The Coaching Impact Study™

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The Coaching Impact Study: Measuring the Value of Executive Coaching

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When the topic of the return on investment ("ROI") of coaching comes up among coaching professionals, there is often skepticism about its ultimate usefulness. This may be rooted in the notion, held by some, that it is essentially impossible to accurately measure ROI. This paper reports on our efforts to develop a meaningful methodology for the study of return on investment broadly construed, of executive coaching. We will present a brief overview of the rationale for continued efforts to come to grips with the ROI challenge followed by a description of the methodology developed by the research team and some of the results from the study to date. Our goal has been to create an approach that will help organizations enhance informed decision-making regarding how to invest in executive leadership coaching, as well as to share information about the impact and value of leadership coaching with the larger leadership development communities.

THE CONTEXT FOR MEASURING IMPACT

As we know, executive leadership coaching has grown in popularity and application over the past several decades. The reasons for the expansion of leadership coaching are many. The task of being an executive has arguably become much more difficult and expansive. More leaders now routinely deal with significant ambiguity, disruptive changes and pressures to perform in an increasingly global and diverse context. They are asked to be both strategic decision makers and masters of the "soft" skills required to effectively manage people. At the same time, due to the pace and magnitude of change and the disruption within organizations themselves, the relationships that can support personal development and learning, an absolute requirement for effective leadership, are often lacking. Into this breach has stepped, among other professionals, the executive coach – who is tasked with helping guide leaders and managers toward betterment.

THE CONTEXT FOR ASSESSING VALUE – WHY YOU SHOULD CARE

We also know, however, that coaching in some organizations has demonstrated a "life cycle" effect (Hunt and Weintraub, 2006). Coaching has caught on, spread throughout the organization and then been scaled back or even brought to an abrupt halt. The usual rationale for ending coaching in an organization has to do with the sense, on the part of key organizational decision makers, that the coaching is not connected to the needs of the business. Yes, it was helpful to individuals, but did it help the business? How is one to know its value from that perspective?

This examination of worthiness takes place within the larger context of the changing face of human resources management and strategy. Human capital, the idea that people represent more than tangible assets and are in fact organizational investors in a knowledge economy, rather than organizational costs (Davenport, 1999), has begun to change the way we think about such questions such as "did coaching help the business?" The question confronting human resources management is whether or not it can move from being a function that provides a “nice to have” set of programs to a “decision science” that helps organizational leaders gain the most from their and others’ people-related investments (Boudreau & Ramstad, 2005). Decisions, good ones, require some ability to assess and measure relevant variables (among other things, of course). One could argue that the assessment of intervention impacts, from a business perspective, is thus one of the main requirements of a decision science of human resource management.

In general, expert coaching appears to be a useful tool to promote learning and development, and yes, at times, helping get a leader back on a successful track (so-called “fix-it” coaching). Although executive coaching has, for the most part, been very poorly researched to date, some brave practitioners and researchers have documented such outcomes. See Wasylyshyn, Gronsky & Haas (2006), Orenstein (2006), Fillery-Traves & Lane (2006), Smither, London, Flautt, Vargas & Kucine (2003) and Hall, Otazo & Hollenbeck (1999) for some examples. These authors describe or review a variety of studies indicating that effectively conducted executive leadership coaching engagements result in both client satisfaction and personal learning including changes in leadership behavior. However, such studies have focused on the individual level of analysis. Yes, coaching helps individuals, but does it help the business?

The fact that we are able to document that coaching can promote individual learning does not help people make decisions about whether or not, or how, to institute coaching in their organizations. Is what is learned in coaching truly relevant to the organization’s mission? Does it help the organization enough to warrant the costs associated with the investment? The latter question helps us understand the occasionally heard notion that everyone should have their own coach. Perhaps that could be argued. However, realistically, not everyone is going to get one. Leaders typically think about costs, types of costs and desired impacts when making decisions. They usually must make some assessment with regard to which interventions will likely create the most value for the organization and for key stakeholders involved with the organization, such as investors and customers.

Measures of return on investment then become relevant to making decisions about the deployment of leadership coaching. However, note that from this discussion “return” can be defined in multiple ways, as can types of investment. Measures of return can be purely economic – as in: *We spent X-dollars and have received X+Y dollar value as a result of coaching*. If we can document the numeric outcome that flows from a coaching engagement, we can answer that question. However, such an outcome measure isn’t always required. Let’s assume that an organization has a very robust leadership competency model in place such that they know that certain behaviors or actions will lead to desired business outcomes. If it can be documented that coaching has resulted in the development of such competencies, a similar equation can be made regarding investment and business results. Such non-financial results from executive coaching, for example those involving leader behavior changes, are easier to measure (Fillery-Traves & Lane, 2006). Beyond this perspective, however, we have found in some organizations, particularly those that are “mission driven” or are privately held, measures of return based solely on economics may seem irrelevant. In such instances, it may be much more relevant to think about coaching “strategically” rather than tactically, relating organizational-wide coaching to business mission and strategy (see Kumata, 2002). The health-care organization, for instance, may place quality of patient care above all, based on their stated mission. Discussions of returns put in terms of money may seem irrelevant and even inappropriate.

Value is in the eyes of the beholder. Decision makers look for value creation, either implicitly or explicitly, when deciding what to do about leadership coaching. In most cases, they don't just look at costs though, of course, there are always exceptions. We would suggest, however, that they are most likely to focus strictly on costs when they do not have a clear understanding and first-hand experience of the value that coaching, if properly executed and deployed, can create in terms of whatever outcomes are of importance in their organizations.

In the absence of a broader discussion of returns and value creation that are measurable, *traditional* calculations of ROI typically get considerable and growing attention. Interestingly, such attempts (e.g., Anderson, 2003, p. 181) typically suggest rates of return that may seem rather incredible, e.g., on the order of several hundred percent! How does this happen? It comes about because in large measure the coaching program involved some carefully chosen individuals who, with the aid of coaching, were given the opportunity to have a significant impact that was of specific value to their organizations. These may also be individuals who, by the nature of their role, influence larger financial metrics to begin with and, in comparison to other coachees, disproportionately bias ROI results. ROI in reality is at least to some degree, an *organization-specific* metric. This suggests again the importance of relating ROI metrics to what is valued within a particular organization. This perspective, of course, is aligned with the trend toward viewing executive coaching as serving a strategic rather than a remedial role.

An organizational view of executive coaching that takes a broader perspective towards an examination of value creation will likely consider the following organizational issues and needs:

- The competencies (i.e., behaviors and abilities) required of leaders and other potential coachees if the organization is to execute its business strategy, and in particular the competencies required for significant impact on business results, short and/or long term.
- Those individual leaders who need those competencies the most.
- How expert coaching can help to build those critical competencies in this particular group of people who are likely to be able to have a real impact on business results.

In sum, it is necessary, in our view, to provide measurement methodologies that address both the financial and non-financial results of executive coaching that will be of importance to particular organizations. It was this perspective that drove the design of our research initiative and the development of the survey tool to be discussed below.

HISTORY, OBJECTIVES AND ASSUMPTIONS OF THE COACHING IMPACT STUDY

Description of the Study

Beginning in December 2004, Cambria Consulting launched an ongoing study of the impact of executive leadership coaching in large organizations. The four authors served as principal investigators in this effort, comprising a multidisciplinary partnership from the areas of coaching, consulting and academia. The study was designed to utilize a T1 – T2 methodology ("before" and "after") to assess the potential impact and realized impact of coaching from the perspective of multiple stakeholders. We have endeavored to understand the importance of potential and realized gains from coaching from the organization's perspective rather than our own.

The study instrument is an online survey that can be supplemented by follow-up interviews. Coachees, coaches, managers/sponsors and, when appropriate, other stakeholders are surveyed in each participating organization. Initial findings from the study have been presented to the annual convention of the Society for Industrial and Organizational Psychology (Kumata, Schlosser, Hunt, Gentry & Steinbrenner, 2005) as well as to the Conference Board's Executive Coaching Conference (Hunt, Stern, Mickelsen & Steinbrenner, 2006). As exemplified by this article, we are now moving toward written dialog with the coaching community.

The study is designed such that, in addition to providing participating organizations with valuable insights into the impact of their coaching activity, the aggregated findings will make available to the extended coaching community—both providers and consumers—more refined information about the broader impact of leadership coaching than is currently available in the existing literature.

Research Objectives Within and Across Organizations

It was our goal to create a research methodology that would be both useful and illustrative. Our desire to be "useful" drew our attention to significant questions that repeatedly confronted us when engaged in consulting or research projects related to coaching activities. Organizations have a long list of issues that they face and a woeful lack of data or theory to guide them. ROI studies are inherently a form of action research as they require a partnership with a research "subject," in this case a firm, which is motivated by their own interests to participate. As discussed in the previous section, value is in the eyes of the beholder and is contingent in part on the situation of the beholder. Thus we needed a methodology that creates a good deal of "firm-specific" knowledge. Second, however, we hoped to approach this challenge from a perspective that would travel well across organizations and thus build insights valuable to the field. Our research objectives, then, were as follows. We hoped to:

1. Systematically gain insights regarding which <u>capabilities/behaviors</u> are focused on in coaching within and across organizations.
2. Identify individual leader development as well as <u>business outcomes</u> thought to have been improved as a result of coaching.
3. Explore perceptions of the qualitative and quantitative <u>value</u>, <u>impact</u> and <u>satisfaction</u> of executive coaching engagements.
4. Use a time-efficient, <u>concise data collection</u> system that would be "user friendly."
5. Avoid what we see as a trap, for now, regarding questions that are beyond the state of current research to address, such as which coaching methods work best.

Research Assumptions

Exploratory research (such as this study represents) requires careful examination of the underlying assumptions of the researchers and the methodologies that emerge from this effort. In our case, we held the following four working assumptions based on field experience and our review of the literature as presented above:

1. There are costs associated with coaching (and for not coaching, for that matter).

2. Coaching usually results in the creation of value.
3. Assessing the impact of coaching can be difficult but is not impossible.
4. These valuations can be compared to the costs to estimate ROI of various types.

Assumption 1:
There are costs associated with coaching (and with not coaching, for that matter).

The costs of coaching may include dollar outlays to coaches, travel expenses, time spent by all of the stakeholders (e.g., coachee, coach, manager/sponsor, HR professional), administrative support, materials, training, coachee's activities as suggested from the coach (e.g., homework, readings, workshops, off-sites), gatherings of the coaches, etc.

Assumption 2:
Coaching usually results in the creation of value.

What happens as a result of coaching? And how might we understand the value ("impacts") of what happens from executive leader coaching? Given that organizations and organizational stakeholders to coaching have a variety of perspectives regarding the nature of value created from coaching, multiple assessments of value are likely to be more appropriate than a single measure. However, the phrase "value is in the eyes of the beholder" does not get us very far. A more formal delineation of our assumptions regarding the kinds of value that are created through coaching is as follows:

1. **Operating Financial Results:** The financial results may be expressed, in overview, as savings and revenue. Note that from a particular intervention there can be a distinction between perceived financial results based on opinion and actual financial results (e.g., guesstimates about cost savings vs. actual cost savings).
2. **Business Results:** Business results would include outcomes related to shareholder value, organizational growth, market share, profitability (obviously related to #1, above), product or service development, customer satisfaction and industry leadership.
3. **Strategic Results:** The strategic value to the organization and its subunits refers to factors such as supporting high potency leadership, culture optimization, transition management and other initiatives that help the organization compete effectively.
4. **Human Capital Development and Organizational Effectiveness Improvements:** Acquiring, developing and retaining talent; leadership development; organizational effectiveness and succession planning, for example. Note here that one of the challenges associated with assessing impact on human capital is the long-term nature of human capital management. Some results take years to show and as such, we are again dealing with what we can see in the relative here-and-now versus what we perceive is likely to be the longer-term impact of an intervention.

Assumption 3:
Assessing the impact of coaching can be difficult but is not impossible.

Various estimates of results from the categories listed under Assumption 2 are, more or less, readily accessible. We believe it is important not to let the desire for perfection drive out the possibilities of gaining knowledge through the use of estimates, particularly multiple estimates from multiple stakeholders, and thus the use of estimates may be viewed as essential as well as practical.

Assumption 4:
These valuations can be compared to the costs of an executive coaching program to estimate ROI of various types.

