EXECUTIVE COACHING IN MOROCCO: SIMPLE TREND OR A REALLY IMPACTFUL PROCESS?

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Abstract
Nowadays, organizations present an environment leading people to greater competitiveness and individual performance in the workplace. In order to better serve its interests and objectives, business community use different forms of support of their managers, namely the executive coaching, object of our study. This approach is applied as a managers’ performance development strategy (Grant & Greene, 2004; Moën & Federici, 2012; Moën & Skaalvik, 2009).
Since the last 90’s, executive coaching is gaining progressive popularity in Morocco, thanks to the emergence of different coaching programs and institutions.
The aim of the present study is to highlight the main reasons explaining the resort to this strategy, and to bring valuable insights about its success factors and its impacts on managers’ performance.
Is executive coaching in Morocco just an observable trend or a real difference making process? Through semi-structured interviews, conducted with Moroccan coaches, coachees and a HR Manager, we will analysis this research question.

Keywords: Executive coaching, Process, Factors of success, Effects.
JEL Classification: O15.
Paper type: Empirical research
1. Introduction

Moroccan companies are now facing multiple challenges in order to guarantee their development, even their survival. Indeed, decision-makers push their managers to invest more in their missions, to manage and lead their teams, in order to achieve the goals, set by their organizations. Thus, managers face a dilemma: the need to raise their level of performance, to be as motivated as flexible and versatile, while «accepting» an uncertain future of the organization. The situation is further aggravated by issues related to corporate vision, internal communication, and recognition of the efforts made and in general all the shortcomings related to the management of the Moroccan company. The combination of these factors would be a source of stress at work, demotivation and even frustration many managers. As a result, their individual performance is impacted.

Based on these observations, some companies apply different forms of support, especially executive coaching (which is gaining a wide popularity all over the world) in order to help their managers developing their performance at work.

However, this growing popularity of executive coaching worries many for at least three reasons. First, some consider that having a personal coach at a manager’s disposal is regarded as fancy, or as a sign of professional success and a consideration proof from the organization since it gives him access to an expensive resource to facilitate his development (Feldman, 2005).

Second, the growing number of individuals who call themselves coaches raises a danger of obvious opportunism with serious consequences. Indeed, the coach is likely to have a notable influence on his customers, enough to create dependence relationships, thus opening a wide door for all kinds of abuse (Larocque, 2001). In the same vein, Filipczak (1998) concerned about the arrival on the market of a large number of therapists with little experience and a very limited knowledge of the business world.

Third, it must be recognized that we know a little about the practice itself. We have difficulty identifying executive coaching in relation to other better-known practices such as mentoring and counseling (Feldman, 2001). Little is known about the reasons for this recent popularity as a manager development tool whereas coaching has been a concept known since a long time. The success or failure factors of this practice are still uncertain since the lack of rigorous research on this topic.

This study aims to highlight first the particularity of executive coaching, and to determine the different reasons explaining the resort to this strategy, and finally, through semi-structured interviews, with six coaches, three coachees and one HR Manager, to bring valuable insights about the research question mentioned above.

2. Executive coaching: Literature review

2.1. Definition

Executive coaching, also known as professional coaching, or coaching for managers, is increasingly applied within organizations as a personal and professional development strategy for managers (Grant & Greene, 2004; Moën & Skaalvik, 2009, Moën&Federecii2012 ;castel-Girard & Baron, 2015).

Coaching is a trendy concept (Bayad & Persson-Gehin, 2003) with many definitions. We can distinguish some of them:
According to the International Coach Federation (ICF)\(^1\), coaching is defined as a partnership that enables clients to achieve satisfactory results in their personal and professional lives. Through the coaching process, clients intensify their knowledge, improve their performance and enhance their quality of life.

The center for creative Leadership (Douglas & Morley, 2000, P.40) provides the following description of coaching:

Executive coaching is the process of equipping people with the tools, knowledge, and opportunities they need to develop themselves and become more effective (Peterson, 1996).

