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A Qualitative Study on the Practice of Executive Coaching to Improve Leadership Capacity in Academic Deans at American Higher Education Institutions

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SOUTHERN METHODIST UNIVERSITY
SIMMONS SCHOOL OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

A QUALITATIVE STUDY ON THE PRACTICE OF EXECUTIVE COACHING
TO IMPROVE LEADERSHIP CAPACITY IN ACADEMIC DEANS AT
AMERICAN HIGHER EDUCATION INSTITUTIONS

By

David Wayne Bertrand

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ABSTRACT

The history and sociology of faculty career transitions to deanships is an intriguing phenomenon, given that the skill sets of accomplished scholars vary immensely from the duties and responsibilities of academic deans. On top of that, today's academic deans face particularly challenging leadership dilemmas. Navigating the transition from a scholarly focus to adopt a more team-oriented, managerial approach may prove difficult, especially when personal interests might need to be sacrificed for the unit's collective gain—an idea not necessarily supported or rewarded in a researcher/scholar paradigm. This exploratory, qualitative study sought to examine if executive coaching is an effective strategy to swiftly and ably prepare deans for the unique requirements of the position, as well as to equip them with and/or improve transformational leadership skills. Results were favorable towards coaching and showed associations in transformational leadership to be strongest in the component of intellectual stimulation; provided with new information from their executive coaches, deans were more skillful in fostering innovation and creativity among their followers. Deans also described improvements in self-awareness, self-care, and in empathetic behavior—outcomes that showed the deans received value on a personal level and not just professionally. As perceived by the deans, coaches achieved these outcomes by building trust, the superior quality of their listening skills, and their ability to offer useful perspectives. The information provided in this study might challenge higher education institutions to consider executive coaching as a way to eliminate blind spots and address personal and organizational challenges that academic deans encounter.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES.....	iv
LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS.....	v
I. INTRODUCTION.....	1
II. REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE	4
Introduction.....	4
Executive Coaching	4
Conceptual understanding and definition.....	4
Why executive coaching?.....	4
Process and activities	5
Qualifications for executive coaches	6
Outcomes of executive coaching	8
Transformational Leadership	8
Conceptual understanding and definition.....	8
Higher education.....	9
Charismatic leadership.....	9
Traits and behaviors.....	10
Academic Dean Leadership	10
Duties and responsibilities	10
Leadership in higher education.....	11
Challenges.....	11
Lifecycle of a dean.....	12
III. METHOD	12
Introduction.....	12
Researcher Background	13
Philosophical Assumption	14
Participant Selection	14
Coding and Analyzing	15

IV. RESULTS.....	15
Informant #1 - Laura.....	15
Informant #2 - Michael.....	18
Informant #3 - Tony.....	20
Informant #4 - Alan.....	22
Informant #5 - Lynn.....	25
V. DISCUSSION, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION	27
Initial Attitudes towards Executive Coaching	28
The Impact of Executive Coaching.....	30
Culture.....	31
Expectations of coaches.....	31
Notable themes that emerged.....	32
Empathy	32
Self-awareness	34
Self-care	34
Listening	35
Perspective	36
Trust	37
Recommendations.....	38
For Practice: Executive Coaches	38
For Practice: Academic Deans.....	39
For Future Research.....	40
Limitations.....	41
Conclusion.....	42
APPENDICES.....	44
A - Institutional Review Board Approval Letter	44
B - Informed Consent Document.....	45
C - Protocol for Interviews	48
REFERENCES	50

LIST OF TABLES

TABLE 1: Skills Executive Coaches can Increase and/or Improve.....	5
TABLE 2: Executive Coaches' Activities and Processes.....	6

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

CEO.....	Chief Executive Officer
DiSC.....	Dominance, Influence, Steadiness, and Conscientiousness
IQ.....	Intelligence Quotient
MBA.....	Master of Business Administration
PhD.....	Doctor of Philosophy
ROI.....	Return on Investment
SCARF.....	Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness, and Fairness

Introduction

Leadership in higher education is a heavily researched topic, giving credence to the idea that many stakeholders find it an important and worthwhile pursuit. However, despite the apparent abundance of leadership research, Birnbaum (1992) claimed we still know very little about leadership, in general, and because of the complexities that come with leading others, the full nuances of leadership will never be understood. This assertion has not stopped researchers from trying, though, as the search for an increased knowledge base around academic leadership and effectiveness continues. Leadership efficacy can be a critical factor that affects how institutions operate and improve. Ramsden (1998) advanced the idea that good leadership could be the most cost-effective and practical strategy to address the challenges of the academy:

It can transform the commonplace and average into the remarkable and excellent; it has the effect of making everyone feel personally responsible for the standard of work produced by themselves and their colleagues; it inspires people to grasp the opportunities offered by change (p. 363).

The problem of practice investigated in this study addressed the leadership competence gap in higher education and the practice of executive coaching to increase academic deans' transformational leadership skills. For the purposes of this study, the traits of transformational leaders were categorized as charisma, communication ability (as it relates to vision), intellectual stimulation, and interpersonal skills as a means to provide individualized consideration (Bass, 1985; Bess & Dee, 2008). Transformational leadership behaviors have been shown to be positively associated with leader effectiveness (Kezar, Carducci, & Contreras-McGavin, 2001).

There is some consensus in higher education that these are unprecedented times for those in leadership positions. Economic pressures have placed institutions in compromising positions as they attempt to figure out how to increase enrollment, cut budgets, increase faculty and staff workloads, all while tenured faculty positions diminish and stress rises across the board (Cameron & Ulrich, 1986; Weinstock & Sanaghan, 2015). These challenging times bring about perplexing leadership dilemmas, which demand leaders find new ways to manage competing priorities with time-honored academic values. For example, newly promoted administrative leaders, such as department chairs and deans, are expected to successfully facilitate meetings, build relationships with faculty and other constituent groups, manage personnel issues (including underperforming faculty), provide and receive constructive feedback, and perform many other important duties (Weinstock & Sanaghan, 2015). Skill sets for provosts and presidents can be even more administratively robust and complex. Institutions are faced with the immense challenge of equipping future academic administrators with the necessary skills to lead effectively; however, because academic professionals are commonly incentivized only for scholarly activities (i.e., obtaining grants, research and publishing), it is unlikely they will fully initiate the leadership development process on their own. Furthermore, unfortunately, institutions of higher education are also unlikely to initiate the process given the low prioritization of leadership development in the academy (Astin & Astin, 2000). In order to prioritize leadership development in higher education among senior level administrators, institutional decision makers need to look at innovative ways, one of which is executive coaching, for grooming the leaders of tomorrow.

Coaching is broadly defined by Whitmore (1992) as “unlocking a person’s potential to maximize their own performance. It is helping them to learn rather than teaching them” (p. 8). Executive coaching is a strategic approach to personal and professional development (Grant, 2005) known as

...a helping relationship formed between a client who has managerial authority and responsibility in an organization and a consultant who uses a wide variety of behavioral techniques and methods to assist the client to achieve a mutually identified set of goals to improve his or her professional performance and personal satisfaction and, consequently, to improve the effectiveness of the client’s organization within a formally defined coaching agreement (Kilburg, 1996, p. 142).

