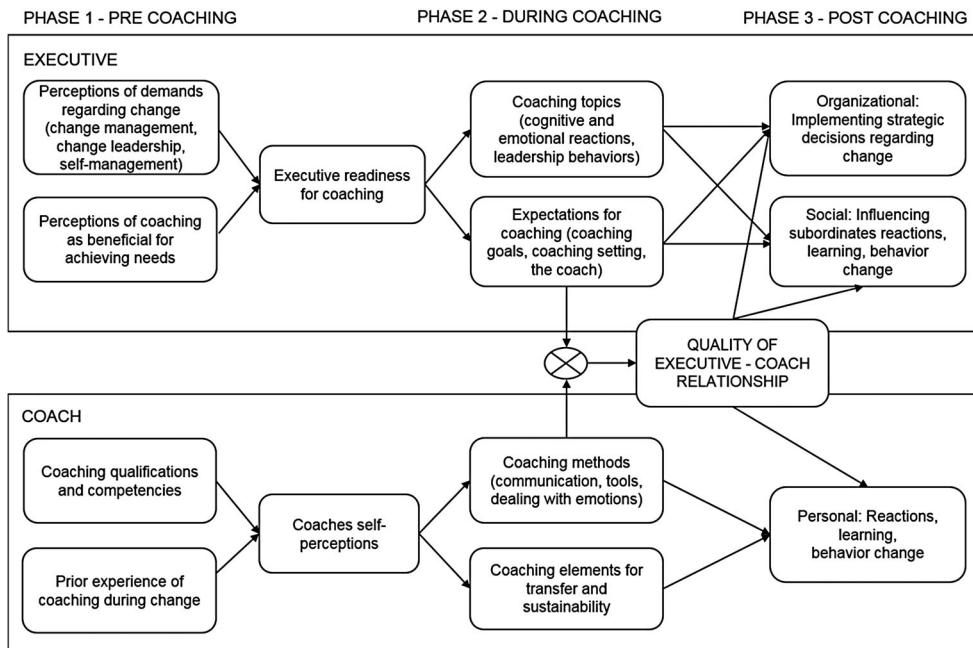


Figure 1. The change-coaching (C-C) model from executives and coaches perspectives.

needing coaching guidance. Twenty answers were classified into the *change management* subcategory, which include interview statements about the complex nature of the change, ability to change and process control as the most significant demands, as the following statement demonstrate:

The main problem was that responsibilities were not defined anymore, procedures had to be learned again, and people had to become acquainted with the new software [...] It has taken almost a year. (E 4)

Sometimes executives experience inconsistent demands given by the organisation:

Sometimes executives are in a bind; they might be unable to carry out the strategy as much as they should; this of course depends on the level of the executive, but it is especially true for lower and middle-management levels. They must be loyal to upper management and, despite their skepticism, must convince their employees that the project is necessary. (E 3)

Executives are required to comprehend the objectives of the change process and their role as well as to recognise the interests of different players and the 'culture rules' within the organisation. Our findings show that especially executives with previous coaching experience are those, who are more aware of this in the interviews.

Concerning *change leadership* executives frequently mentioned dealing with resistance or emotional reactions of their team members as challenges, that they needed coaching guidance on (14 statements):

The biggest challenges are the people; we are quite at ease in the here and now and change of any kind always triggers a stress situation. (E 5)

As an executive, you are always faced with the classic conflict of maintaining distance. If you are someone who has built up personal relationships with your employees, it can cause difficulties. So those were the biggest challenges. (E 12)

Regarding *self-management*, 23 answers showed that one of the greatest challenges was to react positively to factors making organisational change more frequent and complex (e.g., technological advances, social changes and global changes):

90% of the people I work with are completely bogged down in their thoughts and actions on whatever level. That is quite a cause for concern because we are talking about people that are supposed to shape our future. (E 11)

I do believe there is a correlation between the rapid pace of change and the dynamic of changes which does not occur in a linear manner in order to give a person and the human brain a chance to follow. (E 5)

With only one exception, all executives who addressed these issues participated in coaching sessions in the past. This finding indicates that previous coaching experience may have helped them to reflect more deeply how change processes may, for example, infer with their organisational identification due to new organisational values or increasing workload and time pressure.

Executives' perceptions of coaching as meeting their needs during change. Our analysis points out that executives want to be guided by coaches in reflecting on change processes and their implications. Fourteen of the 15 executives regarded coaching as helpful for managing the change process; nine saw it as necessary. For example,

I think that [coaching] could be a very good idea. When I had to change, this would have alerted me to be careful of problems that may arise, to consider things and give me somebody to talk to. (E 6)

My belief is that a coach opens the chance for a new perspective. You just reflect on all that happened. (E 13)

Our findings show that those executives who reported experiencing resistance among their employees and who were faced with negative emotions particularly expressed a need for coaching. Executives mainly wanted coaches to provide practical support on how to implement change and deal with employees' reactions. In addition, how to handle dilemmas and conflicts when goal are ambiguous and requirements of the change are contradictory is often an important issue for managers to address in a coaching setting. In contrast, those executives who did not express a need for coaching can be characterised by the fact that they have already gained a lot of experience with different types of past change processes. They are more likely to be involved in more radical types of change processes, such as staff reductions or the building of new organisational structures. Therefore, they have knowledge about change-related demands and are aware of upcoming change-related management tasks. Those executives without a need for coaching reflected that without their change experiences in the past they would possibly benefit from coaching. However, it can be assumed that based on their previous experiences with organisational change, they are now so confident in dealing with change demands that they no longer believe to profit from a coach, as the following statements point out:

Years ago it [Coaching] might have been useful, or, I would say, helpful. (E 14)

... if I were completely new in the situation, I would find it very helpful, if there was a coach, which would help me there. What now is hard for me, if you have a lot of experience, then you have a certain idea that someone [a coach] should have the same experience. (E 1)

In summary, these findings show that coaching is needed, especially among executives with less change-experience.