Executive coaching involves the teaching of skills in the context of a personal relationship with the learner, and providing feedback on the executive’s interpersonal relations and skills (Sperry, 1993). An ongoing series of activities tailored to the individual’s current issues or relevant problem is designed by the coach to assist the executive in maintaining a consistent, confident focus as he or she tunes strengths and manage short-comings (Tobias, 1996).

Frisch & al. (2012) define executive coaching, as an Individual development process involving a formal contract between a professional coach, an organization and a client managing employees and/or responsible for a team, with the aim of increasing the managerial performance and/or leadership of the client and often involving feedback and learning processes in the action.

An analysis of different definitions of coaching shows that they all share a common element, namely accompaniment. However, we find this notion in other service professions, such as mentoring, counseling and therapy.

Therefore, it seems necessary to distinguish between these concepts.

2.1.1 Coaching and mentoring

Mentoring is a self-help relationship where a more experienced person (the mentor) shares knowledge and assists a less experienced person. Persson-Gehin and Bayad (2004) call it “internal coaching” because the mentor is usually someone from the same organization. According to Saint John and Audet (2007) “the mentor is generally someone who has certain qualities of caring watching over a young individual, who benefits from the advice and support of his mentor.”, the mentor is considered as a role model, not in a position of authority to the mentee.

Mentoring differs from coaching in the sense that the first is a voluntary, free approach, while the second is a response to a request.

2.1.2 Coaching and consulting

According to ICF Québec, a consultant is an external specialist, called by an organization in order to bring an opinion (advice) about an identified issue, or to help in solving a specific problem. Although coaching is often confused with consulting, there is a real difference due to the nature of intervention. The coach does not provide an answer to a given problem; he pushes the coachee to find the solutions while considering his personality. The consultant, therefore, responds to the client’s needs by providing solutions without necessarily learning (Couteret & Audet, 2006) and focuses on organizational performance (Coutu & Kauffman, 2009).
2.1.3 Coaching and therapy (Counselling)

Therapy treats psychological problems, based on the understanding of human personality. His approach is based on the clarification of the solutions that the person can find in himself to resolve the difficulties he is facing. (Valéau, 2005; Rogers, 1966; Priels, 2004). Also, counseling is concerned by the past and the origins of the problems experienced, whereas coaching focuses on specific situations, and what a person can develop as skills.

2.2. Contexts and reasons of adopting executive coaching

2.2.1. Context

According to Baron & Morin (2010b), Executive coaching can be relevant in four contexts:
- **Organizational changes** (examples: mergers, acquisitions, new management philosophy): Such changes often require different approaches to management and new skills and competencies that executive coaching can promote.
- **Professional transition**: Coaching can help developing the skills of individuals who will be given more authority and responsibilities in their workplace.
- **Development of specific skills**: Managers aware of their weaknesses in management and leadership can benefit from a targeted coaching program to develop these skills (example: difficulties in public speaking or working with a board of directors).
- **Specific problem solving**: Executive coach can help a manager correct one or more dysfunctional behaviors causing repetitive difficulties. In this case coaching has a correction objective, as distinguished from other contexts where it is proposed for developmental purposes.

2.1.2. Reasons of using EC

Several reasons motivate the use of coaching, such as a need for related development with a promotion, the development of a specific skill for a manager or unsatisfactory individual performance. According to (Fieldman & Lankau, 2005; Natale & Diamante, 2005), Executive coaching is resorted to achieve four objectives:
1- Developing the leadership of a high potential manager;
2- Correct attitudes and behaviors that adversely affect performance and professional relations in the current position or for the future progression of an executive;
3- Maximize the chances of success (or reduce the risk of failure) for newly promoted individuals (often specialists) in management positions.
4- Advising entrepreneurs who need help leading the growth of their business.

2.3. Processes and success factors of executive coaching

Several authors have addressed steps in the management coaching process. (Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001); Smither & Reilly, 2001) propose six main steps in this process:
1- Establishing a relationship of trust between the coach and the coachee,
2- The assessment of the coach and his work environment,
3- Communicating the evaluation results to the coachee,
4- Drawing up action and development plans in order to set objectives,
5- Encouraging the skills acquisition,
6- Assessing made progress.