In the United States, annual spending on executive coaching is roughly \$1 billion (Sherman & Freas, 2004). Institutions can potentially increase the leadership IQ of presidents, provosts, deans, and department chairs by upskilling them through the practices of executive coaching. Bowen & McPherson (2016) acknowledged the need for better leadership in higher education and found that too many academic leaders, especially presidents, exhibit risk-averse behaviors. For example, *rocking the boat* is seemingly discouraged as it can reduce one’s chances of moving up the higher education leadership ladder. Search committees tend to lean towards candidates who play it safe, avoiding a potentially embarrassing hire. A challenge with this approach is that academia may be losing out on attracting leaders who have the courage to go against the grain. Without opportunities for real experimentation (i.e., risk-taking behaviors), administrators miss out on key technological advances and faculty leaders continue to stay away from new ideas (e.g., flipped classrooms and hybrid courses). With the continued prevalence of risk-averse behaviors, improving educational outcomes while controlling costs is improbable (Bowen & McPherson, 2016).

Academic middle managers in the leadership pipeline can also benefit from executive coaches as long as internal searches are conducted to identify those with leadership potential and release time is offered to pursue the one-on-one training approach in leadership skills. The problem of scarce leadership talent in higher education is not a lack of leaders; the problem is there are not enough *developed* leaders. While executive coaching might help close the gap, Bass (1998) asserted the leadership development approach must focus on the individual as well as the organization.

The traditional career path for an academic scholar, aspiring for the highest levels of responsibility and leadership within institutions of higher learning, might resemble the following pattern: assistant professor → associate professor → full professor → department chair → dean → provost → president. Full professors usually begin with a tenure-track appointment, which demands a certain number of publications and career distinctions along the way to gain opportunities for promotion. The process takes a considerable amount of time from one’s career, and according to one study of independent institutions of higher education, the path to becoming a first-time president is not realized, on average, until age 59 (Hartley & Godin, 2009). The best professors are generally known to possess high levels of knowledge in a specific area of research, have excellent writing, verbal, organizational, analytical, and time management skills, and can effectively assess student outcomes. Given these are the skills that trained researchers and tenure-track academics are customarily adept in, the progressive leap to senior level

academic leadership positions might seem peculiar when considering the duties and responsibilities of a department chair or even a dean. In fact, research has shown that most scholars do not enter the field with an administrative position in mind (Wolverton & Gmelch, 2002). Nevertheless, deans commonly take on supervisory roles and spend much of their time working with and bringing out the best in faculty (Reed, 2014). Managing personnel and organizational change can involve having a more outward-facing, team-focused, available presence and personality. Those trained as scholars, on the other hand, are groomed to secure grants, publish journal articles and books, and accumulate pedagogical knowledge (Spence-Ariemma, 2014). The very nature of their research work demands they set aside a great deal of time for publication endeavors in order to accomplish important career goals and objectives. Their schedules become more complex when balancing teaching and service responsibilities. To further complicate the leadership dilemma, *The Chronicle of Higher Education Almanac* (2016) reported 64.5% of faculty members are neither tenured nor on the tenure track at private non-profit institutions, meaning senior-level administrators are leading a largely contingent labor force of faculty driven by a different set of aspirations, behaviors, motivations, and sources of satisfaction (Baldwin & Chronister, 2001). Navigating the transition from a scholarly mindset to adopt a leadership view is difficult especially when personal interests might need to be sacrificed for the unit's collective gain, an idea that is not necessarily supported or rewarded in a researcher paradigm.

Professionals trained as career scholars commonly accept promotions into leadership positions requiring management of people and change, even though they may not possess the specific skill set to perform the duties and responsibilities of the position. Some might argue that the excellence attained in scholarship, research, and teaching are transferable skills, meaning the experience of becoming an expert in one domain is evidence for competence to be quickly achieved in another. Weinstock and Sanaghan (2015) referred to this logic as a “dangerous assumption” when it comes to identifying leadership potential (p. 25). Nonetheless, the ideals of research universities predictably value prestige in scholarship over an affinity for leadership (Carstensen, 2000). For academics thrust into dean, provost, and president positions—without prior leadership development—steep learning curves ensue, which can jeopardize all members of the organization. These findings warrant further study to discover how we can better prepare leaders in the pipeline and better equip leaders already holding senior-level positions.

Emerging leaders lower on the chain of command need great leadership modeled for them. Academic leaders in supervisory roles most likely traveled the academy's traditional path to acquiring more responsibility: becoming nationally and/or internationally recognized as an expert in a research niche of a discipline and then rising to a position of leadership within a unit or school. If indeed institutions of higher learning could reduce the number of underprepared administrators and improve the collective leadership IQ of its senior-level leaders, they could more ably lead through challenging times. The purpose of this exploratory study is to shed light on the practice of executive coaching and its perceived value in increasing transformational leadership skills of academic deans in higher education. The following served as research questions to guide the study: *How effective is executive coaching in regards to improving the leadership skills of academic deans? What are other outcomes of executive coaching as experienced by academic deans?* While the evidence-based research on leadership is vast, the peer-reviewed coaching literature is lacking. Elliott (2005) acknowledged the need for researchers of evidence-based coaching to incorporate the leadership literature, emphasizing the

importance of it for the growth of the industry. Research has shown, albeit in limited fashion, that transformational leadership qualities are not solely innate but can be learned and improved upon (Bass, 1999; Parry & Sinha, 2002; Vandenberghe, 1999). This claim is central for stakeholders to champion efforts to improve leadership skills in individuals and overall leadership competence in organizations.

Review of Related Literature

Introduction

Many types of coaching exist, and in developing a search strategy, I found it necessary to first come to an understanding of the broader coaching narrative, the operational definition of executive coaching, and instances in which it has been successfully utilized to improve performance. Secondly, I defined transformational leadership according to the literature and provided evidence for its relevance to higher education administrators. Lastly, I distinguished the different duties and responsibilities of academic deans, as well as the challenges they frequently encounter.

Executive Coaching

Conceptual understanding and definition. Kilburg's (1996) definition of *executive coaching* not only helped to clarify theory and practice from an organizational perspective (Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011), but it also conceptualized the consulting activities of executive coaches, whose clients generally consist of managers and senior leaders in organizations. The nature of coaching lends itself to share boundaries with counseling, psychology, teaching, learning, and perhaps other disciplines (Tobias, 1996). These synthesized elements generate the unique craft of executive coaching. Passmore and Fillery-Travis (2011) contended that the knowledge and practice of psychology, including the understanding of behavior and emotion, was integral to a coach helping leaders learn and deal with change. They expanded upon Kilburg's (1996) findings and defined coaching as "a Socratic based dialogue between a facilitator [coach] and a participant [client] where the majority of interventions used by the facilitator are open questions which are aimed at stimulating the self-awareness and personal responsibility of the participant" (Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011, p. 5). Even brain research is used to define and influence how coaches teach leaders how to understand the true drivers of human social behavior. For example, the SCARF (Status, Certainty, Autonomy, Relatedness, and Fairness) model is one framework used in social neuroscience to explore the biological foundations of why human beings act the way they do (Rock, 2008). Executive coaches can pull from various disciplines and bodies of work to accomplish their objectives with managers and leaders.