Coaches' perspective

When interviewing coaches about the pre-coaching phase, we asked them to focus on their own self-perceptions as change-coaches in terms of what they could contribute to helping executives during organisational change.

Coaches' self-perceptions. Based on the *coaching qualifications and competencies* (and their *prior experience of coaching during change* (see [Table 2](#))), change-coaches viewed themselves as tutors and process consultants for providing assistance in positioning and clarification through solution-focused approaches, which activate the resources of the client:

The systemic way of thinking, thus following the principle of solution-orientation, tries to open new perspectives for the client and the executive. (C 6)

They believed that change-coaching is required when changes mean that previous experience, current competence and commitment of an executive are no longer sufficient. Furthermore, change-coaches describe themselves in their own way, for example, as a 'companion' or 'clarifier in times of uncertainty':

I am familiar with encountering a lack of knowledge and it is the main function of coaching to accompany the client into this lack of knowledge, and thus be there when their confidence ebbs. (C 3)

This requires coaches to have experience about how to manage change processes. Coaches described change-coaching as one helpful tool in a mosaic of tools for leading and managing the entire change process, which should be clearly distinguished from other change management (and consulting) activities. In sum, our findings indicated that executives are faced with a variety of profound challenges. This addresses research question 1 by providing insights into the working conditions and related demands during times of change, which executives have to cope and coaches have to deal with as sparring partner for them.

The change-coaching process: phase 2 – during coaching

Executives' perspective on coaching topics

We asked executives to consider the main topics that they would like to reflect on when engaged in change-coaching. Most of the topics our analysis identified referred to their reactions to organisational change when it occurred. These reactions are subdivided into cognitive and emotional reactions, and leadership behaviours. We first discuss these categories and then compare executives' and coaches' viewpoints on how change-coaching could be beneficial in managing these reactions and behaviours.

Cognitive reactions refer to statements about the thoughts, attitudes and appraisals expressed by the executives related to the change. This category gives insights into whether executives will embrace change or see it as a threat. Nineteen statements indicated that executives would be more positive to change if they expected that change would bring benefits:

You must participate in the decision-making process and take the chance. Really there is no alternative: if our company does not do it, another company will. Thus, I am with those who design the process. (E 3)

Whether executives perceive organisational change a risk or an opportunity depended on the type of change, 'estimated durability value' and perceived autonomy and benefits.

I think the duration and frequency of changes is too high. People are not in the position anymore to adjust to the current situation, to fully develop in this framework and thereafter assume responsibility. (E 12)

Thus, one of the areas that executives may need help from coaches relates to their own appraisal of the change. Coaching may be helpful in reflecting the executives' change-appraisal and increasing the awareness, that negative cognitions about the change could have impact on, e.g., leadership, performance, work satisfaction or well-being, because executives have the responsibility for successful change-implementation.

Emotional reactions refer to any phrases that included executives' own emotions regarding the change processes or where they had to deal with the emotional reactions of their team members. Given that – like the analysis points out – fear of change is one of the biggest factors in resistance to change, understanding how executives perceive the role of coaching in managing the emotions associated with change can shed key insights into how coaching can facilitate effective change management. Six executives indicated that they tended to experience more negative emotional reactions to change; they reported more resistance than enthusiasm both on their part and that of their employees. The findings revealed that unpleasant emotions such as helplessness, disappointment and resignation emerge particularly in change processes characterised by high frequency and short timeframes. For example:

The issue was a threat especially because it involved layoffs. On that respective list were many employees I highly valued. In the end things developed rather smoothly and now my impression is positive. With regard to the organization I think it was a rather favorable step. With regard to the method and modality it was very threatening and discouraging for all of us. (E 4)

Leadership behaviours emerged as a central topic for change-coaching, particularly in terms of how executives can motivate and inspire people to engage for the change processes. From the executives' viewpoint, the challenge they most frequently experienced were (i) How to handle the resistance of their employees (14 statements):

You will not always find approval for your ideas and may meet opposition. The crucial point is to communicate changes in a way that people feel they still have prospects in the company. You know changes are indispensable but you encounter resistance; that is the biggest stress factor. (E 1)

(ii) How to involve the employees in the change process (13 statements):

You have to start from where the people are because all changes generate fears that must be reduced as far as possible. You have to enter into a dialogue with them, and show the aims behind the change. (E 2)

And (iii) how to communicate throughout the change:

Stress needs to be placed on communication. We are talking about so many things but as soon as conflicts, discontentment and anxieties emerge, communication lapses into silence. This is because executives are not trained to cope with these challenges. (E 8)

Executives' expectations about the effectiveness of change-coaching

Coaching goals. Executives indicated that they had clear ideas about the benefits coaching should bring and they described change-coaching goals in 27 interview statements, for example,

As an executive, you must stand for change management. You have to live and support it. You must learn how to cope with opposition and clashes. Coaching should offer you corresponding tools for getting employees interested. It is no problem to inspire people who are motivated but how do I involve the others? (E 8)

Our analysis distinguishes between three categories of executives' change-coaching goals: They wish to gain (1) knowledge about change management processes and implementation strategies, (2) support in clarifying their role as a change manager and (3) self-assurance in how to position themselves within the change process.

