

**The Impact of Goal Types Learning or Performance on the Individual  
Performance in Executive Coaching**

**Ph.D. Thesis  
-Summary-**

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**Iași  
2023**

## Summary

Executive coaching has been used extensively in the past few decades. It has been reported as the second fastest growth industry (Finn, 2007). Despite its popularity, empirical executive coaching studies using rigorous research design are still scarce. Thus more randomized, controlled studies are required (Grant, 2009,2010). There is a fundamental need for more evidence of the effects of executive coaching and its underlying mechanisms. The current research project addresses this need through four studies that provide empirical evidence for the effectiveness of executive coaching and the role of goals type (learning or performance) on goal achievement and performance.

The thesis presents a general introduction in Chapter 1, outlining the main theoretical constructs and the resulting research questions. In the next chapters, we present the results of four studies and discuss the findings.

In the first study, presented in Chapter 2, we evaluated and compared the relative effects of coaching on different types and sub-types of outcomes by means of a classification of coaching outcomes based on previously used taxonomies by reviewing 20 studies with a rigorous methodological design that used control trials and pre-post tests. The results indicated that the impact of coaching on behavioral outcomes was higher than attitudes and person characteristics outcomes, suggesting that behavioral coaching outcomes, especially cognitive behavioral activities, are the most impacted by executive coaching. Moreover, we found significant positive effects for some specific outcomes, such as self-efficacy, psychological capital, and resilience, indicating that executive coaching effectively produces change even on dimensions considered relatively stable over time. The results showed no

moderation effects on the number of sessions. The length of the coaching program was a significant moderator only for the attitudes outcomes. We continued our exploration of executive coaching effectiveness by systematically reviewing 21 empirical studies on executive coaching outcomes in the workplace during organizational change. We analyzed the commonly reported executive coaching positive effects to illustrate the executive coaching impact on behaviors and skills related to leading, managing, and finding strategies for coping with challenging situations. The systematical review study highlighted the benefits of executive coaching, additional opportunities in which its implementation may facilitate through a coaching-based leadership style within organizations, possible challenges to its more widespread adoption, and the means by which these may be overcome.

The third study, presented in Chapter 3, explored the effect of executive coaching on improving the perceived manager's goal performance over time and possible moderators by using an experimental design with two measurement points in a corporate setting. Two hundred and two managers from 13 organizations were randomly assigned to a coaching or waiting list condition. Participants in the coaching condition received four weekly coaching sessions from thirty-three external coaches. The results showed that managers who received coaching significantly improved their perception of goal performance compared with those who did not receive coaching, suggesting that executive coaching is an effective intervention to increase the perceived goal performance for managers with different backgrounds. The findings indicate that general self-efficacy is not a precondition for increased goal performance for those who received coaching, suggesting that coaching is an effective tool regardless of the participant's level of general self-efficacy. The results indicated that low general self-efficacy predicted the decision to withdraw from the study, suggesting the importance of the general self-efficacy trait in assessing the readiness of those involved in coaching. Furthermore, there was no effect of motivational persistence on perceived goal

performance, indicating that volitional and cognitive-motivational aspects may be less important to goal performance outcomes.

Chapter 4 presents the fourth study, which, to our knowledge, is the first to explore the relationship between executive coaching and self-reported goal achievement mediated by goal type (learning or performance) using a rigorous experimental design and a large and diverse sample of managers, organizations, and external coaches. The research reported data from a large-scale experimental study on executive coaching provided by 33 external coaches to 202 managers from 13 organizations. We found strong evidence that coaching is an effective process that companies should use to facilitate learning and goal achievement. Our findings point to learning goals as a critical explanatory mechanism for positive coaching outcomes, highlighting the coaching process's learning aspect. The results suggest that coaches may need to provide appropriate feedback and resources that facilitate learning during coaching engagement to increase the likelihood of coaching effectiveness.

These findings provide evidence that executive coaching is a powerful instrument for organizations to support positive change and personal development. Implications of the results for business practice are discussed in Chapter 5.

This research examines the effectiveness of coaching and the role of goal type (learning or performance) in individual performance within organizations. Our finds suggest that coaching is a valuable tool for development, producing positive outcomes across various areas. Behavioral outcomes are most significantly influenced by coaching compared to other outcome categories. Improvement in work-related attitudes, such as job satisfaction and well-being, suggests that coaching enhances alignment between individuals and organizations, fostering positive organization-related attitudes and recognizing coaching as a valuable developmental resource (Fontes & Russo, 2020). Executives who receive coaching may also experience positive work-related attitudes due to perceived support from the sponsoring

organization. Moreover, managers undergoing executive coaching develop a stronger sense of control over outcomes and workplace experience, resulting in improved attitudes and personal characteristics (McGonagle et al., 2020).

We recommend that future research explore organizational context's impact on executive coaching outcomes, investigating the influence of goal alignment and supervisor support. On the behavioral aspect, cognitive activities, including openness to new behaviors and goal strategy, are found to be the greatest impact. Although not the primary focus, cognitive outcomes related to planning and goal strategy are crucial in promoting behavioral change through feedback, support, and emphasis on planning (Fontes & Russo, 2020).

Surprisingly, the number of coaching sessions does not moderate coaching effectiveness. This suggests that managers may require more time to change attitudes regardless of the number of sessions, possibly due to persistent attitudes and defensive cognitive processes. Future research should examine the duration of coaching programs and its effect on outcomes. Furthermore, researchers should provide more information on goal types, motivation, and organizational context to facilitate further analysis of potential moderating factors.

Overall, the first study identifies areas where coaching research lags, particularly in understanding the differential effects of coaching on various outcome categories. Addressing and focusing on these gaps in future studies is crucial for advancing the coaching field.