Why executive coaching? The importance of developing extraordinary academic leaders is ever-pressing. As deans increasingly deal with the internal and external forces that affect institutional environments, the rate at which these challenges need addressing is more demanding than ever. Anticipating and preparing people for change, as well as developing leaders within the organization to accomplish or exceed institutional objectives, are the most pressing tasks leaders face. Unlike day or even weeklong classes, seminars and e-learning

programs, executive coaches hold leaders accountable beyond a single event, helping leaders focus on the most important tasks and serving as strategic partners for implementation (Zenger & Stinnett, 2006). While the academic leader devotes time and energy into his/her people and job responsibilities, the executive coach prioritizes the academic leader’s growth and development and ensures accountability to previously agreed upon short-term and long-term commitments. The executive coach strives to make the leader acutely aware of his/her unique strengths, provides timely feedback and steering in the middle of projects, and improves the leader’s efficiency at accomplishing tasks (Smith & Sandstrom, 1999). The result of the partnership allows for outcomes that may not otherwise have been possible without the expertise of a coach.

Because the literature that rigorously evaluates the effectiveness of coaching outcomes is still developing, it is difficult to draw convincing conclusions about which audiences might most benefit from coaching and the optimal timing for the relationship. Interestingly, despite the lack of evidence, “more than 70% of organizations with formal leadership development initiatives employ coaching as an important part of that mix” (De Meuse, Dai, & Lee, 2009, p. 117), and its popularity during recent years has established the practice as a major method for leadership development (Zenger & Stinnett, 2006). Subsequently, the subject area of executive coaching has increased 300% in scholarly journals from 1994 to 2004 (De Meuse et al., 2009). Broadly speaking, academic leaders with the goals (shown in Table 1) are viable candidates to hire executive coaches (Kilburg, 1996).

Table 1.

Skills Executive Coaches can Increase and/or Improve

Desire to Increase...	Desire to Improve...
Range, flexibility, and effectiveness of behaviors	Ability to manage career and advance professionally
Capacity to manage an organization (i.e., planning, organization, staffing, decision making, etc.)	Effectiveness of the organization or team
Psychological and social competencies (e.g., social awareness, tolerance of ambiguity, interpersonal skills, capacity to learn and grow, stress hardiness, etc.)	The ability to manage the tensions between organizational, family, community, industry, and personal needs and demands
Ability to manage in crisis and conflict	

Process and activities. Executive coaches employ a variety of organizational development interventions, training technologies, methods, and techniques. Table 2 presents an abbreviated listing of coaches’ activities and processes (Kilburg, 1996).

Table 2.

Executive Coaches' Activities and Processes

Education, Training, and Skill Development	Empathy, encouragement, and tact	Role Playing
Organizational assessment and diagnosis	Brainstorming (e.g., strategies, methods, diagnostics, hypothesis testing, etc.)	Punishment and extinction of maladaptive behaviors; establishing consequences for behaviors
Communications (i.e., active listening, analysis, evaluation questions, etc.)	Clarifications (i.e., restatements of client communications)	Assessment and feedback (e.g., leadership style, personality dimensions, etc.)
Interpretations (i.e., verbal interventions to direct the client's attention to issues, behaviors, thoughts, etc.); evident to coach but out of client's conscious awareness	Reconstructions (i.e., attempts based on what is present and what is missing in client's communications)	Confrontations (i.e., verbal interventions to direct the client's attention to issues, behaviors, thoughts, etc.); evident to both client and coach
Helping to set limits	Helping to maintain boundaries	Conflict and crisis management
Group process and working relationship interventions	Journaling, reading assignments, conferences, and workshops	Behavioral analysis: gathering and assessing information

Kilburg's (1996) scope of activities is large, but practitioners such as Smith and Sandstrom (1999) simplified executive coaching responsibilities into three primary strategic interventions: 1) development of the leaders themselves, 2) implementation and execution of plans/change, and 3) attracting, retaining, and developing other leaders. To do these tasks well, the coach must be skilled in the art of questioning, causing the recipient to think, discover, and search (Bossidy, Charan, & Burck, 2011). Dingman (2004) looked for similarities between all published models of coaching processes and identified six generic stages: 1) formal contracting, 2) relationship building, 3) assessment, 4) getting feedback and reflecting, 5) goal setting, and 6) implementation and evaluation.

Qualifications for executive coaches. The area of practice in professional leadership coaching is light on empirical research and yet high in sheer number of practitioners. Insufficient standardization or certification exists in the industry; unlicensed practitioners cause concern for coaches and organizational leaders alike (Smith & Sandstrom, 1999). When informally polling audiences at two forums, the Australian Psychological Society's Coaching Psychology Interest Group and the International Coach Federation, Elliott (2005) reported well over one-third of respondents claimed to either be aspiring coaches or currently practicing as leadership coaches. Given the rising tide of executive coaches globally, there is a great need for universal qualifications that effectively characterize the profession. Some recipients of executive coaching prefer a graduate degree in psychology while others require a mixture of psychology, experience in the working environment at hand, established reputation as a coach, listening skills, and

professionalism (i.e., intelligence, integrity, confidentiality, and objectivity) (Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011; Wasylshyn, 2003). Zenger and Stinnett (2006) claimed most qualified coaches possess the ability to: 1) build strong relationships, 2) communicate effectively, 3) facilitate action and results, and 4) provide ongoing support and accountability. Providing ongoing support is a key qualification to point out, distinguishing coaching from being a situational phenomenon. Intriguingly, these four skill sets are not only essential criteria for coaches but for leaders too.

Elliott (2005) posited that executive leadership coaching is a specialist form of professional coaching, as opposed to a generalist coach (i.e., life coach) that might not be well-versed in the leadership literature as it relates to groups, organizations, and individual development. He created seven propositions to define the parameters of specialist professional leadership coaching:

- 1) *Leadership coaching requires the application of relevant knowledge frameworks.* Knowledge of leadership and group development frameworks equip coaches with the necessary concepts, theories, and strategies to interpret complex organizational and leadership problems.
- 2) *Accessing the extensive leadership assessment and development research is essential to leadership coaching.* This and the first proposition stress the importance of using evidence-based practices as an executive coach and substantiate claims expressing that leadership coaches need training above and beyond that of generalist coaching models. Professional leadership coaches must understand leadership theories from research, as well as leadership assessment and development interventions from the literature.
- 3) *A broad set of skills, methods and strategies is required in the leadership coach.* Leadership coaches must go beyond simply helping clients set goals and find solutions, as suggested by mainstream generalist models. Critical application of leadership, group, and organizational models lay the foundation for the broad skillset needed in executive leadership coaching.
- 4) *Both expert interpretation and process facilitation modalities are required in the specialist leadership coaching relationship.* These propositions assume leadership coaching is a specialized form of professional coaching and while these coaches will have a certain level of expert skill, it is expected the coach facilitate and empower, allowing the client to move forward in a self-directed manner. The professional coach will still bring forth expert interpretations based on theory or experience, weaving back-and-forth seamlessly from the roles of expert (e.g., consulting, training, and advising) and facilitative coach.
- 5) *Leadership coaching is more effective when undertaken simultaneously at multiple levels.* This proposition introduces the idea that coaching is most effective when intervening not only with the leader but with other team members and stakeholders in order to identify the influencers in the organization and their associated outcomes.
- 6) *The use of applied ethics is required in leadership coaching.* Coaches are exposed to confidential information in various layers of trusted relationships within an organization. Honest, dignified, and respectful behavior is paramount for successful, professional, ethical coaching.