Note here that once a comprehensive assessment of value is offered, it becomes easier to estimate both the financial or business return on investment as well as the ROI in relation to outcomes such as human capital development.

THE INSTRUMENT

The stakeholders we hoped to enlist in this effort are very busy people. We often find, as have others, that they are not necessarily interested in spending a great deal of time on overly complex efforts to measure coaching impact, particularly when they feel that the coaching has been relatively effective from a satisfaction standpoint. As such, we attempted to develop a survey tool that would:

1. Be as brief as practicable.
2. Make it possible for multiple raters to assess the same items.
3. Take the respondents through a relatively granular assessment of coaching impact and value, moving toward an overall assessment.
4. Provide a comprehensive depiction of human capital/organizational effectiveness as well as business and financial targets. (See Tables 1 and 2)
5. Allow for the selection of multiple outcome targets (up to three items) along with ratings of the item's importance and an estimate of dollar value of coaching success in that item's area (i.e., perceived valuation). (See Table 3)
6. Provide the ability to visually track which items were selected from pre- to post-surveying.
7. Provide an opportunity to assess other relevant aspects of a particular coaching program and activity.

Tables 1 and 2 describe the specific items that relate to the building of human capital and/or organizational effectiveness. Table 1 focuses largely on the personal gains in capability or behavior that can be expected through participation in executive coaching in terms of competencies and competency-related outcomes. Table 2 focuses more on organizational effectiveness and business outcomes external to the coaching client but nevertheless related to the work of the coaching engagement.

Table 1. Capabilities and Behaviors Targeted in Coaching		
■ Big-picture/Detail Balance	■ Diversity Considerations/Sensitivity	■ Meeting Facilitation
■ Building Enthusiasm	■ Executive Presence	■ Negotiation Skills
■ Building Relationships	■ External Visibility/Image	■ Partnering across Boundaries/Silos
■ Building Team Morale	■ Field Presence/Field Experience	■ Personal Energy/Optimism
■ Business Acumen/Knowledge	■ Following Others	■ Productivity/Time Management
■ Business Results/Execution	■ Fostering Innovation	■ Project Management
■ Career Advancement	■ Global/International Perspective	■ Quality of Work Product
■ Client Focus/Service	■ Goal Setting	■ Self-Awareness/Self-Reflection
■ Collaboration/Teamwork	■ Influence	■ Self-Confidence
■ Communication Skills	■ Internal Visibility/Image	■ Sense of Urgency/Responsiveness
■ Conflict Management/Resolution	■ Interpersonal Skills	■ Setting Direction and Vision
■ Decision Making and Judgment	■ Job Satisfaction and Enjoyment	■ Strategic Thinking
■ Delegation/Empowering Others	■ Leading/Driving Change	■ Stress Management
■ Developing Self	■ Listening Skills	■ Technical Skills Mastery
■ Developing/Coaching Employees	■ Managing Performance Issues	■ Work/Life Balance

Table 2. Human Capital and Business Outcomes/Metrics Items		
■ Alignment with Business Priorities	■ Employee/Team Retention	■ Product/Service Launch
■ Avoidance of Termination/Separation	■ External Client Sat./Relationships	■ Productivity
■ Base of Committed Followers	■ Increased Sales/Revenue	■ Profitability
■ Client Retention/Growth	■ Intention to Remain with Organization	■ Promotability/Career Progression
■ Efficiency/Cost Reduction	■ Internal Client Sat./Relationships	■ Quality Management
■ Employee Alignment	■ Merger Integration	■ Reduce Loss/Business Decline
■ Employee Engagement	■ Process Improvement	■ Risk/Liability Reduction
■ Employee Satisfaction	■ Product/Service Development	■ Turnaround/Business Recovery

We utilized two ways to assess stakeholders' perceptions of the value of these outcomes. This included a set of ten questions regarding the perceived overall value of the coaching. This approach was utilized given the difficulty we anticipated in gaining reports regarding specific dollar estimates of the impact of general, overview coaching outcomes.

However, we also asked stakeholders to estimate the dollar value ascribed to various specific outcomes of the coaching using the dollar ranges as presented in Table 3.

The instrument also allowed stakeholders to define desired changes in behaviors or competencies, the human capital or business outcome associated with such changes, and an estimate of the dollar value associated with competency and outcome changes.

Table 3. Dollar Range Rating Scale	
Scale	**Dollar Value**
1	$0
2	$1 to $5,000
3	$5,001 to $10,000
4	$10,001 to $25,000
5	$25,001 to $50,000
6	$50,001 to $100,000
7	$100,001 to $250,000
8	$250,001 to $500,000
9	$500,001 to $1,000,000
10	over $1,000,000

THE METHODOLOGY

The Coaching Impact Study is designed to assess stakeholders perceptions at baseline (time 1 which is roughly at the outset of the coaching) and after the conclusion of coaching ("follow-up" – time 2). The survey instruments are quite similar for times 1 and 2, differing mainly in grammatical tense. The follow-up primary survey also asks for permission from the respondent to participate in an assessment interview and has a supplemental survey appended that assesses coach competencies and concomitant professional practices. Thus there is a capability for pre-post measurement (including supplemental surveying) along with qualitative post-coaching interviewing.

Because some participating organizations already have coaching engagements underway, there is an option to simply begin organizational participation by starting with the follow-up surveying (useful in its own right). We point this out because we have found that organizations and those charged with managing coaching programs within organizations require a good degree of support as they move up a learning curve associated with conducting such a detailed program assessment. We stress that an ROI study is itself an organizational intervention and that it is critically important to begin with "meeting the client where he/she is," rather than insisting upon a rigid partnering and design process.

Organizations participating in the study identified individual coachees, as well as their managers, their coaches, and, in some instances, their HR contacts, to respond to the on-line survey(s). Automated system reminder e-mails were used to encourage higher response rates. To help cover the costs associated with on-line data collection, quantitative analysis, summary reporting, and presentation of findings to scientific/industry communities, each participating company was asked to make a very modest financial contribution.

Participating organizations were invited based on previous relationships with one or more of the authors, as well as an active word-of-mouth campaign. Two of the authors also served as coaches at two or more of the organizations.

Organizational participation in the Coaching Impact Study at times required a certain degree of "selling." Particular benefits emphasized to participant organizations include:

1. Having information to share with coaches and consumers of coaching about what is valued from coaching at the participating organization.
2. Receiving a summary report based on an analysis of the responses from their coaching program – to learn what areas receive attention in coaching and patterns of progress.
3. Ultimately receiving a benchmark report aggregating results across participating organizations.

We found that those organizations participating in the study did so for a variety of reasons. Some coaching practice managers were under explicit requirements to provide ROI justification for program activities. All were interested in understanding the question of value-creation in greater depth, even if they were not under pressure to conduct a formal ROI study. All were also interested in trying to develop a clearer picture of how their programs were doing in relation to other "best practice" companies. A spirit of continuous improvement seems essential to such a partnership.

Data Protection

Confidentiality considerations are an important element of conducting the Coaching Impact Study. The sponsoring firm, Cambria Consulting, is committed to maintaining the confidentiality of the information gathered and stored in the process of carrying out the Coaching Impact Study. The investigators are committed to treating all study-related information as sensitive, and to that end, steps have been taken to protect names and other identifying information of individual respondents. The sensitive nature of this information is such that any analyses and interpretations shared with an external audience will be in aggregate form. Furthermore, names and other information provided to Cambria in the course of the study will not be used for any purpose other than study-related activity.

Assessments are completed over the Internet on a private survey portal owned and maintained by Cambria Consulting, Inc. SSL encryption is used to protect communications with the server, and participants are given access to the system by an individual username and password. User information and data are kept confidential at all times and will be used solely for the purposes of this survey.

THE RESULTS

The findings reported herein are meant to give an initial overview of what we are learning to date (as of August, 2006) and our assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of the methodology under study. We report here on some of our initial findings regarding the triad of coachee/manager/coach using a subset of items from the *follow-up primary survey data only*. In that this is an ongoing study, our aim is to periodically update the coaching community through articles and other media.

One or more stakeholders from 132 unique coaching engagement "triads" (coach, manager, and coachee) at Wachovia, Credit Suisse and Deloitte (the U.S. firm) were invited to participate in the study. The results that follow are from 95 of those engagements, meaning that at least one stakeholder from each of 95 engagement triads responded to the survey. Each of the participating organizations has a substantial coaching program in place and is overseen by a coaching practice manager. All of the coaches in the data presented are external. Response rate is calculated based on the number of individuals in a particular stakeholder role invited to respond to the survey.

Table 4. Study Participants

	Coach	Manager	Coachee
Invited	124	114	130
Responded	70	14	56
Response Rate	56%	12%	43%

As can be seen in Table 4, the most responsive stakeholder group consisted of coaches and the least responsive were managers. Presumably, coachees would not have had more than a single engagement, whereas a given coach or manager could be represented for more than a single engagement. In general, for most engagements, there would be a triad of coachee/manager/coach. Summing across respondents, the total *n* (sample size) for this report is 140. For all of the general analyses that follow, please note that not all items have all members of a particular stakeholder group responding (i.e., the *n*'s may vary, where *n* is the number of respondents to a particular item).

Capabilities/Behaviors

To understand *what* kinds of things were worked on for development, respondents could select from a set of 46 capabilities and behaviors that could conceivably receive attention during a given engagement. The ten most frequently selected "Capabilities/Behaviors" per stakeholder group are listed in Table 5.

Table 5. Ten Most Commonly Targeted Capabilities/Behaviors by Stakeholder Group

Coach	Manager	Coachee
Building Relationships **(74%)**	Developing Self **(57%)**	Communication Skills **(61%)**
Self-Awareness/Self-Reflection **(63%)**	Building Relationships **(50%)**	Self-Awareness/Self-Reflection **(54%)**
Communication Skills **(53%)**	Big-picture/Detail Balance **(43%)**	Developing Self **(52%)**
Career Advancement **(46%)**	Goal Setting **(36%)**	Conflict Management/Resolution **(52%)**
Executive Presence **(44%)**	Listening Skills **(36%)**	Building Relationships **(45%)**
Developing Self **(43%)**	Self-Awareness/Self-Reflection **(36%)**	Career Advancement **(45%)**
Partnering across Boundaries/Silos **(41%)**	Career Advancement **(36%)**	Executive Presence **(41%)**
Internal Visibility/Image **(41%)**	Leading/Driving Change **(36%)**	Internal Visibility/Image **(38%)**
Building Team Morale **(39%)**	Managing Performance Issues **(36%)**	Interpersonal Skills **(36%)**
Influence **(37%)**	Building Enthusiasm **(36%)**	Listening Skills **(36%)**
		Setting Direction and Vision **(36%)**

Across the three stakeholder groups, four items were present in the top ten items selected by each group: "Developing Self," "Self-Awareness/Self-Reflection," "Career Advancement," and "Building Relationships."

Coaches selected the most capabilities/behaviors, an average of 10.1 items (*SD*=6.5; *n*=70) out of a total of 46 possible, excluding a "None" option. Coachees selected an average of 9.8 items (*SD*=6.1; *n*=56), and managers an average of 8.6 items (*SD*=8.6; *n*=14). [*Note: SD = Standard Deviation, a measure of central tendency*]

The "Other" item from the list was selected by 10% of coaches, 7% of managers and 5% of coachees, indicating that the list of items provided effectively captured a substantial majority of all behavioral change concepts addressed in coaching engagements. Respondents were given the opportunity to describe their response for "Other," three of which were described by more than one respondent: 'building a high performing team' (by three respondents), and "leadership" and "networking" (each by two respondents).

The incidence of respondents endorsing the "None (no change in any area)" item was very low—one respondent from both the coach and coachee groups and two from the manager group. Obviously, at the individual engagement level, a response of "None" is notable. Once our dataset has grown sufficiently, we can begin to explore the characteristics of such engagements.

Outcomes/Metrics

To convey the impact of coaching, respondents could select from a set of 25 outcomes and metrics that were believed to have improved as a result of the coaching engagement. The five most frequently selected "outcomes/metrics" per stakeholder group are listed in Table 6.

