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 capabilities/behaviors are focused on in coaching within and across organizations.

2. Identify individual leader development as well as business outcomes thought to have been improved as a result of coaching.

3. Explore perceptions of the qualitative and quantitative value, impact and satisfaction of executive coaching engagements.

4. Use a time-efficient, concise data collection 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.
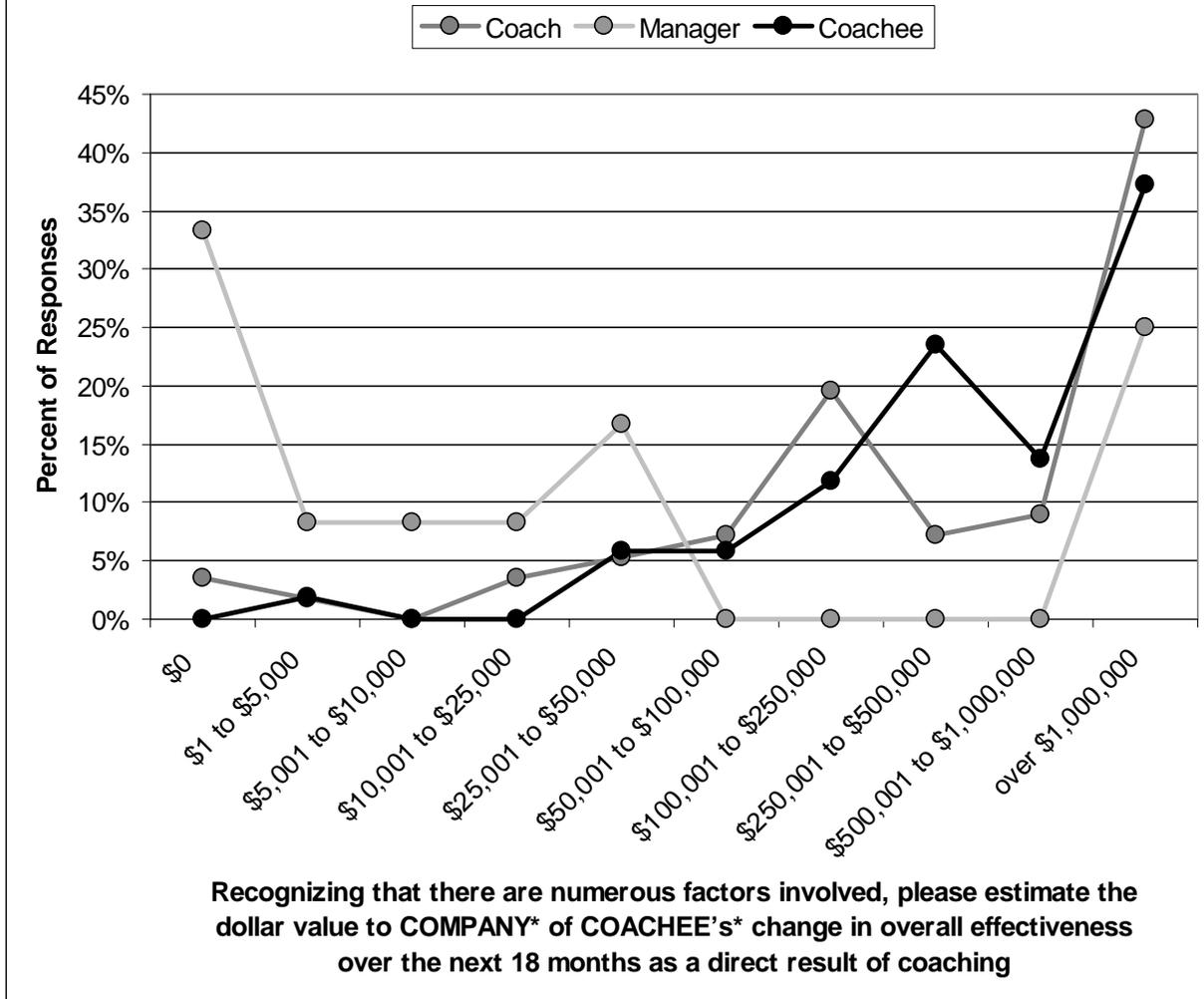
Overall Future Value

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**

Coach — Manager — Coachee

**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 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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