- 7) *Professional leadership coaching roles need to be contractual.* The nature of the professional relationship can take on many forms, but a contractual role may be the most clearly defined. It works best when both coach and coachee are active participants and have equal parts in commitment to the outcome(s). (Elliot, 2005)

Outcomes of executive coaching. Wasylyshyn (2003) found that the most significant, influential factor of an effective executive coach was the ability to form a strong connection with the client. The literature regularly identified quality of the coach-client relationship as the factor most correlated to the success of a coaching intervention (Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011). Similarly, in regards to teaching how to manage and lead through change, client readiness was found as the most meaningful factor for positive outcomes (Lambert & Barley, 2002). While more research is needed to substantiate these claims, it does appear to show that quality coach-client relationships and the client's enthusiasm to be coached lead to better outcomes. Glasgow, Weinstock, Lachman, Suplee, and Dreher (2009) found executive coaching to be a successful professional development strategy for improving leadership of deans, directors, and department chairs when coupled with a formal, campus-based leadership symposia. The study was performed within Drexel University's undergraduate programs in health professions and nursing. A few of the challenges administrators needed help with included: managing conflict, how to exert authority and be assertive, balancing relationships and task accomplishment, developing listening skills, managing self-care, and modulating emotional reactivity. All of the administrators in the study found executive coaching to be a beneficial practice in dealing with these challenges (Glasgow et al., 2009).

One risk facing executive coaching, given the novelty of the practice, is the notion that it is more of a fad than a sustainable and systemic intervention. Others worry about the ROI (return on investment), which can be difficult to back with rigorous research. However, a Manchester Review study of 100 executives cited the ROI for coaching activities at 5.7 times the investment (Zenger & Stinnett, 2006). The benefits and challenges of executive coaching within the academic realm are largely an unknown and unexplored phenomenon.

Transformational Leadership

Conceptual understanding and definition. The transformational leadership construct, initially proposed by Burns (1978), suggested that transformational leaders lead "by raising [their] level of awareness, [their] level of consciousness about the importance and value of designated outcomes, and ways of reaching them" (p. 20). These leaders differed from transactional leaders, espousing a culture of exchanging promises and rewards for effort. Transformational leaders, rather, inspire, encourage intellectual progress, treat others considerately, and place the team or organization ahead of any self-interests (Bass, 1999). They view followers as complete human beings as opposed to seeing them as "instruments for completing tasks" (Bess & Dee, 2008, p. 841). Transformational leadership has also been characterized as going beyond transactional behaviors that can lead to employee dependence (Barling, Weber, & Kelloway, 1996; Bass, 1985), and instead, empowering followers by developing them into "high involvement individuals and teams," ultimately achieving higher levels of overall organizational success (Bass, 1999, p. 9). Other research suggests transformational and transactional leadership are not mutually exclusive constructs; leaders can exude the qualities of both in a complementary way, and the absence of one in favor of the other likely results in ineffectiveness (Bass, Avolio, & Goodheim, 1987; Bennis, 1993; Lowe,

Kroeck, & Sivasubramaniam, 1996). However, follower satisfaction and effectiveness are more highly correlated with transformational behaviors than with transactional. Reasons for this correlation might be due to a transformational leader's desire to help followers cope as they struggle with change (Kotter, 1999). The transactional/transformational leadership paradigms still need further exploration in order to fully understand the complete range of their nuances (Bass, 1999).

Despite various available ways of using the paradigm in practice, command-and-control leadership of the 1970s and 1980s has largely been replaced by models of servant and collective leadership. Collective leadership refers to the concept that a shared vision developed by constituents trumps a vision established by a president or leadership team (Kezar et al., 2006). In other words, transformational leadership serves as a conduit between old and new views of leadership and emphasizes the interaction between leaders and followers (Rost, 1991). Much of the literature focuses on the characteristics of transformational leaders, leaving more to be desired on the process of transformational leadership, including leader-follower relations (Kezar et al., 2006). Also, the generalizability of transformational leadership attributes across cultures has come into question, given the movement towards a global society. However, research has addressed this concern showing transformational leadership qualities to be universal and to transcend culture (Kezar et al., 2006).

Higher education. Cameron and Ulrich (1986) stated that transformational leadership in colleges and universities is essential in order to adapt to the conditions, challenges, and threats that face higher education. Additionally, transformational leadership is more likely to surface in organizations with less restrictive environments (Lowe, Kroeck, & Sivasubramaniam, 1996). Higher education institutions with more autonomous and less formalized expectations for the individual behavior of academic administrators could be suitable spaces for transformational leadership to emerge. Compared to transactional leadership, transformational leadership has been acknowledged as having the potential of greater influence and potency in organizations (Bess & Dee, 2008). This influence can manifest as heightened leader commitment, involvement, loyalty, and performance (Barling, Weber, & Kelloway, 1996; Bass, 1999; Dvir, Eden, Avolio, & Shamir, 2002). Evidence has also been shown that transformational leadership behavior results in more favorable financial outcomes (Vandenberghe, 1999).

In regards to leading diversity initiatives, transformational leadership behaviors have been identified as the best approach to use. In one study examining diversity on college campuses, transformational behaviors of academic leaders such as seeking to empower others, developing trust, working to transform organizational culture, were found to best serve institutional leaders (Kezar et al., 2006). Tierney (1991) and Bowen and McPherson (2016) both argued for the importance of higher education to move out of the status quo, especially as it relates to technology. Other areas of interest in higher education in need of innovative leadership are the need for greater access and the struggle of embracing assessment. Leaders that seek out opportunities to take on risk and challenge the status quo are indeed rare in academia (Bowen & McPherson, 2016).

Charismatic leadership. Charisma is closely linked to transformational leadership and has been used in several theories; scholars agree it is an essential component to leadership effectiveness (Bess & Dee, 2008). Charismatic leadership has been strongly linked to followers demonstrating positive attitudes towards their work, loyalty in staying at their institutions, and

support for the leader's wisdom, power, and influence (Avolio, Gardner, Walumbwa, Luthans, & May, 2004; de Hoogh, et al., 2005; House, 1999). However, charismatic leadership is distinct from transformational leadership, even though the two are often used interchangeably. Charisma is one of the four dimensions of transformational leadership, the other three being inspiration and the ability to communicate a vision, capacity for intellectual stimulation, and consideration for individual needs (Barling, Weber, & Kelloway, 1996; Bass, 1985). Desired outcomes of these dimensions include follower development and follower performance (Bass & Avolio, 1990). Dvir et al. (2002) expanded upon these findings and created a conceptual framework comprised of the three domains of follower development: motivation, morality, and empowerment. They found that among followers, transformational leadership enhanced at least one measure of each domain. Limitations in these studies included the challenge of controlling for unmeasured variables that affect leadership, such as team cohesiveness and organizational culture (Dvir et al., 2002).

Traits and behaviors. Bennis and Nanus (1985) studied transformational leader traits and found they exhibit the following associated behavioral abilities: to focus attention by providing a vision; to make meaning through communication; to establish trust; to demonstrate positive self-regard and concentrate on winning (instead of not losing); to accept people as they are; to approach relationships and problems in terms of the present (and not the past); to treat close staff with dignity; to trust others despite risk; and to not wait for approval. In addition, Kouzes and Posner (2002) found five types of behavior to be integral to transformational leadership: to challenge the process (e.g., searching for opportunities and experimenting); to inspire a shared vision (motivating others toward that vision); to enable others to act (e.g., encouraging collaboration and self-development); to model the way (i.e., leading by example); and to encourage the heart (e.g., celebrating achievements). Providing additional context, transactional and transformational theories are classified within the idiographic dimension of Barrow's (1977) conceptualization of leadership.