Coaching setting. Executives describe the coaching setting and the way the coaching should be conducted (17 statements in total). For example,

I would imagine meeting for one to two hours and developing a strategy for the next three to four weeks. In each meeting one should discuss the detected difficulties and define how to eliminate them. (E 4)

Our findings point show also what executives expect from their coaches in terms of competencies and experience (8 statements). Their expectations included the experience of leadership in change processes as well as general life experience:

I would not accept a coach who has just finished his university studies. I would expect someone with life experience and worldly wisdom. (E 1)

In sum, the interviews classify coaching issues that were related to executives' own cognitive and emotional reactions and appropriate leadership behaviour as a result of the change process. They also addressed questions about how to deal with their employees' reactions. For them, factors contributing to the effectiveness of change-coaching included the goals of the coaching, the coaching setting and the coach's competence and experience.

Contrasting coaches' vs. executives' perspectives

Imperative to a successful change-coaching outcome is that the coach and executive can effectively work together to address the needs of the executive throughout the change process. If executives and coaches have different expectations and perspectives about the function of the change-coaching, a successful outcome will be difficult to achieve. Thus, the interview data suggested also analysing points of synergy and contrast between executives and coaches in the perceptions of the learning and development

process during change-coaching. Therefore, in the section below, we integrate the themes from both regarding methods and issues of learning transfer and sustainability.

Change-coaching methods refer to general practices and applied interventions used by the coaches. The data pointed out three key categories of methods and competencies, which coaches perceived to be relevant for change-coaching: (1) communication skills such as conversation, questioning and reflection techniques; changes in perception and feedback (19 statements); (2) coaching tools such as systemic constellations, rituals, shadowing or creative methods (21 statements) and (3) dealing with emotions such as emotional awareness and clarity, reflecting and expressing emotions (24 statements). For example,

- (1) 'The main method in coaching is systemic questioning, an opportunity for self-reflection and the chance to develop one's own ideas. That is the basic approach.' (C 13)
- (2) 'Visualization of a social system' or 'a tool like "value square", related to uncertainty, what makes the client really certain? What makes him uncertain? What does he contribute to the certainty of others? This might also represent figuratively.' (C 6)
- (3) 'I work with the five basic emotions, I respond to their particular emotions. A certain kind of consciousness is helpful. Anxiety may not necessarily be negative at all. I am also interested in it. Anxiety can promote the process. Sometimes it is even helpful to back out. Of course, you have to consider the opposite part, too, and see where the issue is.' (C 13)

By comparison, the executives mentioned those categories considerably less often, which points to an area where coaches and executives have different conceptualisations of the main focus and the methods used in coaching. They most frequently alluded to the use of management tools and communication skills (five statements):

First of all you have to understand and decode your own managerial behavior. What is the origin of my leadership style and who has influenced the way I lead? Why do I lead the way I do? (E 8)

Comparing the two groups along the interview data, coaches were more focused on supporting executives in handling their emotions and finding ways for personal growth. In contrast, executives wanted to develop tools that would help them to improve their managerial skills during change. This points to a potential area of diverging expectations coaches should be aware of and address in the contracting phase of the change-coaching process.

Learning transfer and sustainability refers to phrases about techniques and practices to enhance the transfer to everyday work situations. The analysis identified 12 executives who hoped to learn through feedback, exercises and trials in the course of the coaching process (5 statements), and coaches agreed with this viewpoint (9 statements). A coach described it as follows:

Coaching always means reflecting on the challenges. The dialogue must develop precise implementation options and subsequently you must decide what actions to take. (C 14)

In addition, coaches expanded on this in 13 statements, suggesting that it was important to review learning after the coaching:

First of all I determine right from the beginning that there is going to be a review date. This meeting should not be too far in the future, so approximately after 4 to 6 months. (C 9)

Furthermore, we found evidence that the *quality of the executive-coach relationship* was an important influence in determining a successful outcome from change-coaching. One executive statement illustrates this:

I think the important thing is that the relationship with the coach is suitable or you are in tune with your coach. That you have the feeling of a coach who understands what you say. (E 6)

Looking at these findings as a whole, they indicate that coaches and coachees differ in their view on what the coaching should focus on. This sheds light on the second research question. Coaches use methods to address the change-related cognitive and emotional reactions to support their coachees, whereas executives themselves would like to gain more self-assurance during change by learning management tools.

The change-coaching process: phase 3 – post-coaching

Given how important it is that expectations of the change-coaching are met, we were interested in comparing the anticipated outcomes of *executives* and *coaches* across three categories: organisational, social and personal outcomes. These findings should help us to answer our third research question.

Organisational outcomes

This category include coaching results related to the successful realisation of change projects from an organisational perspective. For implementing strategic decisions, it was crucial for executives that change-coaching offered substantial support for approaching complexity, for enhancing change competence and for controlling processes (eleven statements). One executive explains:

The main issue is to find out how departments really tick. [...] Our company represents the typical organizational structure, i.e. the technical department, the finance department [...] We are organized this way because our customers want high flexibility and lean information. That is why I am now steering the company in a project and process orientated manner. (E 5)

Nineteen coach statements emphasised that coaching should take corporate-policy aspects and culture into consideration as well:

You have to consider the complexity, and you have to make personal decisions not only on your own behalf, but also on behalf of the organizational development. (C 1)

That is, comparing both groups, the executives valued coaching most for its enhancement of their skills for leading change, while the coaches valued coaching for its focus on organisational issues:

This aspect is very important when you are confronted with highly complex problems during change processes. [...] and one must consider organizational and political issues, as well as the issue of power. (C 7)

Social outcomes

This category includes statements referring to leadership behaviour during change. Executive answers fit into three content categories (21 statements in total): (1) employee perception and involvement, (2) role model and credibility or (3) authenticity, confidence and appreciation in which executives inspire and motivate employees:

My experience with trust and openness with regard to my employees has been extremely positive. (E 4)

Coach responses are classified into four categories (50 statements): (1) employee perception and involvement, (2) handling employees' resistance to change, (3) transparent communication and (4) leadership behaviour adaption to the situation and type of change. One example, which addresses employees' resistance to change, is as follows:

In any case it is important to find out exactly what is going on and where the resistance comes from. Anxieties might play a role or lack of information and background knowledge. (C 2)

By comparing the two groups, regarding the *social outcomes*, we found the best match for the category 'employee perception and involvement', which both groups saw as pivotal for change success:

I believe that leading can only be successful if it is linked to a close dialogue with your people. (C 7) or

You have to start from where the people are because all changes generate fears that must be reduced as far as possible. (E 2)

In addition, some coach statements indicated that situational guidance and transparent communication were most conducive to dealing with employees' resistance to change. Coaches might see higher risk and potential for conflict in the implementation of change and might try to sensitise their clients to these issues through coaching, whereas the executives focus on their function as a role model.

Personal outcomes

This category relate to the perceived benefit for executives' themselves on a personal level from the change-coaching. Coaches were more likely than executives to report that executives' personal reflections, identification, values and attitudes indicate whether they would be successful in implementing change (represented by thirteen coach statements). Dealing with emotions and ambivalence was seen by coaches as highly important for designing a new role and management identity, which requires self-reflection or feedback. One coach answered:

Reflection of the process and personal positioning, that is the basis on which decisions can be taken. These decisions should be promptly taken because skepticism, paralysis and self-doubt do have an impact on health and on psychological stability. (C 6)

Thus, the findings show that from the coaches' perspective, executives need a new definition of their role in the current and future environment. In our study, half the coaches reported that coaching may propel executives to seek new jobs because they no longer identify with their company during or after organisational changes. Only a few interview statements in this category emerged from executives, for example:

Coaching must consider the emotional level. My emotions may be reflected and visible. (E 9)

In summary, comparing both groups, the executive statements were more related to change turbulence, time restraints and complexity management. Coaches mentioned these topics too, but they were much more focused on the executives as people themselves; coaches were more likely to say that executives needed to reflect on their role and organisational identity, values and personal attitudes to better cope with change according to personal outcomes.

Discussion and conclusions

With this qualitative interview study, we sought to explore change-coaching processes from the viewpoint of both middle management executives and coaches using an inductive approach. We interviewed both executives and coaches about their experience of organisational change, and the role of coaching as a developmental tool for executives when managing change initiatives. Our study was led by three research questions: (1) What are the demands executives face during organisational change that may be addressed through change-coaching? (2) How do coaches support their coachees during organisational change? (3) What are the similarities and differences in the change-coaching results that coaches report and executives expect? Themes were categorised across stages of the coaching process, including pre-coaching (phase 1), during coaching (phase 2) and post-coaching (phase 3).

Implications for theory development on change-coaching

Our findings revealed that both groups have clear points of agreement on many aspects of change-coaching, including how it can be used as a developmental tool for executives managing changes processes. However, there are also a number of areas of discrepancy. Executives wanted coaches to provide practical support on how to lead change and deal with employees, while coaches predominantly expected to focus on personal reflection. This points to a difference in task versus self-focus between executives and coaches. It makes sense that executives focus more on their responsibilities during change processes (task focus), as managerial work and motivation are primarily directed toward operational performance rather than learning (Berings, Poell, & Simons, 2008). As a potential starting point, coaches need to manage the expectations of executive at the outset of the change-coaching process and introduce them to the idea focusing not only on their responsibilities regarding the change process, but also on their own thoughts and feeling with regard to the change. We come to the conclusion that to successfully utilise change-coaching, a number of factors need to be taken into consideration before and during the coaching process, in addition to considering expected outcomes. We summarise these in [Figure 1](#).

Our findings, consistent with past research (Rafferty & Griffin, 2006), show that executives need personal development during times of organisational change. In our change-coaching model (C-C), we adopt a process perspective of executives and coaches perceptions of change-coaching, considering their expectations before coaching, in terms of its instrumentality in meeting their needs, their expectations regarding what will change during coaching itself, and possible outcomes for how coaching will help them to achieve their organisational change objectives.

During the pre-coaching phase (phase 1), our research suggests that executives expect that coaching will benefit the organisations' change goals and will help them to manage their tasks and to cope with the demands they experience during change. This determines whether an executive perceives themselves to be ready for change-coaching. From a coaches' perspective, they consider that they must have relevant coaching competencies and prior experience of coaching during change in order to be of benefit to executives in managing the organisational change process. This influences their self-perceptions as a change-coach.