Prior to that, the organization should select the coach, set the coaching goals as needed and match the coach and coachee (Baron & Morin, 2010).
According to the Corporate Leadership Council (2000) and El Khouri (2001) the lack of affinity and chemistry between the coach and the coachee is one of the main reasons for the process failure. The success of coaching is thus dependent on shared responsibility between the two partners.

2.3.1. The characteristics of the coach:

The coach is an individual with human and interpersonal skills that allow him to accompany a person or team in a professional context (Higy-Lang & Gellman, 2000). According to Coutu and Kauffman, 2009; El Khouri, 2001; Hall, Otazo and Hollenback, 1999), an effective coach is one who puts himself in the place of the coachee to understand him without trying to influence him with his own ideas. And for Chouinard, (2004) the coach must use «methods of positive relations» with his coachee, namely listening and empathy (Simon and Kumar, 2001; Sullivan, 2000); Audet and Couteret, 2006). For that purpose, the coach must have the required training and skills. We can say that competence, empathy, credibility and honesty are the keys to a coach’s effectiveness.

We distinguish between two types of coaches: the internal and the external ones. Each type has advantages and limitations.

- The internal coach is part of the staff of the organization. Thus, managers can benefit from his availability and his deep knowledge of the environment and the culture of the company. However, he can present a threat to the level of confidentiality since it is difficult to talk about one’s weaknesses and to confide in someone within the same organization (Ulrich, 2008); Thach, 2002); El Khouri, 2001). - The external coach is a person external to the organization. He has a much more objective vision and can easily provide a feeling of confidence in the coachee, added to that his level of expertise and innovation to follow up on different situations and contexts he encounters. The constraint lies in the cost of the service.

2.3.2. Characteristics of the coachee

Commitment, motivation and involvement are the essential features of the coachee during the process. In addition to that, other characteristics are regarded such as the degree of knowing himself and his abilities, having clear and precise needs, being able to satisfy them easily and allowing himself the time needed to develop them. (St-Onge, Gins, 2011).

2.3.3. The characteristics of the coach / coachee relationship

In addition to the characteristics of each of the parties (coach and coachee), the relationship between them plays a key role in the success of the process. For St-Onge and Gins (2011), this should:

- be good, based on trust and respect
- be structured and based on tools (360 ° assessment, psychometric profiles, etc.)
- rely on confidential exchanges
- Be marked out by a formal contract (for example, number and duration of meetings, fees)
- Be extended over a period of at least a few months.
- Be marked by frequent and fairly long sessions (two to three hours)
- Avoid problems of counter transference and emotional dependence on the coach

Be based on transparent communication between the actors: coach, coachee, immediate superior, human resources professionals
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**Figure 1:** Comprehensive model of the effectiveness of executive coaching process

From this figure, we see that if the entire variables are present, we can evaluate the outcome of the executive coaching processes on individual and organizational performance.

3. **Practical study**

The purpose of this article is to answer the following research questions: What are the reasons for using coaching in Morocco? What are the factors for the success or failure of coaching? What is its impact on an individual level and the whole organization? In order to analysis these questions, we have selected a qualitative-type work method through semi-structured interviews. We used the digital professional network LinkedIn to send requests to carry out our exploratory survey, as well as our personal network. Six coaches with significant professional experiences and proved *Professional Certified Coach-PCC*² (by the International

²The Professional Certified Coach (PCC), requires at least 750 hours of client coaching experience.
Coach Federation (ICF), responded favorably to our request and participated to our series of semi-structured interviews. We also interviewed three Coachees (one of whom had a negatively persuaded coaching experience) and one HR Manager of a multinational company.

The interviews, conducted in French and English, carried out over the phone and through video conferences. They lasted between 30 and 90 minutes. Permission was granted to record all the interviews.

Our interview grid consisted of four sections:
1- Profile of the actors (Coaches, Coachees, HR Manager)
2- Reasons for adopting executive coaching
3- Factors of success and failure of EC, according to the experience of the three actors.
4- Positive impact of EC.