Academic Dean Leadership

Duties and responsibilities. The scope of a dean's activities is vast and a challenge to capture in a succinct manner. Gmelch & Wolverson (2002) investigated academic dean leadership and proposed the following definition: "Academic leadership is the act of building a community of scholars to set direction and achieve common purposes through the empowerment of faculty and staff" (p. 5). Accordingly, the definition offers three conditions for deans to meet for effective leadership: 1) building a community of scholars – faculty balance their own interests with the interests of the college, seeking to build a community within the school, rich with support, comradery, and social responsibility; 2) setting direction – deans are responsible for setting the direction of the school, preferably action-oriented, through crafting the vision and communicating clearly about why the school exists and what they will strive to accomplish collectively; and 3) empowering others – all stakeholders associated with the school are empowered to affect change, especially faculty. Deans empower faculty by convincing them of their significance to the community, engaging them in their work, rewarding them for good performance, and sharing power and influence with them (Gmelch & Wolverson, 2002). Taking it a step further, deans then search for funding to support these goals. Deans also meet with top administrators and students, represent the school at a multitude of events, find time for scholarship, and provide measurements for how much students are learning (June, 2014). Given the conceptualizations of executive coach responsibilities by Smith and Sandstrom (1999) (i.e.,

developing other leaders) and Zenger and Stinnett (2006) (i.e., building strong relationships, facilitating action and results), executive coaches may be uniquely qualified to guide, mentor, develop, and advise academic deans.

Leadership in higher education. Deans may display different behaviors depending on the institution sector (e.g., public 4-year, private nonprofit 4-year, public 2-year, etc.) and academic discipline (e.g. humanities, sciences, business, engineering, etc.). For example, Gmelch and Wolverton (2002) found that education deans were significantly more likely to engage in the transformational leadership behaviors defined above. On the contrary, business school deans rated the transformational attributes the least characteristic of their behavior as deans. Deans in research universities did not value the dimension of community building as much as deans in comprehensive institutions. The supposed cultural differences amongst business, education, and even other disciplines, may affect requirements, expectations, and subsequent leadership behaviors of deans. For example, in Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management, Dean Sally Blount represents a new breed of business school deans who possess a broad set of leadership skills with a background in management, rather than narrow expertise in economics or finance. Harvard and Georgetown universities have also followed suit, hiring deans with an affinity for leadership, organizational behavior, corporate transformation, and accountability. Search committees are increasingly prioritizing a candidate's ability to build rankings and increase market share for the school; whereas, in the past, the criteria were a bit simpler—prioritizing candidates who embraced faculty, displayed a record of impressive scholarship, managed relationships with multiple stakeholders, and simply got things done. Accordingly, with the ever-changing and progressively more difficult issues to face, more and more deans are populating the ranks that do not resemble the psychological disposition nor management orientation of traditional deans of the past with narrow expertise (Mangan, 2014).

Key differences also exist when leading and managing in public versus private institutions. One study in business found that managing a company in the public sector was simply harder because of the degree of market exposure, legal constraints, political influences, coerciveness, system complexity, and public scrutiny, to name just a few (Allison, 1986). These findings may be transferrable to higher education as public institutions of higher learning grapple with many of the same challenges. In another study of midlevel leaders in higher education, which included academic and nonacademic senior-level administrators and deans, review and intervention protocols (e.g., federal government mandates and compliance, state policies and procedures affecting workload, program and budget reviews) were found to have a significant and positive impact on leader satisfaction scores. This was interpreted to mean that midlevel administrative leaders of public institutions largely accepted and understood their reporting role to state and federal demands (Rosser, 2004).

Challenges. According to Wolverton & Gmelch (2002), dean responsibilities can be summarized into six main roles: fiscal resource management, academic personnel management, internal productivity (i.e., work climate, communication), personal scholarship, leadership, and external and political relations. Deans can experience a variety of problems within all of these roles. Challenges deans face include (but are not limited to) many of the following issues: managing non-academic staff; keeping current with technological advances; recruiting, selecting and terminating faculty; replacing a department chair; evaluating chair and faculty performance; maintaining effective communication across departments; communicating goals/mission to constituents across campus; maintaining their own scholarly interests; fostering their own

professional growth; soliciting ideas to improve the college; assigning duties to department chairs and directors; building relationships with outside stakeholders; dealing with the media; and representing the college to the administration (Buller, 2015; Wolverton & Gmelch, 2002). Deans typically prioritize internal productivity above all else, emphasizing academic and fiscal management problems as most fundamental to the position. External and political relations were also rated as highly important by deans, even ahead of leadership. Personal scholarship was rated the least important of all duties (Wolverton & Gmelch, 2002). Handling conflict is largely shaped by the typology of the dean, as conceptualized by Bright and Richards (2001): the corporate dean, treating the college as a business first and academic enterprise second; the faculty-citizen dean, a true scholar; and the accidental-tourist dean, rising the ranks through an administrative route.

Lifecycle of a dean. New deans commonly find themselves in a role with new demands, such as managing people and change. “I’m trying to look at what I know about being an academic and what I’m learning about being a good business leader and put them together,” said Nancy Songer, a dean of Drexel University’s School of Education (June, 2014, p. 3). Deans must balance both academic and business oriented roles. If faculty perceive too much emphasis is placed on the business of the school, the dean risks alienating faculty and perhaps other stakeholders (June, 2014).

Deans could possibly hurt their institutions by serving years in excess of the normal lifecycle. After ten years of service, deans may want to honestly evaluate their position as this juncture seems to be a critical point in their careers where they typically disengage in direction setting, which “could prove crucial to the wellbeing of their colleges” (Gmelch & Wolverton, 2002, p. 13). The lifecycle of a dean is important to note, as the practice of executive coaching at the correct time in a dean’s tenure could prove to be meaningful if the desired result is to expand leadership capacity. Before the lifecycle even begins, however, there are many things a prospective dean can do to prepare for the upcoming leadership challenges such as volunteer for leadership roles, request to be placed on accreditation review committees, stay apprised of ongoing higher education issues, promote interdisciplinary work, develop budgetary experience, and attend workshops for academic leaders (Buller, 2015). The academic dean position is a complex and demanding role, and one that requires a great amount skill, perspective, and dexterity.

Methods of Inquiry

Introduction

This exploratory study examined the use of executive coaching to upskill the leadership abilities of academic deans. It began with experiential knowledge and a general theoretical understanding of the history and sociology of faculty career transitions to deanships in the academy. These experiences and literature formed my initial research questions: *How well might executive coaching improve leadership competence in academic deans? What other themes might emerge when academic deans speak of their interactions with executive coaches?* This qualitative study set out to examine the lived experiences of academic deans of four-year postsecondary or graduate institutions and their executive coaches. Specifically, this study

looked at an executive coach's ability to improve transformational leadership skills of an academic dean. The case study approach best characterized this work as the purpose was to tell the leadership story of each dean in as complete a manner as possible, with detailed attention to individual contexts and perspectives. Additionally, the experience of each dean could vary widely from unique approaches used by each executive coach. The case study style allowed for full exploration the nuances of each experience, something that perhaps a survey might not have captured. When possible, interviews were conducted in the field to collect the individual views of deans and their subjective experiences, an epistemological approach. Other interviews were collected via telephone. While I asked exploratory questions to learn more about dean and executive coach experiences, a theoretical lens (i.e., transformational leadership) through which to interpret the deans' responses was critical in order to obtain a measure of effectiveness for executive coaching in academic settings. Thus, interview data was collected with many of the questions based on the four elements of Bass' (1985) Transformation Leadership Theory, adapted from Burns' (1978) initial conceptualization of transformational and transactional leadership styles. The interview questionnaire instrument can be found in Appendix C.