When engaged in coaching itself (phase 2), executives also have expectations about what coaching should focus on during coaching sessions. They expect that coaching will help them to manage their own reactions to organisational change, including their cognitive appraisals, emotional reactions and leadership behaviour. From a coach's perspective, their success in meeting these expectations during the coaching process is a function of choosing appropriate methods, and focusing on areas that promote the transfer and sustainability of the executives' developmental processes. The match between executives' expectations about what will happen during coaching and the coaches' ability to be flexible in terms of methods and tools is one factor that contributes to the quality of the executive-coach relationship (O'Broin & Palmer, 2010). Previous studies have shown that successful coaching outcomes depend on working alliances and that coaching conversations focus completely on coaches' needs (Jones & Spooner, 2006). A successful coaching relationship may depend on client expectations, coaches' competencies, or the match of the two individuals (Wampold, 2001). For a sustainable working relationship in change-coaching, we suggest that a key element is differentiating between the organisation's goals and expectations in relation to change processes and the client's individual needs and expectations. Thus, coaches and executives cannot build effective, neutral and personal working alliances unless organisational goals and personal objectives are transparent and communicated.

Finally, for the post-coaching phase (phase 3), executives described anticipated outcomes of the coaching process, which included being better equipped to implement strategic objectives regarding organisational change, as well as being able to influence and manage their subordinates reactions, learning and behaviour regarding the changes. Outcomes fell into three broad levels: organisational, social and personal. The content of the *organisational outcomes* category aligns with guidelines for political and organisational actions (Yukl, 2006): (1) determine who can oppose or facilitate change; (2) build a broad coalition to support the change; (3) use task forces to guide implementation; (4) make dramatic, symbolic changes that affect the work and (5) monitor the progress. Change-coaching can additionally be beneficial in helping executives to manage *social outcomes*, which refers to people-oriented actions (Yukl, 2006): (1) creating a sense of urgency about the need for change, (2) preparing people to adjust to change, (3) providing opportunities for early successes, (4) keeping people informed about the progress, (5) demonstrating continued commitment to the change and (6) empowering people to implement the change. *Personal outcomes* for change-coaching are also important for executives, because employees tend to see their manager's as role models when they have high emotional expressivity skills. In line with the findings of Groves (2006), visionary leadership style in the context of organisational change alone, however, is insufficient.

Executives must also be highly committed to the change and highly attentive to employees and their own emotions to facilitate the organisational changes.

In order to support executives with regard to their anticipated outcomes, coaches in turn need to be able to maintain a balance between focusing on the executives own learning, needs, reactions and behaviours about the change, and ensuring that this contributes to the broader organisational expectations. Coaches need to be able to analyse the process and content of change in order to understand executives' requirements, while considering the specific organisational environment. This match between the anticipated outcomes of executives and the observed outcomes described by coaches is a further key element in developing a high-quality executive-coach relationship. We suggest that successfully managing each element outlined in our change-coaching (C-C) model will contribute to more successful management of organisational change processes by executives.

Practical implications for organisations

Organisations undergoing change can use change-coaching as a developmental tool and resource to aid executives manage the change process. However, the factors we outlined in our change-coaching (C-C) model need to be considered to ensure that the coaching contributes to successful and sustainable change. Organisations must clearly define their assignment purposes and carefully select suitable coaches so that coaches, clients and organisations work together. Organisations should assure that coaches can deal with organisational issues by simultaneously considering the self-management of the executive, the change management with regard to managing others and change leadership that considers the strategic objectives of the change.

Practical implications for executives

As our findings show, executives and coaches have many similar ideas regarding change-coaching goals, but they have different expectations regarding the paths to the goals, perhaps because of their different roles. Whatever the reason, our findings show that both sides can learn from each other. On the one hand, coaches can give executives inspiration, new perspectives and self-management skills to serve as individual resources in turbulent times, especially because 'leaders may find the demand of self-development extremely difficult to initiate and maintain, especially given the cognitive demands and the stressful nature of leadership' (Nesbit, 2012, p. 205). On the other hand, executives can give coaches insights into change-related demands, thereby enabling coaches to improve their counselling concepts and coaching skills for executives facing organisational change.

Practical implications for coaches

Throughout the coaching process, coaches must have a clear understanding of the organisational coaching culture, leadership approach, change process, change structure and change goals. They can develop an understanding of these points from executives. Furthermore, coaches who interact with executives must be acutely aware of attitudes and emotional stress factors. Coaches reported that clients may superficially approve of changes but have simultaneous feelings of uncertainty. Thus, change-coaching has

the central task of helping executives clarify their emotional positions, reflect on their negative appraisals or their ambivalent cognition and emotion. Coaches might analyse strategic uncertainty together for characteristics such as reason for change and uncertainty about job security or job role changes (Bordia, Hobman, Jones, Gallois, & Callan, 2004).

Limitations, future research and conclusions

Our research demonstrated that organisational changes generate obligations and challenges that may drive executives to seek experienced coaches for support. Although coaches are especially helpful in alerting executives to emotions that accompany change and problems that can result, coaches and executives often have different priorities, so that both parties must find a common approach. In particular, coaches should adjust their style to fit the needs of the organisations and individuals.

Although our findings complement and extend prior understandings of change-coaching for executives, our study has several inherent limitations to be considered when interpreting the results. We broadly defined organisational change processes for our study, rather than focusing on one specific type of change or on one organisation. However, organisational change is a complex phenomenon and future studies may shed light on whether the type of organisational change has an influence on the role that coaching plays in this process.

In addition, we interviewed middle management executives, thus the findings may fail to generalise to other management or leadership levels. Furthermore, only half of the interviewed executives had experience with coaching, which can be considered as a limitation. A further limitation of our sample is the variability in the coaches' backgrounds, which restricts the comparability of coaching methods and the internal validity. However, we believe that this reflects the natural variance across individual coaches in reality and was the appropriate approach to answer our research questions. Furthermore, the sample selection was based on voluntary participation so that self-selection effects might have occurred (Krippendorff, 2004).