Table 6. Top Five Selected Outcomes/Metrics per Stakeholder Group

Coach	Manager	Coachee
Internal Customer Sat/Relationships **(51%)**	Employee Engagement **(43%)**	Promotion/Promotability **(50%)**
Employee Engagement **(49%)**	Base of Committed Followers **(36%)**	Employee Engagement **(41%)**
Promotion/Promotability **(44%)**	Promotion/Promotability **(29%)**	Productivity **(34%)**
Alignment with Business Priorities **(41%)**	Alignment with Business Priorities **(29%)**	Base of Committed Followers **(32%)**
Employee Alignment **(40%)**	Employee Satisfaction **(21%)**	Employee Alignment **(32%)**
Productivity **(40%)**		

Across the stakeholder groups, two items were present in the top five items selected by each group: "Employee Engagement" and "Promotion/Promotability." Because the survey's design allows for the respondent to describe (in a text entry field) what progress looked like, we are able to gain additional insight as to the meaning of a given outcome, such as those listed in Table 6. For example, thematically, the meanings ascribed to "Employee Engagement" included improvement by the coachee in some instances and, in other instances, improvement was ascribed to other employees (such as team members or other staff). At times, "Employee Engagement" gains also referenced increased teamwork overall.

Coaches again selected the most outcomes/metrics, an average of 5.3 items (*SD*=3.9; *n*=70) out of a total of 25 possible, excluding the "None" option. Coachees selected an average of 4.5 items (*SD*=3.1; *n*=56), and managers an average of 3.2 items (*SD*=3.2; *n*=14).

The "Other" item from the list was selected by 10% of coaches, 7% of managers, and 4% of coachees, indicating that, again, the list of items provided effectively captured most of the relevant outcome concepts impacted by coaching engagements. As with the list of capabilities and behaviors, respondents were given the opportunity to describe their response for "Other," only one of which was described by more than one respondent: "increased profile/visibility" (by two respondents).

The incidence of respondents endorsing the "None (no change in any area)" item was again very low—one respondent from the coach group, three from the coachee group and two from the manager group. This finding indicates that, for most coaching participants, the change they implemented as a result of coaching produced an observable positive impact on their workplace accomplishments.

Assessments of Value: General Perceptions

A series of ten questions follows the outcome items described above, each accompanied by a common 10-point rating scale that ranges from 1 (very little) to 10 (very much). These ten questions address *overall* impact as well as factors that could potentially affect the degree of impact experienced through coaching. Average ratings were calculated for each respondent group, as shown in Table 7.

These survey results reveal that coaches and their coachees tend to view most impact and impact factor questions in a similar, quite encouraging, light. While also past the mid-point side of the 10-point scale, managers have a somewhat less positive view of most factors (with the notable exception of item 6, an assessment of their own commitment to their direct report's coaching process). Given that this study overall is still in its relatively early stages we cannot state with strong conviction the reason for this difference. One might hypothesize, however, that the reasons for this difference in ratings may be an indication that, in many coaching situations, managers (as an averaged group) are not sufficiently or effectively incorporated into the coaching process to the point that they are fully prepared to detect behavior or style change in their direct reports, or to connect changes they do see to the coaching process. Alternatively, it could be that managers, having less of a personal investment in finding positive results from the coaching process, simply have a more skeptical (pragmatic?) viewpoint. This noteworthy pattern of discrepancy in responses between managers and both coaches and coachees is seen consistently throughout the survey results, and is perhaps cause for coaching community debate.

Table 7. Means Table for Rating Scale Questions	Coach	Manager	Coachee
1. To what extent has coaching positively impacted COACHEE's† overall effectiveness in his/her role?	**7.9** *SD*=1.9; *n*=62	**5.8** *SD*=3.5; *n*=12	**7.7** *SD*=1.6; *n*=55
2. To what extent was the coaching worth COACHEE's† investment of time?	**8.7** *SD*=1.6; *n*=66	**7.2** *SD*=3.2; *n*=12	**8.9** *SD*=1.3; *n*=55
3. To what extent was the coaching worth COMPANY's† dollar investment?	**8.6** *SD*=1.8; *n*=64	**6.5** *SD*=3.8; *n*=12	**8.6** *SD*=1.6; *n*=54
4. How important was coaching success, in this instance, to the part(s) of COMPANY† for which COACHEE† works?	**8.5** *SD*=1.7; *n*=58	**6.8** *SD*=3.4; *n*=12	**8.0** *SD*=1.6; *n*=53
5. To what extent was COACHEE† personally committed to the coaching process?	**8.7** *SD*=2.0; *n*=69	**7.7** *SD*=2.8; *n*=12	**9.0** *SD*=1.2; *n*=55
6. To what extent MANAGER† personally committed to the coaching process with regard to COACHEE†?	**7.8** *SD*=2.3; *n*=68	**8.2** *SD*=2.8; *n*=13	**8.3** *SD*=1.9; *n*=51
7. To what extent did COMPANY† set clear expectations about coaching deliverables?	**8.1** *SD*=1.8; *n*=68	**6.5** *SD*=2.3; *n*=11	**6.4** *SD*=2.4; *n*=52
8. To what degree was coaching useful in facilitating understanding of COMPANY† strategic goals?	**7.2** *SD*=1.6; *n*=60	**6.6** *SD*=3.3; *n*=10	**6.1** *SD*=2.3; *n*=52
9. At present, how satisfied are you with the value of coaching for COACHEE†?	**8.5** *SD*=1.8; *n*=69	**6.4** *SD*=4.1; *n*=13	**8.8** *SD*=1.4; *n*=55
10. At present, how satisfied are you with the value of coaching initiatives across COMPANY†?	**8.8** *SD*=1.1; *n*=62	**5.3** *SD*=2.5; *n*=12	**7.8** *SD*=1.7; *n*=44

† In the online survey, the terms COACHEE, COMPANY, and MANAGER shown above are replaced by the specific names of the relevant parties.

Overall Future Value

One of the last items on the survey addresses the overall value of the coaching engagement, giving respondents an opportunity to provide a single assessment that accumulates factors and details already explored in the survey, as well as any additional factors deemed important by the respondent. The results from this *forward-looking* item are shown in Figure 1.

As Figure 1 shows, over 85% of 56 coaches and over 90% of 51 coachees estimated 18-month prospective value of their coaching engagement (from the date of survey completion) to be over $50,000—a figure that would in nearly all cases recoup the expense of a one-year executive leadership coaching engagement.

In contrast, the 12 managers who responded to this item differed dramatically among themselves, with over 30% observing no value from the coaching process, 42% estimating less than $50,000 in value from coaching, and 25% estimating a substantially higher value of over $1,000,000. Again, this is preliminary data from a very small sample size. However, we might again consider whether or not managers of coaching programs might benefit from giving more focus to how managers are enlisted as contributors to the coaching process.

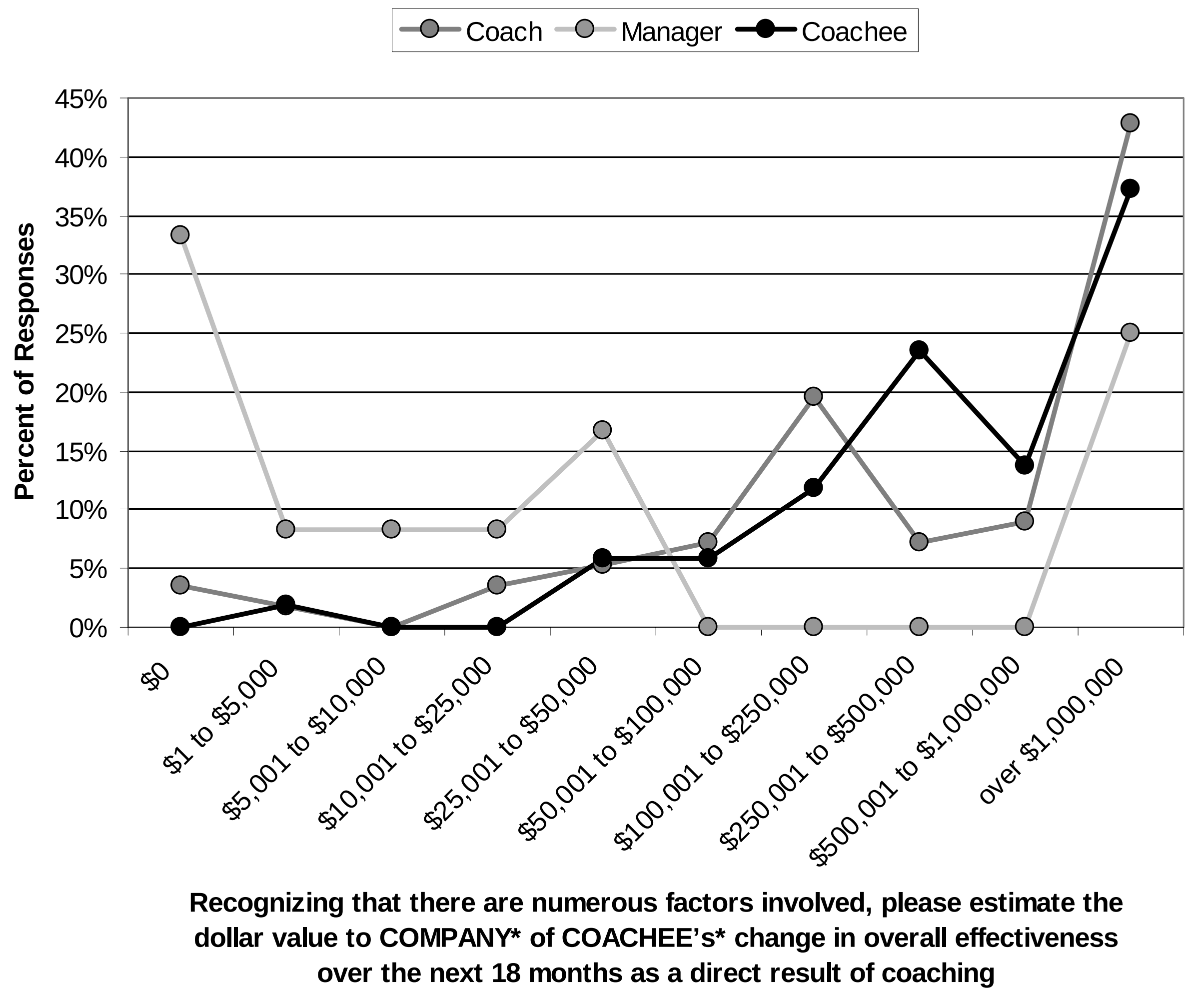

Figure 1. Overall Future Value as Assessed by Different Stakeholder Groups

As a subpart to this item, we added a request for a confidence estimate for the 18-month forward-looking dollar valuation to be provided on a 10-point scale. Average responses indicate that coaches and coachees are highly confident in their valuation estimates, while, averaged manager responses fell just above the middle of the scale. Not surprisingly, the two stakeholders most involved and knowledgeable about the coaching process and results were more confident in their estimations. A message for program managers may, again, be to more prescriptively include them ("managers") in the coaching process, particularly during the contracting and action planning stage where the business impact of the proposed coaching plan can be clarified and agreed to by all parties.

Correlating Value with Potential Moderating Factors

Up to now, we have examined aggregate group-level responses to survey items independently of one another. However, a deeper examination of the full survey data may reveal interrelations among responses across multiple items. While a comprehensive analysis of all such potential mediating relationships is beyond the scope of this paper, we include here one such analysis: an examination of the correlations between the Overall Future Value item mentioned previously, and the ten rating-scale items (estimates of impact and impact factors) also described previously. Table 8 contains the results of this two-tailed Pearson correlation analysis using the combined data from coachees, managers and coaches.

Table 8. Correlations between Estimates of Overall Future Value of the Coaching Engagement and Ten Rating-Scale Items

	Overall Future Value‡
1. To what extent has coaching positively impacted COACHEE's† overall effectiveness in his/her role?	0.49**
2. To what extent was the coaching worth COACHEE's† investment of time?	0.47**
3. To what extent was the coaching worth COMPANY's† dollar investment?	0.50**
4. How important was coaching success, in this instance, to the part(s) of COMPANY† for which COACHEE† works?	0.49**
5. To what extent was COACHEE† personally committed to the coaching process?	0.35**
6. To what extent MANAGER† personally committed to the coaching process with regard to COACHEE†?	0.28**
7. To what extent did COMPANY† set clear expectations about coaching deliverables?	0.21*
8. To what degree was coaching useful in facilitating understanding of COMPANY† strategic goals?	0.25**
9. At present, how satisfied are you with the value of coaching for COACHEE†?	0.49**
10. At present, how satisfied are you with the value of coaching initiatives across COMPANY†?	0.38**

**p < .01

*p < .05

† In the online survey, the terms COACHEE, COMPANY, and MANAGER shown above are replaced by the specific names of the relevant parties.