Researcher Background

I am an outsider as it relates to academic dean experiences and yet an insider when it comes to coaching experiences. First, I will share about key experiences in my nine years as a faculty member in the academy and then I will speak to my professional experiences on both sides of the coaching relationship.

Before stepping into academia, I worked one year in the business sector, one year in a private high school, and three years in public high schools, operating under several different supervisors during this time period. In higher education, I have worked for two different department chairs and four different deans in nine years. All in all, I have observed a variety of different leadership styles and approaches. To account for the overall quality of leadership talent in higher education, one startling difference I noticed was the wealth of leadership development opportunities afforded to me in corporate America versus the dearth of similar experiences in the education sector. Given that I have an affinity for studying leadership and for improving my own leadership abilities, I was immediately aware of the lack of prioritization for leadership development opportunities in education. Despite this unfortunate observation, I have still encountered many great leaders in academia but there is still plenty of room for improvement when it comes to leadership development in the academy.

Upon becoming a doctoral student in higher education administration and leadership, I became more aware of the demands and pressures that academic leaders faced. The transformational leadership competence of academic deans affects their ability to serve their schools amidst the unique challenges of today's higher education climate. I have seen many academic leaders, well-versed in scholarship from careers steeped in research and grant writing, ascend the leadership ranks. Yet what seemed to be overlooked was inexperience in leading others, lack of charisma, and the ability to tactfully communicate with various constituent groups, not to mention underdeveloped interpersonal skills.

As a natural developer of others and having been professionally trained as a coach, I could not help but wonder if academic leaders might benefit by having mentors that understood leadership and the dynamics of workplace relationships better than they did. In my childhood, many of my most positive early memories come from playing sports on teams with great

coaches. I looked up to my coaches and valued their feedback and direction. These affirmative experiences factored into my decision to leave the business sector and to instead pursue a life of teaching and coaching. I desired to have an impact on others much like my coaches and teachers had on me. Along the way I have not only had the privilege of being a recipient of coaching but also of playing the role of coach. I have been coaching for fourteen years, mostly part-time but two of the years as a full-time sports coach. However, while I have been a recipient of executive or leadership coaching, I have not formally delivered this kind of coaching. Because of my personal coaching experiences and my observations of executive coaches successfully helping in other industries, I am naturally inclined to believe that coaches for academic leaders could also make a meaningful contribution.

Philosophical Assumption

As a qualitative researcher, my goal was to fully understand the relationship between academic deans and executive coaches and their collective ability to increase transformational leadership behaviors. Since an epistemological approach most closely resonated with my personal theoretical basis of interpretation, I spent time with the deans and relied on quotes from their experiences to tell the stories of their professional encounters with executive coaches. The information provided by these deans might act as a guidepost to help other deans or senior level administrators that find themselves in similar leadership dilemmas, ultimately enabling them to better serve faculty, staff, and other stakeholders within their institutions.

Participant Selection

The systematic approach I used to select academic deans and learn about their experiences, involved several steps. First, I identified academic deans, faculty, and executive coaches with whom I had personal relationships through my current employing institution and asked them to reach out to their colleagues. All three members of my dissertation committee also reached out to their personal network to increase the likelihood of recruiting deans that had currently been using an executive coach for six months or longer. The former Dean *ad interim* of my school, the Associate Dean, as well as the former Dean and Associate Dean, were contacted and asked to assist in the recruitment of participants. Upon reaching out via email to these contacts, it required several follow-up emails and phone calls to solidify and speak with candidates regarding the possibility of participation in the study. In most cases, those in my personal network reached out to their dean colleagues and then copied me on the email, in which case I followed up. In other cases, I was not originally copied on the email but was included on the email thread at a later time once it had been established the dean was able and willing to participate. It was communicated that the study would include one interview, lasting approximately 60 to 90 minutes, of which an audio recording device would be used to ensure accurate capturing of all information. The interview questions were not offered to the subjects ahead of time. However, participants had the option to withhold any data they felt could be harmful to themselves, others, or their institutions.

Participants included academic deans, representing a variety of disciplines, from four-year colleges and universities or graduate schools. They were given consent forms and were told that the intention of the exploratory study was to learn more about the executive coaching process with academic deans and the results of such relationships. It was relayed to the participants that consent forms would be sent to them at least one week in advance of the interview session, and that their signatures on the form would need to be sent back before the

interview could be conducted. Minimal risk existed for the participants and it was reinforced that measures would be taken to ensure confidentiality, such as creating code sheets to protect identifying information and locking materials in a file cabinet.

In addition to the interview sessions, I visited professional websites for each dean to collect relevant demographic and career data. I also asked the deans to provide me access to internal documents, memos, strategic plans, or other important announcements, so that I could better understand the dean's communication style through examining the tenor and composition of those messages. These efforts helped me to effectively triangulate the data and gain a more comprehensive perspective of the dean's leadership style and presence.

Coding and Analyzing

Upon the completion of the interview process, I established a system for collecting and coding all of the data. First, I used Scribie to transcribe all of the interview audio files except for one dean, who asked to not be recorded. Then I read each transcript several times. On the first read, I did not take down any notes but read only to re-familiarize myself with the interview. On the second read, I highlighted important sentences, phrases, and other sections of data that could then later be coded. On the third and subsequent reads of the interviews, I took notes and recorded story lines and major themes. I also took time to notice individual narratives for each dean, including any subtexts that might have arisen during the interview. As important themes emerged with regard to executive coaching practices and leadership lessons, I created categories (i.e., codes) and later described how they were connected in the cross-case analysis and discussion section. After identifying the most salient themes from the interviews using the qualitative research software *ATLAS.ti 8.0*, I created a concept map to organize the information deans had revealed. I then wrote up each interview as its own case and used transformational leadership theory as a frame through which to report the data. Upon completion of the individual case studies, I used the cross-case analysis and discussion section to compare and highlight themes of significant similarity and/or difference in the deans' experiences of the coaching process. Namely, I addressed the initial attitudes deans had going in to the coaching relationships, the impact and results of executive coaching, institutional culture towards coaching, dean expectations of coaches, and lastly, noteworthy emerging themes from the interviews. Deans' thoughts on executive coaching versus other types of leadership development activities they had experienced were covered in the conclusion.

Results

Pseudonyms were created for all informants to protect privacy and ensure confidentiality.