In terms of data processing, the eight respondents making up the sample will be designated under the fictitious names of A, B, C, D, E, F, G, H, I, K.

4. Results and discussion

4.1. The three actor’s profile has been grouped in the following table:

In the following table, we presented the profile of the interviewees (Six coaches: A B C D E and F, Three coachees: G H and I, and finally J the HR manager).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Interviewees</th>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Years of experience as coach /last position</th>
<th>Specialty/ Occupied post</th>
<th>Length interview</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Coach A</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>50</td>
<td>20 years</td>
<td>Coach and trainer (life coaching, executive coaching and Leadership, intercultural training)</td>
<td>45min/Zoom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach B</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>13 Years</td>
<td>Individual coach, managerial coach, CEO of a consulting firm</td>
<td>40 min/Google meet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach C</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>45</td>
<td>10 Years</td>
<td>Consultant and leadership coach</td>
<td>90 min/Phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach D</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>47</td>
<td>13 Years</td>
<td>Professional Coach and permanent consultant</td>
<td>35 min/Phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach E</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>49</td>
<td>12 Years</td>
<td>Trainer and executive and managerial coach</td>
<td>55 min/Zoom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coach F</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>54</td>
<td>9 Years</td>
<td>Individual and group coach Founder of consulting firm</td>
<td>70 min/Phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coachee G</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>7 Years</td>
<td>Executive Manager</td>
<td>60 min/phone</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coachee H</td>
<td>F</td>
<td>40</td>
<td>10 Years</td>
<td>Executive Manager</td>
<td>40 min/Google Meet</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Coachee I</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>12 Years</td>
<td>Middle Manager</td>
<td>45 min/zoom</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>RHM J</td>
<td>M</td>
<td>48</td>
<td>15 Years</td>
<td>HR Manager</td>
<td>30 min/Phone</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s
Through interviews with the 10 interviewees, we were able to identify certain information:

- Coaches in our sample have academic background in HR, psychology and management. Coaching service is a part-time role (from 10% to 70% of their professional activity).
- All the coachees received individual coaching from an external coach. The program included 6 sessions, for a global duration of three months. They belong to the same organization.

4.2. Reasons for using executive coaching

Table 2 presents the reasons for the increasing demand for executive coaching by the stakeholders:

Table 2: Reasons for the increasing demand for executive coaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Reasons</th>
<th>A</th>
<th>B</th>
<th>C</th>
<th>D</th>
<th>E</th>
<th>F</th>
<th>G</th>
<th>H</th>
<th>I</th>
<th>J</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Developing the leadership of a high</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>potential manager</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Facilitated a professional transition</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solving problems</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Need for support and listening</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Follow the trend</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Working time optimization</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>X</td>
<td>X</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s

The analysis of stakeholders’ responses shows that coaches are most called by organizations in order to develop the leadership of high potential managers (5 coach), to facilitate professional transitions (4 coach) and finally to solve problems (3 coach). Our findings corroborate those of some empirical research, such as (Feldman & Lankau, 2005; Natale & Diamante, 2005). According to the study of Natale & Diamante (2005), the top one reason why the world is using executive coaching approach (86%), is sharpening the leadership skills of high-potential individuals.

However, Coach C talks about the trendy effect followed by some companies that want to be known as organizations seeking the development of its managers.

In the other side, all of the coachees explain that solving problems and the need for support and listening are the main reasons behind the popularity of EC. Interviewee G, for instance, explains that as an executive manager with responsibility and living a high pressure at work. I need a coach to talk to with no pre judgment.

On his part, the HR manager (interviewee J) reveals that his company adopts coaching in order to help managers developing their leadership, to facilitate their professional transition and for problem solving. This seems to be in line with the findings of Kauffman and Coutu survey (2009), where coaches reported that 48% of the times are hired to develop high potentials or to facilitate transition.