‡ Full survey item regarding *Overall Future Value* = "Recognizing that there are numerous factors involved, please estimate the dollar value to COMPANY of COACHEE's change in overall effectiveness **over the next 18 months** as a direct result of coaching."

As this table shows, all ten questions are positively correlated with overall value. The most strongly correlated items, not surprisingly, are those whose purpose is also to provide an estimate of the overall value of the engagement in various ways. However, the strength of the correlation of even the least significant factor, "To what extent did COMPANY† set clear expectations about coaching deliverables?" indicates that the context, expectations, and environment set by the company, the program manager, and the coaching "triad" (coach, coachee, and manager) are all important factors that affect perceptions of the value of coaching across the board.

DISCUSSION

The aim of this article is to report on our efforts to create a tool and a methodology for the study of coaching impacts which begin to satisfy the multiple challenges associated with the task. Such a tool and methodology must be capable of capturing the relationships between coaching outcomes (typically behavior and style changes), business outcomes and financial outcomes. Such a tool and methodology must also be readily useful and not represent a burden on those involved. Such a tool and methodology need to take into account that different stakeholder groups and different organizations will have different perspectives on the kind of value that is created through executive coaching. This coaching impact study is intended to be ongoing and to include an ever-growing number of participant organizations from a variety of business and other sectors. As our knowledge accrues, the findings can be put to use for improving coaching services delivery.

Multiple Perspective, Multiple Organization Studies Appear to Have Promise

Attention to the multi-faceted ways in which value is assessed in coaching and trying to establish the relationships among them, inclusive of financial and non-financial outcomes, appears promising. Relating financial outcomes, which admittedly and purposefully represent estimates, and behavior observation appears workable and, just as importantly, appears sensible to organizational stakeholders.

The Manager's Voice Needs to Be Heard

The results of these initial studies obviously draw our attention to both the low rate of response of managers and the fact that those who did respond had different estimates of the value of coaching. We would note, however, that 42% of them reported a value estimate of $25,001 or higher that in most cases would have paid for the coaching and then some (which touches on the issue that frames ROI as part of the justification for coaching). Nevertheless, the unique perspective of the manager needs to be heard. This has implications for the challenges facing the coaching practice managers in their efforts to understand coaching value creation. The manager has to be brought into the process of measurement. This will likely require greater partnering around outcome measurement as a part of the coaching process itself. The findings also suggest that more frequent and in-depth involvement of the manager would help them understand what is happening within a given engagement and to be, thus, more attuned to coaching's impact. Such involvement is an opportunity for the coaching triad and the organization.

Extending the Scope

The findings presented here represent but a few examples of what can be gained from an effort to research within and across organizations around the topic of the value of coaching. As the study proceeds, we will be able to broaden and deepen our analyses and move toward statistical significance testing to supplement the survey descriptive metrics touched upon herein. Like many readers, we can also imagine the variety of additional ways to look and examine the data. We invite your discussion and dialog!

As time, funding and personnel may allow, we can also envision related studies that would endeavor to correlate other organizationally available data with coaching outcome survey data. Table 9 presents some examples of such data that might be available through HRIS systems or from coaching practice managers. Knowledge about these variables can complement outcomes drawn from the "perceived" outcomes referenced in the Initial and Follow-up Coaching Impact surveys. Obviously, study of such variables assumes support, access, permissions and resources. Also, in general, it would be useful to compare relatively matched cohorts of coached versus non-coached executives. This would help discern the value and impact.

Table 9. Examples of Coaching Impact Variables External to the Surveys
■ Actual dollar cost of a given coaching engagement
■ Length of particular coaching engagement
■ Reason(s) for coaching
■ Previous experience of coachee, manager and/or other stakeholders with coaching and/or other forms of development
■ Experience level of the coach
■ Method of matching coach to coachee
■ Real-world financial performance metrics, such as revenue, savings and profit changes (under the purview of a given executive, or pro rata)
■ Extent to which new products/services developed (as a business impact from coaching)
■ Time to market for products/services
■ Retention and turnover (as compared to matched, non-coached execs)
■ Promotion (as compared to matched, non-coached executive leaders)
■ Compensation level and changes
■ Scope of the coachee's job responsibilities

Ways to Use the Study within the Organization

Broadly speaking and taken together, impacts, value and ROI estimation represent a method of organizational self-study that should be helpful to program managers on an on-going basis. The data that emerges from this self-study could be made of use to organizational decision-makers, coaches and coaching clients as well as their managers. Ratings of the frequency with which particular capabilities are targeted for coaching intervention can help decision-makers assess the alignment between overall coaching activities and business needs, for instance.

The notion of self-study also has potential as a coaching tool itself. The data gathered from initial surveys could be utilized to help the coach and coachee guide their activities going forward in the coaching. Choices of targets, impacts and the business implications of impacts can serve to focus those involved, without necessarily undermining the customization that represents a true strength of coaching.

CONCLUSION

In launching this study, our hope was to stimulate a dialogue regarding the value of coaching that would engage those organizations who utilize coaching or are contemplating coaching, as well as involving other stakeholders to the coaching enterprise. Assuring that coaching is serving the individual and the organization in ways that demonstrate clear value is key to the success of the field. If we have no way to demonstrate and articulate this value, coaching in organizations is at risk. We understand the difficulties inherent in measuring coaching impact and have had multiple dialogues with coaches and organizations regarding both their reservations and support of this effort. We believe that despite the difficulties and complexities of a study of this kind, surrender is not an option! The challenge we face is that of continuing to refine a methodology for assessing value that meets the needs of all stakeholders involved.

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Commentary on The Coaching Impact Study: Measuring the Value of Executive Coaching

Derek Steinbrenner, MA, MBA, Ellen Kumata, Msc, JD, and Barry Schlosser, PhD

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In the few short months since we completed our article, we have begun to hear of its positive, enthusiastic reception by the coaching community. We were recently asked to lead a discussion of the article in a popular practitioner teleconference series, and we look forward to a continuing dialogue with the community in such interactive forums. It is the dialogue our research encourages that most interests us, and that we believe is most valuable to our field. And it is a dialogue that we feel needs to happen often, between practitioner and client, between coach and program manager, and, as we argue from the basis of our research, between participants and their stakeholders.

An area where our ongoing research is leading is in the examination of not only the experiences and perceptions of the coaching dyad, but of the coachee's manager as well. We have begun to call it the coaching triad because of (in our experience) the significant role the manager can play in the ultimate success or failure of an executive coaching engagement.

We have all heard the Zen meditation, "If a tree falls in the forest with no one to hear it, does it make a sound?" The implication for executive coaching is, if you and your coachee achieve significant, lasting change but your client's stakeholders are not primed to observe the change and therefore don't notice it, was it worth the company's money and time? Some would say: "Yes!" And in many ways, they would be right. In a perfectly objective world, the shift in behavior and incremental increases in long-term success of a coachee would speak for themselves, be recognized by colleagues and stakeholders, be valued by the organization, get linked to the coaching effort, and lead to widespread recognition of the positive impact of spending tens of thousands of dollars on a coach.

But we all know we don't practice in a perfect world. Even the most highly-regarded organizational executive coaching programs receive intense financial scrutiny, find themselves subject to budgetary cutbacks, and are at risk in the face of competing demands on financial resources.

These challenges underscore the importance of clearly and convincingly establishing the value of coaching with an audience wider than that of our immediate client, the coachee. In truth, our client is also the coachee's manager, his or her other primary stakeholders (peers, direct reports), the coaching program manager, and the broader organization—we are accountable for creating this 'coaching community' around our coachee so that he or she is primed for success. Because not only is the *change* we foster in our clients important to the success of our coaching, but so is the *recognition* of that change by our clients' stakeholders. We must demonstrate the value of coaching to all of these stakeholder groups—enable them to link the coaching to behavior change as well as to the benefit back to the organization—if we are to see our field continue to grow and thrive, solidifying its place in the pantheon of leadership development options, and avoiding the unenviable fate of a waning management fad.

This brings us back to the "coaching triad", which by our definition includes the coachee's manager. This core group is not the entire stakeholder community, but is the kernel of that community on which we chose to focus our research efforts. As you see in our article, among our research findings in this study was the observation that a large portion of managers responding to our survey (over one-third!) saw no value from the coaching engagement completed by their direct report. We know the risk this poses to a coach—negative or critical feedback, possible loss of future opportunity to coach in the organization; we also know the risk this poses to the coaching program—skepticism of the value of the program, scrutiny and possible restriction or reduction of program budgets. So what can be done to bring these managers around, change their perceptions, and help them to see the positive impact coaching has had on their direct report? We can share two recent examples of how this might be achieved.

We have only just begun to look for ways to address the 'manager gap' we have observed in the coaching engagement. But as we have said, the true value of our findings will result from the dialogue they stimulate among concerned practitioners. As we now embark upon the third year of the Coaching Impact Study, we continue to strive to expand the body of research underpinning our field, and we look forward to an ongoing dialogue with you of ideas and experiences in this important area.

"Not everything that can be counted counts, and not everything that counts can be counted." – Albert Einstein

Before we close, we would like to acknowledge the feedback we have received from many in the coaching community who are concerned that a study design such as the survey research presented here does not account for the full richness and depth of the value obtained through a coaching engagement. We wholeheartedly agree! The value of coaching is not something that can be fully described by any study design, and certainly not by a primarily quantitative survey design such as that represented here. And in recognition of that, we have built into the comprehensive design of our study a "part two"—a qualitative research design that will draw upon the survey data to inform a deliberate, interview-based data collection process. This interview process is designed to gather and probe the stories behind the more successful and the less successful engagements. We hope to launch this second part of the study with select participants this year.

Putting Our Findings to Work

One thing I have been very conscious of since reviewing the results of the study is to set up regular check in meetings with my coachee's manager. In contracting we make sure this is an agreed part of the engagement. In the past I met with the manager in the beginning of the engagement and at the end, but was not as diligent during the engagement to regularly check in with my client's manager. I coached my client to do this, but I realize that I can add value by keeping the manager aware of those things my client is working on and coaching the manager to assist in his/her development. In this way, my client's success is also their manager's success, and this all rolls up to additional reinforcement for the coaching initiatives in the organization.

– Ellen Kumata

The study's inquiry into managerial involvement as an issue has gotten me thinking about contextual factors and the related phenomena that arise. Here are a couple of my top-of-mind considerations:

> *(1) Getting managers routinely involved is a present-day challenge to the communities of coaches and HR professionals. It's part of the evolution of highest-impact coaching to pursue ways to more thoroughly engage managers. But not only do we want managers involved, we want the "coaching triad" to get together more and by various means. For instance, this involvement could be in the form of meetings or shared development plans that the triad drafts and executes upon.*
>
> *(2) One phenomenon we ought to avoid is "shadow managing" whereby the coach ends up functioning as a surrogate manager. This may occur when the coachee is perceived to be in difficulty and so-called "fix-it" coaching is invoked. As a result, the "difficult" coachee may, in part, be handed off to the coach for repair and restoration, while the manager may, in the interim, take a vacation from some aspects of managerial responsibility and experience some degree of relief. When this occurs, the pull is for <u>less</u> involvement by the manager (as far as the manager is concerned). The challenge here is to prevent this from happening.*

I'd love to hear more dialogue about these issues in the world of coaching.

– Barry Schlosser

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Chapter Fourteen

THE COACHING IMPACT STUDY™

A Case Study in Successful Evaluation

Derek Steinbrenner and Barry Schlosser

Introduction

The field of executive coaching has grown considerably in the last several years. By one estimate, the number of practitioners in the marketplace has risen to over 40,000 globally (Frank Bresser Consulting, 2009), and the membership rolls of the International Coach Federation (ICF), a highly recognized professional association of coaches, swelled from just under 8,000 in 2004 to nearly 16,000 in 2009 (International Coach Federation, 2010).

When the authors embarked on the Coaching Impact Study in 2004 as a joint research and practice initiative intended to explore how this burgeoning yet inadequately understood discipline could be measured and evaluated, little research had been done or was being reported beyond the anecdotal. In 2009, as we retire the study and write this chapter, that landscape is changing. There are now a growing number of professional journals publishing coaching research—including many subject to peer review—and an expanding community of academic, behavioral sciences investigators with research programs focused on this area. With SIOP now hosting conferences that highlight coaching (for example, Society for Industrial & Organizational Psychology, 2008) and sponsoring working groups on the subject, a new era of rigor and data-driven knowledge appears to be on the horizon.