Informant #1 - Laura

My first phone interview was with *Laura*, a business school dean at a private, religiously-affiliated university in the Southwest with a long-standing liberal arts tradition. Laura sought out an executive coach approximately one year into her deanship. Laura's knowledge of executive coaching was quite extensive and unique in that she previously worked in the corporate sector as an executive coach, or organization development consultant, offering leadership development training to individuals and teams. Additionally, the provost at her institution employed an

executive coach and offered her and the other deans the same opportunity at no cost to them personally. With a Ph.D. in clinical psychology, Laura understood from an intellectual standpoint many of the concepts a coach might work with her on. However, where she needed help was in understanding these concepts on an emotional level; indeed, this is where her *blind spots* existed and where she was aware she had room to improve as a leader. Ultimately, it was the mounting stress and daunting complexity of the dean position that led her to the realization that she needed an external coach.

Once Laura decided that she could perform her job better by involving an executive coach, she came up with criteria for hiring her first coach: the coach must be female, responsive, able to establish rapport and a value proposition on the first phone call, able to think fast and analytically, have a deep understanding of and exposure to higher education culture, and be comfortable with having a professional relationship at an *arm's length*. In the recruitment process one coach Laura did not hire wanted her to come fly to his hometown and have dinner with him, and this level of intimacy was too close and personal given she wanted anonymity. Laura preferred phone calls for communication, as opposed to Skype or in-person meetings, and while she knew establishing trust was important, initially she did not want a warm relationship with her coach. She said "I intentionally wanted someone outside of the [undisclosed city] area. Because my job is fairly high profile, I didn't want to work with someone I could bump into, or someone who would know people I have to deal with." However, one theme that kept reoccurring throughout my interview with Laura was her desire to feel safe when speaking to her coach. Due to the personal nature of coaching conversations, often dredging up triggers from the past and dealing with sensitive issues, having a coach that could foster a safe, non-judgmental space was of utmost importance. Upon fully committing to the executive coaching process, Laura established two main goals: (1) to better manage the overall stress of the job and (2) to increase the flexibility of her interpersonal bandwidth, especially in regards to relationships with faculty.

Much of the stress Laura experienced stemmed from requiring faculty to do things that they had never done before. Faculty heavily resisted change and interpreted Laura's initiatives as personal attacks, leaving Laura feeling impatient and frustrated. In response to these challenging issues, one approach Laura's executive coach took was to help her manage stress levels by setting aside time for herself. Laura committed to stop working on the weekends, picked up the practice of meditation, and no longer slept in the same room where her mobile phone was plugged in. Laura mentioned these behavioral changes centered on self-management and self-care as "very important because that sets the whole thing in motion." She desired to *respond* to challenges, not *react* to them. She also mentioned the importance of recognizing how stress can result in fear and anxiety: "I have a really bad case of the imposter syndrome, a horrible case of that, and so I'm waiting for people to find out that I really shouldn't be in this office." In situations like these, a tactic Laura's coach used was to offer her resources and helpful tools to address anxiety and impostor syndrome, as well as ways to meditate and work towards self-acceptance. As she reflected upon her experiences with an executive coach and other leadership development methods, Laura indicated a key distinction in that her executive coach focused on Laura *the person* (e.g., behavior issues) while other mentors provided her coaching for Laura *the professional* (e.g., the structural and systems-level issues deans dean with in higher education).

The second major theme of the interview, and one in which Laura acknowledged as a weakness – quality relationships with faculty – dealt with establishing a more flexible

interpersonal bandwidth. As she was quick to disclose, Laura is a fairly sarcastic person and admitted “sarcasm does not play well in the workplace.” Her sarcastic attitude and style have resulted in tumultuous relationships with many of the faculty. Laura and her coach identified a lack of empathy to the faculty position as a possible root cause of these disputes and as a result, prioritized working on being more empathetic. Laura attributed the success of her coach’s approach to her ability to extract the latent meaning, not the manifest meaning, from the coaching sessions. For example, if Laura was explaining and describing problems she was having during a coaching call, instead of listening to the concrete matter of the stories her coach was listening for the themes and patterns across them. This is how her coach identified a weakness in her empathy skills. In light of this discovery, during many of the role play exercises in the coaching sessions, her coach asked questions that caused Laura to reflect on why a faculty member may be acting or feeling a certain way.

Interpersonal struggles Laura experienced with faculty affected her ability to get them to participate in the vision of the school. Coaching has allowed her to see how the two things are related and how she can take action to move the needle in the opposite direction. Laura mentioned faculty strongly resisted the change she proposed around the mission of the school, leading to dysfunctional relationships and performance. The road to becoming a more empathic leader has not been a fast or easy one, as Laura said “It’s hard to find empathy when I’m just so performance driven.” Strategically, Laura’s coach believes that consistent practices in self-care will naturally lead to having more empathy for others. To Laura’s credit, she has been able to communicate the vision clearly and in a way that faculty could understand, a fundamental part of transformational leadership theory. However, she has not been able to inspire mass participation of that vision due to friction caused by the collective sentiment of the faculty, “I wasn’t hired to do that.” Additional feedback from faculty about her leadership style was that she is too direct, too impatient, and expects too much from people. The frustration was mutual, as Laura said “I mean, it’s really only one stakeholder group. The community loves interacting with me. My board loves interacting with me. It is the faculty. I have a faculty issue.”

In light of all of these contextual factors, Laura and her executive coach have mainly set out to thoughtfully address how to increase self-care and empathetic actions towards faculty in order to move more powerfully in the direction of the school’s mission. These areas of weakness most closely align with two of the transformational leadership pillars: individualized consideration via interpersonal competence, and the ability to communicate and inspire others’ participation in a vision. Executive coaching has not contributed to Laura’s charismatic leadership abilities, as she believed this was something that came natural to her and would not be a good use of time with her coach. The last pillar, intellectual stimulation, has been enhanced by her coach providing educational resources and by helping her to reframe situations, which in turn helps the intellectual progress of those in her organization. For example, “One of the most powerful things I think she said to me, and she said it very early on, was ‘well, you’ve got to decide regardless of the response you’re getting: how do you want to show up?’” Of all the deans, Laura’s leadership associations with the transformational leadership model were the weakest. This mirrors Gmelch and Wolverton’s (2002) findings that business school deans rated transformational attributes the least descriptive of their behavior as deans. Thus, it makes sense that Laura’s coach might not focus on criteria that would correlate closely to transformational leadership theory.

Informant #2 – Michael

The second interviewee hailed from a public degree-granting, academic medical and health professions institution in the Southwest. Michael did not intentionally seek out an executive coach; rather, he was introduced to it through an executive MBA program that his institution co-sponsored with a nearby university. Michael's cohort of peers in the MBA program consisted of other dean-level (or higher) executives across the academic medical center. All students were assigned a personal executive coach as part of the curriculum, so in essence, it was not really a choice. In an initial assessment conducted by his assigned executive coach, Michael produced a low coachability score, an unsurprising result given his inherently skeptical personality and his misperceptions of the value a coach could bring to a professional workplace. He recounted in a laughing manner, "Honestly, there was some ignorance about [executive coaching]. I wasn't quite sure what it was. When I thought of coaching, I thought of youth soccer." Despite his hesitations, Michael was keen to move forward with it as a required part of the MBA program. He reported a nice comradery with his coach in the beginning, and upon the coach ensuring confidentiality, the relationship blossomed and over time became mutually beneficial. Even if Michael had not enrolled in the MBA program sponsored by his institution, it might have been hard to avoid getting a coach: "The Provost now requires, or strongly suggests, executive coaching for deans and other senior level administrators. It's a virus." At Michael's institution, for senior level administrators it was counter-culture to *not* have a coach.