4.3. Factors of success and failures of EC

Table 3 present factors of successful and unsuccessful coaching program, we asked all the interviewee to give us according to their experience two factors of success and failures of executive coaching and we’ve grouped all the answers in the following table.
We asked all interviewees to give us, according to their experiences, the main success factors of a coaching process. They unanimously talk about having clear goal, respect, sincerity, and honesty.

Also, they insist all on the importance of the relationship quality between coaches and coaches, which plays a key role in the process. And this is in line with (Doug Mackie (2007), St-Onge & Gins (2011), J. Audet & P. Couteret (2012)) who explain in different context, that the key success of a coaching program is the relationship quality between coaches and coachees.

On his part, interviewee A states that chemistry between coach and coachee, making agenda with clear goal, process and duration constitute the main recipe of an EC program effectiveness. However, some executives can’t distinguish between coaching and consulting.

On the other hand, the lack of clarity about the process goal, deep behavioral issues, and some tension between the managers and their organization were behind the program failure, as the interviewee revealed. And this is in agreement with the findings of Kauffman & Coutu survey (2009), who argue that coaching is unsuccessful when executives have severe behavioral problems (narcissism, deep resentment, and very serious self-esteem issues), when they are unwilling to look inward (Executives who are chronic blamers, are attached to a victim mentality), or when a fundamental tension exists between the executive and the organization (radical discord between the values of the executive and of the organization).

### 4.4. Effects of Executive coaching

Self-efficacy and soft skills development are two unanimous answers for the questions about the impact of coaching. Self-confidence improvement and individual performance (in tasks and contextual) are also mentioned by some respondents. And this is in accord with the analysis carried out by Castel-Gerard & Louis Baron (2015) about positive impacts related to transfer (behaviours) that have been associated with executive coaching.

In general, the effectiveness of coaching is measured informally, based on stakeholder responses, for coaches, effective coaching results in a change in the coach’s behavior (become more autonomous, positive, and motivated to serve the company’s need). (Sylvie St-Onge & Carole Gins (2011)).

However, for the interviewee I (HR Manager), it’s necessary to measure the return on investment, due to the high cost of EC programs. This is in line with the answer of coaches in the survey of Kauffman & Coutu (2009), 32% said that they are hired by the organization because they have the ability to measure ROI.

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**Table 3**: Factors of success and failures of executive coaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Factors of success</th>
<th>Factors of failures</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A</td>
<td>Clear goal</td>
<td>Poor chemistry between coach and coachee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
<td>Respect</td>
<td>loose of motivation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C</td>
<td>Sincerity</td>
<td>Dependence</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>Honesty</td>
<td>Unwilling to look inward</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>Confidence</td>
<td>Tension between organization and Coachee</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F</td>
<td>Empathy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G</td>
<td>Feed back</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H</td>
<td>Change readiness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Author’s
5. Conclusion

This paper aims to answer the question if executive coaching is just a trend or a really impactful process, we can say that true coaching has proved its many purposes and benefits and can benefit both the team members and the organization. (M. Castel-Girard & L. Baron, 2015).

The data collected in this study showed that the characteristic of the stakeholders have a direct impact on effectiveness of the processes of coaching. Our findings corroborate those of some empirical research, such as (S. ST-Onge & C. Gins, 2011, Kauffman, 2009; El Khouri, 2001; Hall, Otazo and Hollenback, 1999).

It has been over a decade since it first emerged, so it is safe to assume that it is now beyond a “trend”, being a critical leadership and management competency. Furthermore, executive coaching is a high-budget management approach (set of skills). If companies are seeking coaches on a daily basis, it is because it’s a necessity, not only for their success, but also for their survival.

The fact is, in our country, there is little to no legal framework to the profession of coaching, which leads the door open to a great number of illegitimate imposters who have no background or experience in the field, and therefore are misleading the organization’ perception of the how a business coach should be an what is expected from the work of a true professional workplace coach.

However, our research shows some limits. We can mainly cite the reduced number of works that deal with the subject, as well as the limited number of interviews conducted. Nevertheless, our results cannot be expressed with precision in a general way, and this favors the use of a quantitative study to better understand the success factors determinants, subject of a next study.

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