The rapid growth and maturation that have occurred in the coaching profession in the intervening years since we began the study offers us an opportunity to reflect on our research from the "early years" and share our experiences and lessons learned with other researchers and practitioners, supporting their efforts to expand our understanding of the field. In this chapter, we describe how a partnership of coaches, organizations, a consulting firm, and an academic conceived a thorough yet straightforward methodology for evaluating the effectiveness, impact, and value of executive coaching engagements as they were taking place in organizations—an approach that was successfully integrated into several organizational coaching initiatives. The chapter tells the story of our study's origins, objectives, design, and implementation within participant organizations. Along the way, we share our process, challenges, and lessons learned (LL) from this effort with the hope that researchers and practitioners alike will discover new ideas and insights in these pages that will inform, challenge, and encourage them to continue the critical work of linking coaching to outcomes, impact, and value for individuals and organizations.

Origins of the Study

The rapid growth in the popularity of executive coaching over the last decade is remarkable, and is largely due to personal experience and anecdotal evidence of its benefits to the individual being coached and, more recently, to the organization. In that time, organizations increasingly began to shift beyond the use of coaching for executives at risk of derailing and increasingly toward its use to support high-performing executives and high-potential leaders, realizing that these latter two groups, if their development as leaders could be accelerated, could return substantial additional value to their organizations.

But with no concerted, centralized plan to manage and align coaching efforts, apply consistent best-practice principles to coaching processes, and systematically capture, evaluate, and communicate results, its impact was diminished, diffuse, and poorly documented. That was how leadership coaching was largely done—as ad hoc, one-on-one relationships whose focus and outcomes rarely emerged from behind the closed door of the confidential coaching session. It was the exception rather than the rule for the HR generalist, boss, or other key stakeholder to be aware that a coaching engagement had even occurred, let alone be clear about what it had produced.

The Organization

To counter that trend, Wachovia Corporation (which has since become part of Wells Fargo & Company) began to take a different approach to executive coaching across the enterprise. Instead of ad hoc coaching activity, it would implement a strategic coaching practice, with a practice leader tasked with ensuring that all coaching had a purpose aligned with the business's needs, was delivered by a professional coach vetted to meet strict qualification standards, was accountable for delivering key coaching milestones and reporting requirements, and was managed to a visible budget.

Wachovia was thus an early adopter of the core tenets of a "modern" strategic coaching practice, which include coordinating and managing coaching activity, prioritizing its objectives, and aligning its efforts in directions that support the organization's business and talent strategies. The raison d'être of a strategic coaching practice is to focus the organization's investment in coaching to achieve optimal business impact, but business impact can also be its vulnerability as visible, significant, and aggregated expenditures on anything, as "soft" as executive coaching may invite hard-nosed scrutiny. Wachovia's coaching practice leader at the time recognized this risk inherent in a strategic coaching practice. Even though the company's senior executives were committed to—and had experienced—the direct impact of executive coaching themselves, and assured her of their support of the new coaching strategy, she recognized the importance of documenting the success and impact of the practice to its long-term sustainability.

The Coaching and Researcher Team

Looking for a way to both evaluate individual coaching engagements and document the value of executives' achievements through coaching, the practice leader turned to Cambria—the consulting and coaching firm of one of this chapter's authors (Steinbrenner)—which had been working with her on the design and implementation of the bank's strategic coaching practice as well as providing and managing some of the bank's external coaches.

The firm had already begun to consider sponsoring a research program, in partnership with coaching researcher James Hunt of Babson University, to explore coaching efficacy and impact in organizations. Cambria's coaching professionals had established the firm's strategic coaching approach (Kumata, 2002) and were becoming interested in the state of research in the coaching field from the organization's perspective—and aware that there was precious little available. Similarly, Dr. Hunt had been conducting research into the value of coaching behaviors at the individual level within organizations (Hunt & Weintraub, 2002) and was beginning to shift his focus to the value of coaching to the organization as a whole.

Coincidentally, on a parallel course, this chapter's other author (Schlosser)—an executive coach and consultant with extensive experience in assessment services and methodology who happened to be coaching at Wachovia—had also been developing a research design and survey material to explore coaching outcomes and return on investment (ROI).

These contributors joined forces as a research team to collaborate on a unified measurement program that would aim to achieve each party's objectives under a single research design. For participation to be practical for Wachovia—and, we hoped, for other organizations—the study's surveys would have to not only reach our team's research and practice goals, but they would need to be concise, efficient, and simple enough to maximize the chance of their being completed by busy, over-surveyed corporate executives.

Other Organizations

As we were designing the Coaching Impact Study, two other organizations—Credit Suisse and Deloitte—agreed to participate.

Coaching in Credit Suisse's North American division was, like Wachovia's, in the process of shifting to a strategic practice model, where coaching across the division would be managed centrally and follow specific guidelines. The bank's coaching practice leader was planning a significant strategic coaching pilot initiative, providing coaching to a cohort of the bank's directors who were candidates for "election" (promotion) to managing director—an annual talent review event that would result in a challenging new role for those who would be elected that year, and disappointment for those who would not. The goals of the Credit Suisse initiative were threefold: (1) prepare directors' development leading up to the "MD Election" process, (2) support the transition of elected MDs into their new roles and accelerate their time-to-productivity, and (3) work with directors not promoted to identify and focus on their development priorities and increase their chances of success the next time around. Related to the third goal was the bank's hope that coaching support would improve its retention of directors not promoted but who were nonetheless a body of talent that was tremendously valuable to the organization and that had historically seen significant turnover following election decisions. And, beyond measuring retention for this single initiative, the practice leader needed a way to delve beneath the coaching experience to better understand the value it produced for Credit Suisse and its executives. This strategic initiative provided an opportunity to introduce such a measurement effort into the coaching process.

Deloitte's strategic coaching practice was several years older and more established than those of Wachovia and Credit Suisse at the time we developed the Coaching Impact Study. According to Syd Snyder, talent director of Deloitte's Partner Services organization, his firm became involved in the Coaching Impact Study for two reasons:

> At Deloitte, we have known for some time that executive coaching can be effective. We knew this by collecting feedback from the leader who worked with a coach and his/her leader. On a case by case, engagement by engagement basis, we knew the costs of executive coaching were completely justified. What we DIDN'T know is how Deloitte as an organization was impacted or not impacted by executive coaching. The Impact Study provided

> us a picture of the organizational shifts as a result of numerous executive coaching engagements with our senior leaders. The good news is the shifts were all in the direction Deloitte as an organization wanted to see.
>
> Secondly, and of equal importance, the Impact Study provided us the opportunity to codify the goals of executive coaching in order for us to learn where we might consider other developmental interventions to supplement, if you will, the one-on-one coaching. By understanding what our leaders as a group believed that they were lacking in leadership capability, we were able to significantly better leverage our development dollars with other development programs. (S. Snyder, personal communication, October 11, 2009)

Ultimately, these first three participating companies, and those that would follow, each had real business needs driving their interest in being involved in the Coaching Impact Study. They did not sign up for the study—with its rigorous surveys of their senior-most leaders (and their managers!) probing for details about a potentially sensitive subject—purely out of an altruistic motivation to contribute research and knowledge to the profession of coaching (though that was part of it). Though needs and interests varied across the group, among them were:

- To develop a foundation of quantitative and qualitative evidence establishing the impact and value of their organization's strategic coaching practice
- To gather data on organizational trends, such as key areas of coaching focus across coaching engagements
- To identify common pitfalls or obstacles to coaching success
- To raise "red flags" that might indicate priorities for the coaching practice, including internal messaging needs (for example, raising awareness of coaching with a key stakeholder group) or coaching process elements (for example, incorporating a check-in with the manager at the end of the coaching process)
- To better align and blend executive coaching with other talent development efforts of the organization
- For a couple of participant organizations, to evaluate the effectiveness and fit of the coaches doing the coaching work

These business needs shaped our study's objectives, and each had an impact on its design and implementation. The study's objectives, design, and implementation are the subjects of the next three segments of this chapter.

Objectives

In large measure, we pursued the Coaching Impact Study to apply quantitative and qualitative research methodology to understanding the focus, process, impact, and value of what is accomplished through executive coaching. At its outset, there was a paucity of studies of actual coaching engagements, and so we took it upon ourselves to research and map out what a contemporary and practical study of executive coaching might consist of at the individual and organizational levels.

Though we agreed that powerful lessons can be drawn from anecdotes and stories, our general sense was that the executive coaching field would benefit from a more empirical, quantitative examination. We were thus determined to design a study that would extend beyond the qualitative to also allow for robust statistical analyses.

We settled on the following key objectives integral to the study's success:

1. **Develop a practical design.** Achieving sufficient response rates was a major concern as we embarked on our study. We were highly aware that the surveys were in some respects an imposition upon the respondents—busy professionals, many of whom have little time or inclination for being surveyed and may already be over-surveyed. Thus, the practicality of our design became a study objective of its own. We labored to strike a balance among comprehensiveness of content, item design, and survey length. We used a straightforward design for the Web-based surveys. We wanted each survey to fit within one scrolling Web page of reasonable length—rather than a series of pages—so that respondents could quickly see the full length of the survey they were being asked to respond to and would therefore be more likely to complete the entire survey.

2. Examine coaching from multiple perspectives. There are three primary stakeholders in most coaching engagements: the executive or "coachee," the coach, and the coachee's manager. We refer to these stakeholders collectively as the "coaching triad." Our participant organizations each expected some level of involvement in the coaching process from the coachee's manager (or, in those more matrixed organizations, a more senior "sponsor" for the coaching effort). Though in some cases the manager's role was primarily to approve funding, most managers were expected to provide input into coaching priorities, confirm action plans, track progress, and provide ongoing feedback. We and our participant organizations were interested in comparing the perspectives of these "managers/sponsors" to those of the other members of the coaching triad.

3. Compare expectations to outcomes. Whereas traditional program evaluation efforts typically focus on measuring reactions, perceptions, and effects following the completion of the program, we were also curious to find out how assessments of impact and value from coaching after the fact compared to expectations going into the engagement. Would overly high expectations at the outset tend to produce disappointment in the end? Would initial skepticism tend to be disabused or confirmed? Or perhaps more important, would levels of initial skepticism persist in influencing perceptions regardless of actual accomplishments? These and similar questions led us to build into our study's design a Time 1—Time 2 methodology.

4. Identify the focus of coaching engagements. The overarching objectives of most developmental coaching are essentially behavioral and attitudinal changes in a particular direction—not increased knowledge of a subject or improvement of a technical skill, which might be better addressed by training or other educational means. Thus, an important aspect of understanding the value that coaching produces for the individual and, by extension, for the organization is to understand the specific kinds of capabilities and behaviors targeted for improvement within a coaching engagement. In formulating our study, we needed to identify a method to help survey respondents zero in on these capabilities and behaviors before appraising their value. This would also allow us to identify trends or themes in areas that receive the most attention in coaching and to compare what was envisioned for improvement at the start of coaching to what actually was addressed.

5. Identify the impact of coaching engagements. To arrive at a reasonable estimate of the value produced by a coaching effort, it is critical to determine what organizational or business-oriented outcomes are achieved. Such insights could provide valuable support for an organization's investment in coaching.

6. Measure perceptions of the value of coaching engagements and factors important to them. Coaching may be perceived to add value to an organization in many ways. Coachees may become more effective by improving their capabilities; a manager/sponsor may have a more connected team member; the organization may find value because desired business metrics have been achieved. These perceptions of value are tied to changes in behavior or capability that lead to business-relevant outcomes that hold merit for the organization. Our objective was not to treat these perceptions as equivalent to econometric notions of ROI, nor were we particularly interested in pursuing the notion of a financial return on the coaching expense as other investigators had (for example, Anderson, 2003). The financial estimates of value we intended to measure would serve more as a proxy for stakeholder *perceptions* of the value that a coaching effort produced for the organization.

7. Produce useful reports for organizations. For our participant organizations, a main goal was to gain access to organizational-level survey data that would allow them to influence the use and direction of coaching at their own organization, as well as to share information with their own leaders. A major benefit to these organizations was the opportunity to compare data from their own surveys to benchmark data from other participants.