The results of the third study support the positive effect of coaching interventions on managers' perceived goal performance in terms of time. These findings align with previous research on executive coaching goal outcomes using randomized control trial designs (Evers et al., 2016; Grant, 2009,2010; Moen, 2009,2012; Zanchetta et al., 2020). Coaching is likely to enhance the alignment between an individual's initial goal and their perceived goal

performance at the end of the intervention, leading to positive organizational outcomes through individual development.

Future research should build upon these results and consider existing literature on managers' performance in executive coaching. Studies have found a positive relationship between coaching and improved role performance in terms of agency, self-reflectiveness, and confidence in general leadership tasks (Ladegard et al., 2014; Anderson et al., 2008). Investigating specific behaviors influenced by coaching that affect perceived goal performance over time would contribute to understanding the behaviors that can be learned or developed through coaching interventions. Incorporating self-reported data from multiple sources and conducting longitudinal studies using quantitative and qualitative methods can further enhance the coaching literature.

This study did not support the moderating effect of self-efficacy or motivational persistence on the relationship between coaching and goal performance. This finding is surprising considering the positive correlation reported in other studies between coachee's self-efficacy and coaching effectiveness or behavioral change (Stewart et al., 2008, deHaan et al., 2013, 2019; Sherer et al., 1982). One possible explanation is that conceptualizing self-efficacy as a generalized global personality construct might not capture its predictive value in coaching. Specific to the goals set during coaching, task-related self-efficacy may provide a better explanation and predictive value for coaching behaviors and outcomes.

Future research should explore the significance of task-related self-efficacy as a condition in the coaching process. Conducting large-scale studies with randomized control trials can help assess different factors that contribute to coaching effectiveness. By comparing coaching and non-coaching conditions, a better understanding of what makes coaching effective can be gained. Additionally, examining various task-related behaviors, traits, and contexts can provide deeper insights into the effectiveness of coaching as a developmental

tool. Researchers should focus on the learner, task, and context components of learning transfer to enhance the assessment and practice of coaching.

The fourth study provides compelling evidence that executive coaching is associated with higher manager-rated goal achievement than those who did not receive coaching. This relationship is partially explained by the manager's pursuit of a learning goal. The findings highlight the effectiveness of executive coaching as an intervention in supporting employees in achieving their goals. Using a randomized control group, the study attributes the increased goal achievement to the coaching intervention. This aligns with previous research on coaching, emphasizing its value in goal attainment (Grant, 2003; Grant et al., 2009; Grant & Green, 2010; Zanchetta et al., 2020). Coaching is identified as a goal-focused process in which learning plays a crucial role. Goal theory literature suggests that clear goals and action plans enhance performance and facilitate goal attainment (Gollwitzer, 1999; Locke & Latham, 2002). The connection between learning goals and coaching outcomes is explained by linking achievement goals with the resources provided by the coach and self-regulatory processes (Cellar et al., 2011).

The study reveals that learning goals during coaching intervention results in significantly better goal achievement compared to situations outside of coaching, where performance goals perform better. This finding supports the idea that the goal-focused aspect of the coach-coachee relationship is a powerful predictor of coaching effectiveness (Grant et al., 2013; de Haan et al., 2016). The results emphasize the importance of individual motivation at the beginning of the coaching process and the feedback provided by the coach. Individuals with a high level of learning goal orientation seek to acquire knowledge and skills, viewing feedback as an opportunity for personal improvement (Bozer et al., 2013).

Regarding goal orientation, the study does not find evidence to support the notion that it determines the type of goal chosen in coaching or the manager's reported goal achievement.

Managers independently choose to focus on learning goals regardless of their goal orientation. However, the study does find that individuals with low learning or performance approach goal orientation are more likely to drop out of the study before coaching begins. This suggests that a reduced perception of competence to perform well may discourage managers from considering coaching.

The results also highlight that interaction between four dimensions of achievement goals (task requirements, mastery, performance, and approach), during coaching and the waiting period requires further exploration, as it remains unclear how they operate together and whether they offset each other for different participants. The reported higher goal achievement of managers involved in coaching may be attributed to those with a high level of achievement orientation, as individuals with low achievement goal orientation dropped out of the study.

In summary, the research project provides evidence supporting the effectiveness of executive coaching in assisting managers in improving their performance. Learning goals and the goal-focused aspect of the coach-coachee relationship play pivotal roles in coaching effectiveness. Further research is needed to understand better how the different dimensions of achievement goals interact and influence coaching processes. Moreover, future research should continue to investigate coaching effectiveness using rigorous designs, explore specific behaviors and contextual characteristics, and consider task-related self-efficacy a significant factor. This will contribute to a better understanding of coaching outcomes and inform decision-making regarding coaching interventions.

This research program used different research designs, such as systematic review and experimental study, to enable the evaluation of the effects of executive coaching on different types of outcomes and on individual performance. Three research questions guided the

investigation, examining the effectiveness and behavioral impact of executive coaching and measuring its effects on goal achievement and performance variables.

The studies revealed that executive coaching is an effective organizational intervention, especially for behavioral change. The results showed that managers who received coaching could significantly improve their perception of goal performance compared with those who did not. Impressively, our findings suggest that coaching is effective regardless of the participant's confidence level in performing the task requirements. Moreover, we found strong evidence that coaching is an effective process that companies should use to facilitate learning and goal achievement. Our findings point to learning goals as a critical explanatory mechanism for positive coaching outcomes, highlighting the coaching process's learning aspect. Therefore, executive coaching represents a potent approach to learning and personal development in organizations, leading to improved individual performance. Practically, this finding justifies the use of executive coaching for meaningful leadership and organizational change. This research program augments the limited knowledge in the coaching field and broadens our understanding of coaching effectiveness and its underlying mechanisms.