In order to confirm the credibility (Elliott, Fischer, & Rennie, 1999) of our thematic analysis, we have added the third author to developing the categories and the model and collected feedback from some of our interview partners.

Future research would benefit from investigating change-coaching using matched coach–client dyads in ongoing change-coaching processes, where possible. This is difficult to achieve using a qualitative methodology, but may be possible using quantitative methods. Future research will also benefit from testing our qualitatively derived model in quantitative, longitudinal studies. A question for future studies could be which methods and coaching approaches can be employed to different types of change processes. Furthermore, follow-up studies should investigate the role of relationship building in change-coaching to determine how this can impact on the success of the change-coaching process. There is a need to analyse how coaches might tailor their offerings for the best fit with individuals and organisations, including a deeper understanding of the best methods for coaching, managing outcome expectations and ways to measure outcomes.

In summary, our qualitative research explored the key elements of a rarely studied research field with the objective of proposing a conceptual model of change-coaching.

In keeping with our research objective of developing our understanding of change-coaching from executive and coach perspectives, our model can serve as a basis for deriving hypotheses to be tested in further studies and for developing more comprehensive theory.

Note

1. For more details, additional interview quotations are available for research on request addressed to the authors.

Disclosure statement

No potential conflict of interest was reported by the authors.

Notes on contributors



Katrin Bickerich, psychologist, is currently a Ph.D. candidate in the Department of Work and Organizational Psychology at the University of Heidelberg, Germany. Her research interests focus on the design of executive coaching during organisational changes. She has written co-authored book-chapters on coaching topic and has presented her work at conferences. She is also practitioner and works in the HR development department of the Heidelberg University Hospital and as an executive coach for young professionals. She is a member of the German Psychological Society (DGPs).



Alexandra Michel is Scientific Director at the Federal Institute for Occupational Safety and Health and Associate Professor for Work and Organizational Psychology at the University of Heidelberg, Germany. Besides being an academic, she is a practitioner with experiences as a Human Resources and Change Manager as well as a Coach. She is co-editor of the book *The psychology of organizational change: Viewing change from the employee's perspective* and has published her research in several peer-reviewed journals including *Journal of Applied Psychology*, *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, *Journal of Organizational and Occupational Psychology* and *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, amongst others. Her primary research interests refer to resource-oriented interventions at work, organisational change, coaching and occupational health.



Deirdre O'Shea is a Lecturer (Above the Bar) and Registered Work and Organisational Psychologist in the Department of Personnel and Employment Relations, Kemmy Business School, University of Limerick. Her research interests include psychological resource-based interventions, work motivation, emotions and emotion regulation, and occupational health psychology, among others. She is currently involved in a number of national and international collaborative research projects investigating these topics and has received research

funding from the Irish Research Council (2014), Enterprise Ireland (2008, 2009) and European Association of Work and Organisational Psychology (2013), among others. Her research has been published in various peer-reviewed publications including *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology*, *Journal of Vocational Behaviour*, *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, the *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, and *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, amongst others.

References

- Augustijnen, M.-T., Schnitzer, G., & Van Esbroeck, R. (2011). A model of executive coaching: A qualitative study. *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 6(2), 150–164.
- Berings, M. G. M. C., Poell, R. F., & Simons, P. R.-J. (2008). Dimensions of on-the-job learning styles. *Applied Psychology: An International Review*, 57(3), 417–440. doi:10.1111/j.1464-0597.2008.00362.x
- Bickerich, K., & Michel, A. (2016). Führungskräfte-Coaching bei Change Prozessen. *Zeitschrift für Arbeits- und Organisationspsychologie A&O*, 60(4), 212–226. doi:10.1026/0932-4089/a000226
- Bordia, P., Hobman, E., Jones, E., Gallois, C., & Callan, V. J. (2004). Uncertainty during organizational change: Types, consequences, and management strategies. *Journal of Business and Psychology*, 18(4), 507–532. doi:10.1023/B:JOBU.0000028449.99127.f7
- Bordia, P., Hunt, E., Paulsen, N., Tourish, D., & DiFonzo, N. (2004). Uncertainty during organizational change: Is it all about control? *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 13(3), 345–365. doi:10.1080/13594320444000128
- Caldwell, S. D., Herold, D. M., & Fedor, D. B. (2004). Toward an understanding of the relationships Among organizational change, individual differences, and changes in person-environment fit: A cross-level study. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 89(5), 868–882. doi:10.1037/0021-9010.89.5.868
- Corbin, J. M., & Strauss, A. L. (2008). *Basics of qualitative research: Techniques and procedures for developing grounded theory* (3rd ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- de Haan, E., Duckworth, A., Birch, D., & Jones, C. (2013). Executive coaching outcome research: The contribution of common factors such as relationship, personality match, and self-efficacy. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 65(1), 40–57. doi:10.1037/a0031635
- Dopson, S., & Stewart, R. (1990). What is happening to middle management? *British Journal of Management*, 1(1), 3–16. doi:10.1111/j.1467-8551.1990.tb00151.x
- Duijts, S. F. A., Kant, I., van den Brandt, P. A., & Swaen, G. M. H. (2008). Effectiveness of a preventive coaching intervention for employees at risk for sickness absence due to psychosocial health complaints: Results of a randomized controlled trial. *Journal of Occupational and Environmental Medicine*, 50(7), 765–776. doi:10.1097/JOM.0b013e3181651584
- Eby, L. T., Butts, M. M., Durley, J., & Ragins, B. R. (2010). Are bad experiences stronger than good ones in mentoring relationships? Evidence from the protégé and mentor perspective. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 77(1), 81–92.
- Edmondson, A. C., & McManus, S. E. (2007). Methodological fit in management field research. *Academy of Management Review*, 32(4), 1155–1179.
- Eisenhardt, K. M. (1988). Agency- and institutional-theory explanations: The case of retail sales compensation. *The Academy of Management Journal*, 31(3), 488–511.
- Elliott, R., Fischer, C. T., & Rennie, D. L. (1999). Evolving guidelines for publication of qualitative research studies in psychology and related fields. *British Journal of Clinical Psychology*, 38(3), 215–229. doi:10.1348/014466599162782
- Elo, S., & Kyngäs, H. (2008). The qualitative content analysis process. *Journal of Advanced Nursing*, 62(1), 107–115. doi:10.1111/j.1365-2648.2007.04569.x
- Elsbach, K. D., & Kramer, R. M. (1996). Members' responses to organizational identity threats: Encountering and countering the business week rankings. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 41(3), 442–476.
- Ely, K., Boyce, L. A., Nelson, J. K., Zaccaro, S. J., Hernandez-Broome, G., & Whyman, W. (2010). Evaluating leadership coaching: A review and integrated framework. *The Leadership Quarterly*, 21(4), 585–599. doi:10.1016/j.leaqua.2010.06.003