8. Share our findings with coaching researchers and practitioners. From the outset of the Coaching Impact Study, we intended to explore unanswered questions in the coaching field and to convey our insights and findings to the broader coaching community—and to encourage dialogue, questioning, and further study. Throughout the life of the study, therefore, various combinations of our investigator team and participant organizations have endeavored to broadcast the aim of the study and our findings to a variety of audiences, including professional associations, research groups, practitioner groups, and stakeholder communities internal to our participant organizations.

Design

The preceding eight objectives drove the ultimate design of the Coaching Impact Study, which we detail here along with several key findings and lessons learned along the way.

Study Methodology

The Coaching Impact Study methodology consisted of identical online surveys sent to multiple stakeholders of a coaching engagement at two points in the coaching process: near the outset and at the conclusion. These fundamental design elements—Identical Surveys Across Stakeholders and Time 1—Time 2 Surveys—have been described previously (Schlosser, Steinbrenner, Kumata, & Hunt, 2006), but bear further discussion here before we examine the details of survey construction.

Identical Surveys Across Stakeholders

Because we wanted to be able to compare responses on survey items not just within but across stakeholder groups, we created a standardized survey whose primary focus of evaluation was the engagement itself, with each item identical across the coaching triad. This gave us the opportunity, for example, to collect what was essentially a self-assessment rating of the commitment of the manager/sponsor to the coaching engagement.

We ultimately found that the stakeholder group with the highest response rate was the coach group. In our view, this was largely because coaching program managers hold the purse strings and therefore have significant influence over their coaches. The second highest responders were the coachees: most of our participant organizations asked their coaches to encourage their coachees to respond to the surveys. Lowest of the response rates was that of managers/sponsors, and the organizations most successful in getting their responses were those who explicitly defined a role for that individual in the coaching process itself and clearly communicated that surveys were an important element of the process. *With all groups, personal follow-up on uncompleted surveys by coaching practice staff produced the highest success rate in obtaining responses to the surveys.*

Time 1—Time 2 Surveys

To meet our objective of comparing expectations to outcomes, we created two versions of the survey: the first—Time 1 (T1)—to be distributed near the outset of the coaching engagement, and the second—Time 2 (T2)—to be distributed at or soon after the conclusion of the coaching engagement. The T1 and T2 surveys were nearly identical, with most items differing only in verb tense (that is, forward-looking at T1 and primarily backward-looking at T2). Our initial intent was to use the T1 survey to establish a baseline of initial expectations of what would be achieved by the coaching engagement and then to compare those expectations to T2 evaluations after coaching had occurred.

What actually happened was that most of our participant organizations began by administering the T2 survey for coaching engagements that had recently ended (without having administered the T1 survey for those engagements) and then proceeded with both T1 and T2 surveys as new coaching engagements began and ended over time. We therefore collected considerably more T2 data over the life of the study than T1 data. Furthermore, due both to inconsistent response rates from individual stakeholders at both T1 and T2, and to occasional changes in manager/sponsor over the course of an engagement, we ultimately had relatively few responses to both surveys from the same individual manager/sponsor. *Although we were able to pool a very modest amount of data **across** organizations to link some individual responses from T1 to T2 and begin to explore differences in those responses, organizations were unable to link their own results across the two points in time for reliable insights into such differences.*

However, the T1—T2 design proved quite valuable in other ways. As our participant organizations began to administer the T1 surveys in new coaching engagements, an interesting phenomenon emerged. The surveys, by their very introduction into the coaching process, began to influence the behavior of those involved. Coaches, after being briefed on the surveys by the coaching program manager, began discussing them with their coachees at the outset of the engagement. The language of the T1 survey, such as its lists of behaviors and outcomes, and the survey items probing organizational impact and value, began to filter into initial coaching discussions themselves (the actual survey items are shown later in this chapter). Coaches and coachees, and even managers, began to link the coaching objectives they were including in their action plans to business results and impact. And they were quantifying them—what will the value be to the organization if we achieve this objective? *We discovered that a survey we had introduced to* ***measure*** *a dynamic system had* ***influenced*** *that system*—not in every case, surely, but enough to cause lively discussion of the phenomenon among the coaches and program managers of most of our participant organizations. This result seems to us a highly desirable by-product of a coaching evaluation process. Encouraging the explicit linking of coaching outcomes to business impact and value in the context of a coaching engagement must increase the likelihood that the stakeholders of the coaching engagement will recognize and acknowledge the business value when there is coaching success. For a coaching program manager attempting to build visibility and recognition for the value coaching delivers to the organization, facilitating that recognition is a worthwhile goal.

Another way in which the T1—T2 design proved valuable was in looking at different group aggregates. For coaching cohort groups (coaching engagements starting at the same time and proceeding together as part of a common initiative), the aggregate data provided (at T1) insight into the group's initial expectations of what coaching would achieve, as well as (at T2) an overall picture of what the program ultimately achieved. At the organizational level, aggregate data revealed trends across the organization's executive population, such as the most common areas of development, as well as both statistics and qualitative anecdotes describing the impact and value that coaching was delivering to the organization (including, as we will discuss, enough information to calculate a type of ROI).

Survey Construction

Construction of effective yet practical surveys was no small challenge. For the remainder of this segment of the chapter, we provide a brief walk-through of the surveys themselves, section by section, showing the T2 (Follow-Up Survey) version while describing the differences in phrasing of the T1 (Initial Survey). A reproduction of the study's Follow-Up Survey is provided for reference in Figure 14.1, at the end of the chapter.

Section 1: Capabilities/Behaviors

The survey began by focusing on what we called "Capabilities/Behaviors," which comprised a pick-list of competencies and behaviors that we compiled through an iterative design-and-feedback process involving the study's authors, our initial participant organizations, and a handful of executive coaches. The first item asked respondents to select all Capabilities/Behaviors from the list that applied to this coaching engagement (see Figure 14.1 Section 1[1]).

Our objective with this list was to provide the respondents with an opportunity to expand their thinking about what could be (T1), or had been (T2), accomplished through coaching. The list was not intended to be orthogonal—indeed many of the options overlap conceptually—nor did our need for a practical design allow us to define each term in detail. Rather, we wanted to present as complete a list as possible to maximize the likelihood that the accomplishments of most any coaching engagement could be identified. Subsequent analyses would allow us to connect and group related items to identify patterns of coaching focus and achievement. To provide additional flexibility, we included options for "None (no change in any area)" and "Other"—the latter of which included a text box to allow a brief description of the meaning of that response.

Item 1 of the survey included a second component, where we asked respondents to select up to three of the Capabilities/Behaviors they had chosen from the full list and describe them in greater detail by responding to three additional questions for each Capability/Behavior they selected. The rating scale and scale anchors for these survey fields are shown in Table 14.1.

Table 14.1. Rating Scale and Scale Anchors for Drop-Down Response Fields

	Scale Anchors		
Scale	*Dollar Value*	*Importance*	*Confidence*
1	$0	Very Little	Very Little
2	$1 to $5,000		
3	$5,001 to $10,000		
4	$10,001 to $25,000		
5	$25,001 to $50,000		
6	$50,001 to $100,000		
7	$100,001 to $250,000		
8	$250,001 to $500,000		
9	$500,001 to $1,000,000		
10	over $1,000,000	Very Much	Very Much

Our biggest concern with this item, and the whole survey itself, was whether respondents would ultimately be willing to provide an estimate of the financial value of what was attained in a coaching engagement. We worried that stakeholders would not be able to quantify coaching's impact in any meaningful way, and thus not respond. *We ultimately found that this particular design—starting with a broad pick-list of possible behavior changes, then asking respondents to select a few of the most important ones, describe them in their own words, and assess their importance to the organization, before asking for a financial value of that impact—provided a sufficiently robust* ***chain of logic*** *for the respondents, and that most did actually think through the process, follow it to its end, and provide a response to the financial value question.* This being the first of several questions asking for financial value ratings, it also brought respondents further down the pathway toward the ultimate goal: an estimated overall financial value rating for the coaching engagement as a whole.

This item ("Capabilities/Behaviors") ultimately produced some important results for our participant organizations. *The item revealed the areas coachees were focusing on for development, which showed their organizations how coaching was being used by executives across the enterprise and revealed trends in the development needs of the organization's leaders.* Findings such as respondents' most frequent selections, which have been reported elsewhere (Schlosser, Steinbrenner, Kumata, & Hunt, 2006, 17), helped coaching practice leaders better market their practices to organizational leaders based on the needs they served and highlighted potential development priorities for their executive and high-potential populations as a whole. The item provided quantitative and qualitative documentation of the kinds of behavioral changes being focused on and achieved through coaching as well as the perceived value of those changes to the stakeholder groups surveyed.

Section 2: Outcomes/Metrics

The next section of our survey, numbered as Item 2, exactly mirrored the format of the first section, but focused on the business-related by-products of behavioral change, which we called "Outcomes/Metrics" (see Figure 14.1 Section 2[2]). Again, we employed the same process as for our list of "Capabilities/ Behaviors" to develop a master list for this item. Our rationale for this item was twofold: (1) to build a greater understanding of the concrete ways coaching was being seen as producing real impact and value for organizations, and (2) to lead our respondents *further down the chain of logic* to arrive at an assessment of the financial value of that coaching engagement overall.

This item also produced valuable findings for our participant organizations. Their practice leaders were able to draw from its responses and develop a body of quantitative and qualitative data demonstrating how the organization's coaching investment was producing outcomes of real business value.

Section 3: Impact Narrative

We followed the first two narrowly defined, largely quantitative survey items with a qualitative item asking respondents for a description, in their own words, of what the coaching would or did produce (see Figure 14.1 Section 3[3]). This narrative response item allowed respondents to describe their experiences, observations, and expectations regarding the impact and success of the coaching engagement outside of the structure of a selection box or rating scale. *Narrative responses gave our participant organizations access to a wealth of insights into the experiences of those involved in their coaching engagements and valuable anecdotes they could use in reports and presentations on their coaching programs.*

Section 4: Scale Response Items

The next ten survey items (items numbered 4 to 13; see Figure 14.1 Section 4[4]) were designed for responding using a simple 10-point scale. These items captured a variety of assessments of the value of the coaching, as well as evaluations of several factors that we and our initial participant organizations believed might mediate respondent perceptions of that value. Challenges with this section included keeping items sufficiently brief and uncomplicated.

We deliberately chose to exclude evaluations of coach methods and styles because doing so would have exceeded the practical limits we placed on our survey design. Coaching methodologies and their efficacy were beyond our study's focus and, thankfully, have become the subject of increasing examination (for example, McKenna & Davis, 2009; Stober & Grant, 2006;). For the purposes of our study, it was enough to know that a coaching engagement was roughly defined as a six-to-twelve-month one-to-one development process facilitated by a vetted professional executive coach, and that executive coaching engagements were implemented and managed with some consistency within a given participant organization.

This section provided a wealth of insight into stakeholder perceptions of the value of coaching engagements and their assessments of factors affecting that value. For example, we found that ratings provided by managers/sponsors were significantly lower than those of coachees and coaches, which were similar to each other. These lower ratings from managers/sponsors sparked a fair amount of concerned speculation among the study's research team and our participant organizations and prompted extensive discussion and some further writing (Steinbrenner, Kumata, & Schlosser, 2007). *The key imperative we took away from this finding was this: get the manager more involved from the outset and throughout the coaching process.* This makes managers more aware of the focus of the coaching engagement and better positioned to observe and appropriately value the changes that occur. We return to this discussion again in the next segment of this chapter.

It is interesting to note that manager/sponsor ratings weren't lower across the board; one item bucked the trend. The item with the highest average rating from managers/sponsors, consistently higher than the ratings it received from the other respondent groups, was Item 6, which assessed their own commitment to the coaching process.

Section 5: Overall Impact Assessments

Items 14 and 15 of the Follow-Up Survey (see Figure 14.1 Section 5[5]—the Initial Survey did not include an item corresponding to 15) were designed to gather summative assessments of the overall impact and value of the coaching engagement.