- Glaser, B. G., & Strauss, A. L. (1967). *The discovery of grounded theory: Strategies for qualitative research*. Chicago, IL: Aldine-Athestor.
- Godshalk, V. M., & Sosik, J. J. (2003). Aiming for career success: The role of learning goal orientation in mentoring relationships. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 63(3), 417–437.
- Grant, A. M. (2014). The efficacy of executive coaching in times of organisational change. *Journal of Change Management*, 14(2), 258–280. doi:10.1080/14697017.2013.805159
- Grant, A. M., Curtayne, L., & Burton, G. (2009). Executive coaching enhances goal attainment, resilience and workplace well-being: A randomised controlled study. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 4(5), 396–407. doi:10.1080/17439760902992456
- Groves, K. S. (2006). Leader emotional expressivity, visionary leadership, and organizational change. *Leadership and Organization Development Journal*, 27(7), 566–583. doi:10.1108/01437730610692425
- Herold, D. M., Fedor, D. B., Caldwell, S., & Liu, Y. (2008). The effects of transformational and change leadership on employees' commitment to a change: A multilevel study. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 93(2), 346–357. doi:10.1037/0021-9010.93.2.346
- Huy, Q. N. (2002). Emotional balancing of organizational continuity and radical change: The contribution of middle managers. *Administrative Science Quarterly*, 47(1), 31–69. doi:10.2307/3094890
- Jayaprakash, M., Puri-Taneja, A., Kandula, N. R., Bharucha, H., Kumar, S., & Dave, S. S. (2016). Qualitative process evaluation of a community-based culturally tailored lifestyle intervention for underserved South Asians. *Health Promotion Practice*, 17(6), 802–813. doi:10.1177/1524839916650165
- Jones, G., & Spooner, K. (2006). Coaching high achievers. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 58(1), 40–50. doi:10.1037/1065-9293.58.1.40
- Jones, R. J., Woods, S. A., & Guillaume, Y. R. F. (2015). The effectiveness of workplace coaching: A meta-analysis of learning and performance outcomes from coaching. *Journal of Occupational and Organizational Psychology*, 89, 249–277. doi:10.1111/joop.12119
- Kiefer, T. (2005). Feeling bad: Antecedents and consequences of negative emotions in ongoing change. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 26(8), 875–897. doi:10.1002/job.339
- Kombarakaran, F. A., Yang, J. A., Baker, M. N., & Fernandes, P. B. (2008). Executive coaching: It works! *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 60(1), 78–90. doi:10.1037/1065-9293.60.1.78
- Krippendorff, K. (2004). *Content analysis: An introduction to its methodology*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Lindorff, M., Worrall, L., & Cooper, C. (2011). Managers' well-being and perceptions of organizational change in the UK and Australia. *Asia Pacific Journal of Human Resources*, 49(2), 233–254. doi:10.1177/1038411111400264
- Michel, A., & Morales-Gonzalez, M. G. (2013). Reactions to organizational change: An integrated model of health predictors, intervening variables and outcomes. In S. Oreg, A. Michel, & R. T. By (Eds.), *The psychology of organizational change: viewing change from the recipients' perspective*. (pp. 65–91). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Miles, M. B., & Huberman, A. M. (2007). *Qualitative data analysis : An expanded sourcebook* (2. ed., 20. [print] ed.). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.
- Moran, D. J. (2011). ACT for leadership: Using acceptance and commitment training to develop crisis-resilient change managers. *International Journal of Behavioral Consultation and Therapy*, 7(1), 66–75. doi:10.1037/h0100928
- Nesbit, P. L. (2012). The role of self-reflection, emotional management of feedback, and self-regulation processes in self-directed leadership development. *Human Resource Development Review*, 11(2), 203–226. doi:10.1177/1534484312439196
- Nielsen, K., Taris, T. W., & Cox, T. (2010). The future of organizational interventions: Addressing the challenges of today's organizations. *Work & Stress*, 24(3), 219–233. doi:10.1080/02678373.2010.519176
- O'Broin, A., & Palmer, S. (2010). Exploring key aspects in the formation of coaching relationships: Initial indicators from the perspective of the coachee and the coach. *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*, 3(2), 124–143. doi:10.1080/17521882.2010.502902
- Oreg, S. (2003). Resistance to change: Developing an individual differences measure. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 88(4), 680–693. doi:10.1037/0021-9010.88.4.680

- Oreg, S., By, R. T., & Michel, A. (2013). Introduction. In S. Oreg, R. T. By, & A. Michel (Eds.), *The psychology of organizational change: Viewing change from the recipients' perspective* (pp. 3–14). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Oreg, S., Vakola, M., & Armenakis, A. (2011). Change recipients' reactions to organizational change: A 60-year review of quantitative studies. *Journal of Applied Behavioral Science*, 20(10), 1–64.
- O'Reilly, C. A., Chatman, J., & Caldwell, D. F. (1991). People and organizational culture: A profile comparison approach to assessing person-organization fit. *Academy of Management Journal*, 34(3), 487–516.
- Rafferty, A. E., & Griffin, M. A. (2006). Perceptions of organizational change: A stress and coping perspective. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 91(5), 1154–1162. doi:10.1037/0021-9010.91.5.1154
- Rafferty, A. E., Jimmieson, N. L., & Restubog, S. L. D. (2013). When leadership meets organizational change: The influence of the top management team and supervisory leaders on change appraisals, change attitudes, and adjustment to change. In S. Oreg, A. Michel, & R. T. By (Eds.), *The psychology of organizational change: Viewing change from the recipients' perspective* (pp. 145–172). New York: Cambridge University Press.
- Stober, D. R. (2008). Making it stick: Coaching as a tool for organizational change. *Coaching: An International Journal of Theory, Research and Practice*, 1(1), 71–80. doi:10.1080/17521880801905950
- Strijk, J. E., Proper, K. I., van der Beek, A. J., & van Mechelen, W. (2011). A process evaluation of a work-site vitality intervention among ageing hospital workers. *The International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, 8, 58. doi:10.1186/1479-5868-8-58
- Theeboom, T., Beersma, B., & van Vianen, A. E. M. (2014). Does coaching work? A meta-analysis on the effects of coaching on individual level outcomes in an organizational context. *The Journal of Positive Psychology*, 9(1), 1–18. doi:10.1080/17439760.2013.837499
- Ting, S., & Riddle, D. (2006). A framework for leadership development coaching. In S. Ting & P. Scisco (Eds.), *The center for creative leadership handbook of coaching* (pp. 34–62). San Francisco, CA: Wiley.
- Turgut, S., Michel, A., Rothenhöfer, L. M., & Sonntag, K. (2016). Dispositional resistance to change and emotional exhaustion: Moderating effects at the work-unit level. *European Journal of Work and Organizational Psychology*, 25, 1–16. doi:10.1080/1359432X.2016.1157583
- van den Heuvel, M., Demerouti, E., Bakker, A. B., & Schaufeli, W. B. (2013). Adapting to change: The value of change information and meaning-making. *Journal of Vocational Behavior*, 83(1), 11–21. doi:10.1016/j.jvb.2013.02.004
- Wampold, B. E. (2001). *The great psychotherapy debate: Models, methods, and findings*. Mahwah, NJ: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates Publishers.
- Willig, C. (2009). *Introducing qualitative research in psychology: Adventures in theory and method* (2nd ed.). Maidenhead: Open University Press.
- Wooldridge, B., & Floyd, S. W. (1990). The strategy process, middle management involvement, and organizational performance. *Strategic Management Journal*, 11(3), 231–241. doi:10.1002/smj.4250110305
- Yukl, G. A. (2006). *Leadership in organizations* (6th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson, Prentice Hall.

APPENDIX

Interview protocol with examples of questions asked throughout the whole research process

Assignment to ASC
framework (Ting & Riddle,
2006)

	Executives	Coaches
Background	Please tell me, what is your position and function in your organization? Which were your responsibilities? What experience have you had with organizational change processes? Did you ever use individual coaching?	Please tell me, how long have you been working as a coach? What is your educational background in this area? How do you see yourself as a coach (your personal, technical, methodology competencies)? How do you define coaching in change management processes?
Assessment (demands in change, reactions in change)	Which challenges confront you in the current change processes? How do you assess change processes in your organization? When would you consider individual coaching for yourself in line with a change process?	Why do you think individual coaching is needed in times of organizational change? How do you think executives evaluate organizational change processes?
Challenge (imbalance of demands and competences)	What topics would you work on with your coach? According to your experience, what leadership behavior is best for handling change processes?	What thematic priorities do you work on with your clients? Which leadership behavior do you think is more helpful in an organizational change process? Which is less helpful?
Support (coaching process, sustainability)	What should change-coaching offer for you? How should change-coaching be configured for success? Which educational targets do you consider desirable? Would you want to involve your team in the coaching process? What would help transfer the gained skills into practice?	What specific methods and tools do you use in change-coaching? How should a change-coaching procedure be designed? How would you measure successful coaching? What are the three most important goals in change-coaching? Would you want to involve your client's team in your change-coaching? Which methods do you use to transfer the gained skills into practice and ensure sustainability?
Conclusion	Would you like to add anything?	Would you like to add anything?

Note: The ACS framework (Ting & Riddle, 2006) shows that coaching processes should include (1) assessment (needs of the client), (2) challenge (imbalance between current skills and demands) and (3) support (creating and maintaining learning motivation). Those characteristics were the basis for the questions guiding the interviewer to explore (1) current and future challenges for executives in handling organisational change (assessment); (2) possible imbalance between executives' skills, competencies and change demands (challenge) and (3) characteristics of an appropriate coaching process (e.g., executives' expectations, applied methods) with sustainable effects (support).