A Surprising Finding

The result that most captured our—and our participant organizations'—attention were data plots, by respondent group, of the financial values estimated for the coachee's change in overall effectiveness. Data from the Initial Survey showed strong agreement across rater groups, with most ratings of expected financial value from coaching on the high end of the scale (over 90 percent of respondents in each group expecting the value to be above $50,000, and 39 to 49 percent expecting the value to be above $1,000,000). Data from the Follow-Up Survey revealed a striking difference: whereas the coach and coachee data followed a similar pattern (albeit a bit more spread out), the manager/sponsor group was dramatically split. Although most managers/sponsors continued to perceive significant value from the coaching, over 15 percent of them estimated the financial value of the impact of the coaching engagement at $0!

This result generated numerous questions among the study's authors and our participant organizations. What were these managers thinking about the coaching investment that they and their company were making in their direct report? Were they not noticing any behavior change and, if not, was there really no impact, or were they just not connected enough to the coachee or his or her development to fully recognize and appreciate change? Or were they actually noticing change, but not seeing it as valuable to the organization? We were not able to go back to individual respondents to probe further into these responses, but we did arrive at two important conclusions and related suggestions from this finding—both rather intuitive, yet subtle:

- *Get the manager more involved.* Involve the coachee's manager early in the coaching engagement to foster insight into the coachee's development priorities and buy-in on the coaching action plan. Then, continue to keep the manager in the loop as the coaching engagement unfolds. Check in with the manager at milestone points during the engagement to gather feedback on the coachee's progress (and facilitate recognition of that progress). The less input managers have into the coaching plan, and the less they are primed and encouraged to observe change and development, the less likely they are ultimately to recognize achievements made through coaching.
- *Link coaching and development plans to business outcomes and anticipated organizational value.* Creating an action-oriented coaching plan with specific, clear objectives for the coaching engagement, usually with documented success metrics, has been a long-standing hallmark of good coaching practice. But the results articulated for such well-conceived goals are often limited to descriptions of the behavior change being targeted. Rarely do they include successful business outcomes resulting from that change. Even more rarely do they put an estimated financial value on successful achievement of the goal—it's hard to do. Yet, for the coach, coachee, and manager to agree at the end of the coaching engagement that the investment of time and money in coaching was worthwhile, it seems to us that those bridges must somehow be crossed. Encourage that discussion by incorporating it into formal coaching processes, development plan templates, and other elements of the coaching program's architecture.

In the next segment of this chapter we will come back to some of these findings and conclusions and discuss how they influenced, and were influenced by, the implementation of the Coaching Impact Study within our participant organizations.

A Note to Empirical Survey Designers

We realize our surveys were not without flaw. We relied on single items to measure some phenomena, used a variety of response scales, and included no reverse-scored items. Our lists of behaviors and outcomes were derived from a committee process and are not orthogonal (that is, they are not all independent of one another). And while we led respondents through a conceptual chain of logic, encouraging them to work from high-level concepts down to concrete metrics, we left it to them to take some logical leaps, such as asking them to derive financial value figures from descriptions of their coaching progress.

Implementation

Once our study methodology and surveys were in place, the next steps were to implement them within the established, active coaching practices of participant organizations, accumulate survey responses, and analyze and report on the results.

Start-Up

Although the formal design of the study included both the Initial and Follow-Up Surveys for each coaching engagement, our implementation was flexible enough to allow individual respondents and participant organizations to participate in either or both surveys independently. The data for each survey could easily stand alone, and in fact most of our survey reporting and analyses examined the T1 and T2 surveys separately. We incorporated that flexibility by choice. We realized early on that we could not expect high survey completion rates within any stakeholder group at both points in time, from frequently over-surveyed individuals, given the separation of many months from T1 to T2 and under circumstances where job roles may shift during the process.

A major benefit of this flexible approach was that it allowed an organization to launch the study in one major introduction. In addition to "rolling into" the study by administering the Initial Survey as new coaching engagements began, organizations were also able to send the Follow-Up Survey to large batches of coaching engagements that had recently completed. These engagements may have closed anytime in the prior few months and would not have previously received the Initial Survey. By starting participation in this way, organizations were quickly able to obtain meaningful results from a large number of coaching engagements.

Change Management

Our participant organizations all realized that embarking on the study was an exercise in change management within their coaching programs. This change management effort required planning ways to communicate about the study and its relevance to coaching stakeholders and to encourage responses to the surveys.

The communication effort was twofold: first, organizations had to embed the study into their formal coaching programs, introducing it to the coaching triad (as stakeholders) from the beginning of new coaching engagements, explaining the rationale for it and its importance, and informing stakeholders that they would receive the study's two surveys over the course of the coaching program. Second, they had to present the study to the stakeholders of coaching engagements that were already in progress, or that had recently ended, where the surveys would not have been initially expected by the stakeholders.

For most organizations, this communication process began with their communities of coaches. These were primarily professional executive coaches hired by the organization to provide coaching services to executives. Among each organization's first objectives were educating its coach community about the study, ensuring that all coaches understood the process and highlighting the importance to the organization of their participation. Coaches were then encouraged to reinforce that message with coachees and their coachees' managers/sponsors.

Most, but not all, coaches reacted positively to this message. *Coaches who reacted with initial opposition to the study fell into two* *categories: those who believed the surveys to be an intrusion into the confidentiality of their coaching relationship, and those who believed that the business-related impact of coaching, and the financial value of that impact, was either inappropriate or impossible to measure in this way.*

Most of the resistant coaches perceived the surveys to be an intrusion into the sanctity of their confidential relationship with their coachee. In their opinion, any request for information of the kind in our study, such as the behavioral changes and business outcomes pursued through coaching, compromised that confidentiality. These objections primarily surfaced among coaches in organizations whose coaching programs were less structured and were managed with a lighter touch. Coaches in such programs tended to have a higher degree of latitude in how they delivered coaching and relatively little accountability to the program manager for following a defined coaching process. They had not been asked by their program managers to report much, if anything, about what they were doing in their coaching engagements, and in that context the surveys were a startling change in procedure. Organizations whose programs were more structured and included other process and reporting expectations, such as shared action plans and progress reports, did not encounter much of this kind of resistance.

Program managers who did encounter this resistance successfully dealt with it through open dialogue, both one-on-one with resistant coaches and in group settings with their coach community. These program managers explained to their coaches that the information provided by the surveys was highly important to the coaching practice and to the organization, that no confidential details from coaching sessions would be collected, and that survey data would only be reported in aggregate.

The second reason for resistance among coaches was a refutation of the notion that the outcomes of coaching could be measured or quantified in any meaningful way through the use of a survey. In their view, the only valid approach to understanding the value of coaching was through the same anecdotal evidence that represented the bulk of research into coaching efficacy at the time we designed our study. Coaches in this group believed that although the individual coachee gains personal value from an executive coaching engagement, the organization does not, or more accurately should not, expect to realize any meaningful, quantifiable value from it. In their minds, it was not appropriate for the organization to measure the business impact of coaching.

This view is, of course, antithetical to ours and to that of our participant organizations. Companies that pay for executive coaching do so not out of pure altruism, or simply as an element of an executive's compensation package. They do so largely because they believe it will provide enough value to the organization to justify its expense; in other words, they expect some form of ROI. They may not expect to be able to attribute a direct financial return on a coaching investment, but their decision to pay for coaches is certainly based on a business case for coaching that includes not just individual benefit but positive organizational outcomes as well.

We were surprised at first that our study met this kind of resistance and skepticism from some professional executive coaches. Perhaps, when we launched the study in 2004, the field was still young enough, in some corners of the practitioner population, to react defensively against inquiry into its inner workings, to fear exposure of its (or a given coach's) processes to scientific scrutiny. It could be that these coaches simply disagreed with the specific design of our study, but our interactions with these coaches led us to believe that most or all of them would have objected to any study having the general intent of our own. Happily, this kind of resistance among the coach community appears to be on the decline. Increasingly, coaches realize that their work does, and should, produce discernible value for organizations. Perhaps the coaching community is also becoming more confident in the soundness of its processes and approaches. Certainly evidence is mounting to support that confidence.

Organizational Reports

In return for their participation in our study, organizations received comprehensive aggregate reports of the data collected from each survey. For many of the survey items (the quantitative items in particular), these reports showed the organization's results alongside the aggregated results of the other participant organizations (rolled into one). *This benchmarking capability was a key benefit of a standardized survey design implemented across multiple organizations.*

Most organizations chose to publicize some of the findings from their surveys to their coaching communities in some way, revealing highlights and surprising findings to their coaches as a way of demonstrating the value of the survey effort, and also to spawn discussion and reflection on the meaning of certain results. In a few cases, the organization invited us to present the findings from the organization's surveys to scheduled gatherings of their coaches. These interactive presentations and ensuing discussions were well received by the coaches who attended. Many of these coaches developed a better appreciation for the purpose and value of the measurement effort, and discussions among coaches and program managers often produced insights about how to increase response rates and improve perceptions of the value of coaching.

In fact, it was from one of these participant-sponsored coach meetings where a discussion first surfaced about the effect the survey process was having on the coaching process itself. A coach attending the meeting mentioned that, anticipating the Initial Survey shortly after the start of a coaching engagement, he had begun to incorporate into initial conversations with his coachees some discussions of the business outcomes that they might expect from coaching success, and even the value of those outcomes to the organization. One of this chapter's authors (Schlosser) had already observed a similar change in his own coaching process.

Further, the common finding that the manager/sponsor group had both the lowest response rate and the greatest proportion of respondents attributing little impact and value to coaching prompted extensive dialogue among the coaching communities of several participant organizations. In response, coaches and program managers began to discuss ways to better engage managers in the coaching process, to make them more aware of the focus and goals of the coaching, and to get their buy-in into its efficacy. Again, a number of coaches described making changes to their own coaching processes that they found increased involvement and responses from the managers/sponsors of their coachees.

Clearly, the act of measurement was, itself, having an effect on the phenomenon being measured.

Publication

Although providing timely and valuable reporting on survey results to our participant organizations was critical to guaranteeing and growing our participant base, another important objective was to communicate our study design, experience, and findings to the broader coaching community through presentation and publication opportunities. Throughout the years of our study, this included presentations to multiple industry and academic audiences (for example, Kumata, Schlosser, Hunt, Gentry, & Steinbrenner, 2005; Steinbrenner, Schlosser, & Snyder, 2008; Steinbrenner & Schlosser, 2008; Steinbrenner & Schlosser, 2009)—some that included representatives of our participant organizations—and articles in a few industry and research publications (for example, Kumata, 2007; Schlosser, Steinbrenner, Kumata, & Hunt, 2006; Steinbrenner, Kumata, & Schlosser, 2007). For each, we examined and reported on different aspects of our study's data and, since data collection was a continuous process that occurred over several years, we updated findings with new data at later dates. And as our dataset grew, we were able to expand our analyses into new areas and identify new findings.

Moving Forward

The Lifespan of the Study

Work on the Coaching Impact Study began in mid-2004, and in the intervening years we worked with six formal participant organizations—Wachovia, Deloitte, Credit Suisse, Booz Allen Hamilton, Citi, and Assurant—gathering and feeding back data on over three hundred coaching engagements. By mid-2009, after five years in total, we announced the study's retirement and began to wind down data collection with remaining participant organizations. We closed the study feeling that we had accomplished our primary mission of examining some of the workings of the coaching process from start to finish and making a useful contribution to the field of coaching and the growing foundation of research underlying it.

One key learning was just how challenging it is to run a complex longitudinal study staffed by volunteers who were not full-time researchers (for whom such an effort is a familiar drill). Perhaps our biggest unanticipated challenge was the sheer number of hours the project would consume to bring it to life and sustain it—seeking participants, developing and delivering reports for participant organizations, running analyses of the data collected, organizing our findings, and publishing and presenting our work to various audiences. We often relied on the generosity and kindness of colleagues who helped with such tasks as survey and report programming, graphic design, statistical analysis, and general editorial support. Participant organizations contributed modest funding to help defray expenses, which was of great help in offsetting some of the programming and travel costs. The majority of funding, however, came from the principle investigators ourselves.

All told, the study was worth the effort. We are grateful to have found the enthusiasm and commitment of several world-class coaching practices to help launch the study and it was gratifying to see the data begin to accumulate in sufficient quantities to permit meaningful analyses. And, ultimately, it was rewarding to find such receptive, encouraging audiences for our findings.

It is conceivable that we could launch a "Round 2" of the study. Should the Coaching Impact Study continue in a future iteration, we envision engagement-level reports that would be used by the coaching triad to see, for instance, how aligned the parties are at the beginning and conclusion of coaching. Such a report from the Initial Survey, for example, might prompt conversations among the coaching triad regarding focus and priorities that could help to put the coaching engagement on a more refined path to success from all perspectives.

Adaptations of the Study

Many organizations do not wish to, or may not be able to, gear up for a full-scale assessment of their coaching initiatives. Common reasons include not having a dedicated coaching staff or strategically oriented coaching program, lack of time, insufficient funding, or having an approach to coaching based mostly on responding to the occasional "one-off" coaching need. Even though our study was engineered to be readily adopted, it did require a certain scale and scope of coaching program. It was also standardized, and not equipped to include items customized to evaluate specific aspects of a particular coaching initiative. For smaller programs and those with unique evaluation needs, we have also explored with success a modified impact study approach using short forms or portions of the surveys supplemented by custom items. This is another avenue by which we hope the Coaching Impact Study might live on in some form, contributing to future coaching evaluation and research efforts. *A key takeaway from our experience is that "simpler is better" and, even then, it is likely to be mainly the coach and coachee who will be the most willing survey respondents.*

Recommendations for Coaching Practice Leaders

Whether you are responsible for a handful of coaching engagements or a substantial practice, it is valuable to have a window into understanding what is specifically being addressed in your organization's coaching engagements in order to build strategic alignment between business needs and individuals' behavior changes. As a practice leader, part of your responsibility is to help ensure that the organization meets its aims by providing employee development resources, such as executive coaching, so that leaders, managers, and teams can function at their best. Your understanding of the metrics of impact helps you align your efforts and optimally invest your limited resources, and having a way to assess the value of this impact to the organization provides you with a tool to differentiate among such investments and a unique window into the perceptions of key stakeholders of your practice.

Other recommendations for coaching practice leaders, based on our experiences throughout the study, include:

1. Using data as a foundation, convey the success stories of your coaching engagements to others in your organization to help

build up your coaching culture. Encourage leaders to share their own coaching success stories. This will increase the overall credibility of the coaching initiatives.

2. Share what you learn about patterns of impact and value, in the aggregate, with your coaches. Include the main themes about what is being worked on, what the business and other desirable outcomes are, and how these are valued. If you find that coaching efforts are directed toward pursuits that are off-course from the organization's strategic priorities, use what outcome and valuation data you may have as a resource for redirection.
3. Consider banding together with other like-minded organizations and coaches to form a coalition in which you can disseminate best practices about coaching evaluation approaches. Survey items used in common with other organizations can also provide useful benchmarks for comparison.
4. Once enough data are available to begin reporting in the aggregate, do so. Build interest among key organizational communities in the accomplishments and trends of coaching in your organization.

Recommendations for Coaching Researchers and Evaluation Consultants

With hindsight from our experience with the study, we also offer a few suggestions to fellow researchers and consultants embarking on the evaluation of coaching initiatives:

1. Keep the survey material brief and digestible.
2. Ensure that the language used in the surveys is not laden with professional coaching or research jargon, but instead is couched in language meaningful to business executives.
3. If possible, use a pre-post design and link expectations to outcomes.
4. Include the "coaching triad" (that is, coachee, coach, and manager/sponsor). The views of each stakeholder group are different, and each is valuable. Develop a practical strategy to maximize participation of managers/sponsors. Institutionalize

clear accountability from the outset and encourage personal follow-up from program managers, coaches, and coachees.

5. Don't reinvent the wheel unless your road has very unique requirements. Leverage existing survey items, such as those from our study, and compare your results from them to other findings where available.
6. Plan periodic data-sharing events with your participant organizations and interested stakeholder groups, such as coach communities.

Challenge to Coaches

Coaching professionals know that an interview-based 360 process can serve not only to gather critical contextual information for a coaching engagement, but also as a communications medium to the coachee's broader workplace social environment. Broadcasting in this medium sends a message that the coachee is pursuing desirable change toward one or more end states. Likewise, a formal assessment of impact and value among the coaching triad before and after coaching provides a similar benefit.

Our challenge for coaches is to *energetically* communicate to their coaching engagement stakeholders important aspects of what will be addressed in coaching at the front end of each engagement, and what was specifically accomplished, and its value, at the conclusion. This can be done through persistent and collaborative follow-up with those in key relationships with the coachee, and it can be sought by both the coach and coachee (and, for that matter, anyone else positioned to broadcast the message of success). A conceptual framework for describing what will be and has been addressed through coaching and its impact on the organization, such as that provided by our study, can help meet this challenge.

Figure 14.1. Coaching Impact Follow-Up Survey

Survey Sections

CAMBRIA CONSULTING

Coaching Impact: Follow-up Survey

Thank you for providing feedback regarding the ABC Corporation coaching engagement identified below. Your feedback is being sought in an ongoing effort to measure the effectiveness and value of this organization's coaching initiative, and to identify opportunities for improvement. This survey will take approximately 30 minutes of your time.

If you have any questions, please contact: Donna Star (dstar@abc.com) or Betty Henderson (bhenderson@abc.com).

Please respond to this survey in reference to the following coaching engagement:

Person Being Coached: Jack Connolly, ABC Corporation
Your relationship to him/her: Executive Sponsor

Is the above information correct? ○ Yes ○ No
If not, please explain: [ ]

1

1. From the list below, select the **capabilites/behaviors** that you think Jack Connolly has improved as a result of this coaching engagement:

☐ Big-picture/Detail Balance	☐ Diversity Considerations/Sensitivity	☐ Meeting Facilitation
☐ Building Enthusiasm	☐ Executive Presence	☐ Negotiation Skills
☐ Building Relationships	☐ External Visibility/Image	☐ Partnering across Boundaries/Silos
☐ Building Team Morale	☐ Field Presence/Field Experience	☐ Personal Energy/Optimism
☐ Business Acumen/Knowledge	☐ Following Others	☐ Productivity/Time Management
☐ Business Results/Execution	☐ Fostering Innovation	☐ Project Management
☐ Career Advancement	☐ Global/International Perspective	☐ Quality of Work Product
☐ Communication Skills	☐ Goal Setting	☐ Self-Awareness/Self-Reflection
☐ Collaboration/Teamwork	☐ Influence	☐ Self-Confidence
☐ Conflict Management/Resolution	☐ Internal Visibility/Image	☐ Sense of Urgency/Responsiveness
☐ Client Focus/Service	☐ Interpersonal Skills	☐ Setting Direction and Vision
☐ Decision Making and Judgment	☐ Job Satisfaction and Enjoyment	☐ Strategic Thinking
☐ Delegation/Empowering Others	☐ Leading/Driving Change	☐ Stress Management
☐ Developing/Coaching Employees	☐ Listening Skills	☐ Technical Skills Mastery
☐ Developing Self	☐ Managing Performance Issues	☐ Work/Life Balance
☐ None (no change in any area)		

☐ Other (If other, enter here.) [ ]

Based on your selection(s) above, select and describe up to 3 of the most important **capabilities/behaviors** that you think Jack Connolly has improved as a result of this coaching engagement:

Capabilities/Behaviors	**Describe what progress in this area has looked like**	**Importance to the results of the business**	**Estimated dollar value* of coaching success in this area**
Please select - >		Please select - >	Please select - >
Please select - >		Please select - >	Please select - >
Please select - >		Please select - >	Please select - >

Please give your best guess - we're just looking for your general perceptions.*

(continued on p.398)

Figure 14.1. (Continued)

2

2. From the list below, select the **outcomes/metrics** that you think Jack Connolly has improved as a result of this coaching engagement:

- ☐ Alignment with Business Priorities
- ☐ Avoidance of Termination/Separation
- ☐ Base of Committed Followers
- ☐ Client Retention/Growth
- ☐ Efficiency/Cost Reduction
- ☐ Employee Alignment
- ☐ Employee Engagement
- ☐ Employee Satisfaction
- ☐ Employee/Team Retention
- ☐ External Client Sat./Relationships
- ☐ Increased Sales/Revenue
- ☐ Internal Client Sat./Relationships
- ☐ Intention to Remain with Organization
- ☐ Merger Integration
- ☐ Process Improvement
- ☐ Product/Service Development
- ☐ Product/Service Launch
- ☐ Productivity
- ☐ Profitability
- ☐ Promotability/Career Progression
- ☐ Quality Management
- ☐ Reduce Loss/Business Decline
- ☐ Risk/Liability Reduction
- ☐ Turnaround/Business Recovery
- ☐ None (no change in any area)
- ☐ Other (If other, enter here.)

Based on your selection(s) above, select and describe up to 3 of the most important **outcomes/metrics** that indicate the success level of this coaching engagement:

Outcomes/Metrics	**Describe what progress in this area has looked like**	**Importance to the results of the business**	**Estimated dollar value* of coaching success in this area**
Please select - >		Please select - >	Please select - >
Please select - >		Please select - >	Please select - >
Please select - >		Please select - >	Please select - >

Please give your best guess - we're just looking for your general perceptions.*

3

3. In concrete terms, what has the coaching experience produced for Jack Connolly and ABC Corporation in the last six (6) months?

4

For questions 4-13 please select "?" if you have no basis for making an assessment.

	Please select a response to each question.	**Very Little 1**	**2**	**3**	**4**	**5**	**6**	**7**	**8**	**9**	**Very Much 10**	**?**
4.	To what extent has coaching positively impacted Jack Connolly's overall effectiveness in his/her role?	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
5.	To what extent was the coaching worth Jack Connolly's investment of time?	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
6.	To what extent was the coaching worth ABC Corporation's dollar investment?	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
7.	How important was coaching success, in this instance, to the part(s) of ABC Corporation for which Jack Connolly works?	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
8.	To what extent was Jack Connolly personally committed to the coaching process?	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
9.	To what extent was Jack Connolly's manager(s) personally committed to the coaching process?	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
10.	To what extent did ABC Corporation set clear expectations about coaching deliverables?	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
11.	To what degree was coaching useful in facilitating understanding of ABC Corporation strategic goals?	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
12.	At present, how satisfied are you with the value of coaching for Jack Connolly?	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○
13.	At present, how satisfied are you with the value of coaching initiatives across ABC Corporation?	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○	○

5

14. Recognizing that there are numerous factors involved, please estimate the dollar value to ABC Corporation of Jack Connolly's change in overall effectiveness **over the next 18 months** as a direct result of coaching: Please select - >

- How much confidence do you have in your dollar value estimate above? Please select - >

15. How much has Jack Connolly's performance improved since starting his/her coaching engagement? ____ %

- What percentage of this improvement do you attribute directly to coaching? ____ %

Footnotes

1. The corresponding item in the Initial Survey varied as follows (varying text underlined): "From the list below, select the **capabilities/behaviors** that you think Jack Connolly must improve in order for the coaching engagement to be a success:"; "Based on your selection(s) above, select and describe up to 3 of the most important **capabilities/behaviors** to focus on in this coaching engagement:"; and "Describe what progress in this area would look like"
2. The corresponding item in the Initial Survey varied as follows (varying text underlined): "From the list below, select the **outcomes/metrics** that you think Jack Connolly must improve in order for the coaching engagement to be a success:"; "Based on your selection(s) above, select and describe up to 3 of the most important **outcomes/metrics** that would indicate the success level of this coaching engagement:" and "Describe what progress in this area would look like"
3. The corresponding item in the Initial Survey varied as follows (varying text underlined): "In concrete terms, what outcomes would a successful coaching experience produce for Jack Connolly and ABC Corporation in six (6) months?"
4. The corresponding items in the Initial Survey varied as follows (varying text underlined): "To what extent will coaching positively impact Jack Connolly's overall effectiveness in his/her role?"; To what extent will the outcomes of coaching be worth Jack Connolly's investment of time?"; To what extent will the outcomes of coaching be worth ABC Corporation's dollar investment?"; How important is coaching success, in this instance, to the part(s) of ABC Corporation for which Jack Connolly works?"; "To what extent is Jack Connolly personally committed to the coaching process?"; "To what extent is Jack Connolly's manager personally committed to the coaching process?"; "To what extent has ABC Corporation set clear expectations about coaching deliverables?"; and "To what degree will coaching be useful in facilitating understanding of ABC Corporation strategic goals?"
5. The corresponding item in the Initial Survey varied as follows (varying text underlined): "Recognizing that there are numerous factors involved, please estimate the dollar value to ABC Corporation of Jack Connolly's change in overall effectiveness over the next 24 months as a direct result of coaching:"

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