When starting the MBA program, Michael had just been appointed interim dean of his school so the executive coaching served as a convenient mechanism to prepare for the role of dean that he would eventually assume. As Michael began to learn the depth and breadth of services that executive coaches offered, he centered on self-improvement as his main area of growth. He knew the MBA courses and professors would help him with "Management 101", the business aspects of being a dean, the financials, and funds flow; however, from an executive coach, he saw an opportunity to work on himself. Upon participating in the initial self-discovery exercises (e.g., 360 feedback, DiSC) given by his coach, he perceived that the coaching process might prove vitally important in helping him shift his thinking and in preparing him for higher levels of leadership. More specifically, he mentioned his greatest gains to be made were in becoming more empathetic and in learning how to influence followers. For example, Michael referred to the DiSC personal assessment tool, an instrument used to generate dialogue about people's behavioral differences, as particularly useful in helping him to better understand others and himself. Michael recounted, "My wife would say 'Hey, we are going to a party so it's time to get the *i* up.'" The *i* denoted influencer and salesman type behaviors, ones that Michael had to consciously work on as they did not come naturally. Essentially, these examples directly point to where executive coaching assisted him in incorporating charismatic behaviors into his leadership skills palette. In presentations to the faculty, he brought more excitement and optimism into the meetings. By simply being aware of this weakness, it has led to changed behavior: "For people to like you, you have to be involved and gain the influence and opportunity to lead them. The coaching helped me realize this was important." He focused his efforts on being more people-oriented, as opposed to task-oriented (distinctions offered by the DiSC profile). This fundamental shift has provided Michael a new and unique perspective for leading as a dean.

There are also very clear associations for how executive coaching helped Michael to communicate his vision to school stakeholders. During the MBA program, he developed a document on school vision and his coach would provide feedback on how to optimally

communicate the vision. For example, the coach thought that the vision document Michael created was too detailed. Instead, his coach advocated for a document that communicated the vision from a higher, broader level. Through the back-and-forth process of revising the document, Michael was stretched as a leader by learning the compromise of crafting of a more general message and sacrificing some of the more minor details.

Intellectual stimulation, one of the four pillars of transformational leadership theory, also played a significant role in the coaching process for Michael. Before he was assigned an executive coach in the MBA program, one of his courses provided a strong theoretical basis for coaching. He learned about what distinguished coaching from mentoring, consulting, and other similar methods. Armed with sound underpinnings of coaching theory and practice, he was better able to anticipate and modify his tasks and roles in the change process. Michael said, “Even now I use the coaching process with the people in my school. It serves as a problem-solving mechanism and a means to work through issues with those I mentor and lead.” For example, one tactic he now employs is to allow those he is coaching to get to the answer on their own, as opposed to outright telling them what to do. This connects nicely with the characterization of coaching by Bossidy et al. (2011) and Whitmore (1992) as helping others learn instead of simply teaching theory. Michael’s experiences also link powerfully with Passmore and Fillery-Travis’ (2011) research which emphasized a Socratic-based dialogue in order to stimulate self-awareness and personal responsibility.

While Michael could not point to how the coaching had directly influenced his interpersonal leadership skills, he again referred to the DiSC assessment as integral in helping him to understand that others do not see things the same way he does. With this newfound understanding, he said the way he communicates has changed and he believes to now have a higher emotional intelligence with the knowledge of how to best lead others different from himself. For example, Michael was tasked with the ominous obligation of changing expectations in faculty workloads. Instead of making a top-down demand, he framed it as a way to ensure faculty were spending time in the areas where they were strongest and that would help them the most. Instead of emphasizing the dreaded word *change*, he made it more palatable by tying it to their previous successes. When Michael shared this example with me, he became noticeably excited and engaged, and said,

By reframing it this way, it was a win-win. I appointed a committee to lead the effort, and on the committee I was certain to include a balanced number of D’s, i’s, S’s, and C’s, according to the DiSC assessment methodology.

By doing so, he ensured buy-in from faculty and a smooth transition of adjusting faculty workloads across the school. Before executive coaching, he would not have thought strategically about the strengths and weaknesses of faculty members when appointing a committee. In summary, with the coaching he shifted his focus from being task-oriented to becoming more people-oriented.

Michael’s overarching takeaway from his time with executive coaches was the irreplaceable value of having a confidant who provided a lack of bias. With these unbiased, unfiltered perspectives, his executive coaches skillfully and artfully listened to his concerns and then steered him in the right direction. In Michael’s estimation, an executive coach’s knowledge of his discipline, field, or even industry, was irrelevant and not a prerequisite for effective coaching. Rather, the lack of bias was actually the chief requirement. Michael credited his

improved self-awareness to coaching. His coaches continually challenged his thinking, questioned his assumptions, and asked poignant questions, forcing Michael to think more carefully and critically than ever before. Over time Michael developed deeper trust with his coaches, and from that came higher levels of honesty and authenticity. In reflecting on his thinking before he happened upon executive coaching, he said “Those that don’t have coaches may be ignorant like I was. To have a coach means you are admitting you don’t know something.”

Informant #3 – Tony

Tony, the third of five interviewees, came from a mid-sized, private graduate school in the Northeast offering programs in medicine, dentistry, and various other health professions. Tony enjoyed a mixed approach of both practicing medicine and leading residency and fellowship programs at various universities, before committing to full-time administration as a dean. His first exposure to executive coaching was through a seminar he attended that covered organization, workability, and overall success and effectiveness. Tony instantly connected with the material and the instructors and later found out the seminar leaders also offered coaching for executives. Underpinning his receptivity to coaching was in part his belief in the principles of the Johari Window Model, developed by psychologists Luft and Ingham (1961) to explain interpersonal relations. The model introduced four quadrants: things known by self, things unknown by self, things unknown by others (e.g., secrets), and things others know about you but you do not know (i.e., blind spots). The grand prospect of coaching for Tony came from the final quadrant of Johari’s Window, the possibility of a coach providing feedback that was going to cause revelations for him:

Here was an opportunity for someone at a very high level to help me see my blind spots, so that I could start to become aware of things I wasn’t aware of, and I could begin to incorporate that into who I was as a leader to then transform into the leader that I am today.

Given Tony’s natural leaning towards coaching, of all the deans I interviewed he was far and above the most enthusiastic endorser of executive coaching as a profession and the benefits it provides. He was also the only dean to actively and publicly promote to others that he had an executive coach, as his core belief was that every leader should have a coach.

Next, I will address Tony’s responses to how executive coaching might have influenced his leadership abilities through the lens of Transformational Leadership Theory. In regards to how executive coaching shaped Tony as a charismatic leader, he commented that he has always been a fairly charismatic person. However, coaching did support him in believing more deeply in his authentic self:

I didn’t have to be pretentious [anymore]. I didn’t have to cover up who I was. Who I was was good enough for me and damn, it’s going to be good enough for others as well. And for me, a lot of that was pure charisma and a lot of it was enthusiasm and excitement.

As an example, Tony then recounted a story of moving an associate dean into another role where she kept pressing him for exact details about his decision:

I finally had to say to her, ‘I just want to make a change, and that needs to be good enough for you.’ And she thanked me for that. She said, ‘Okay, now I know where you are coming from. I thought perhaps there were very specific things that if I worked on...’, and I said, ‘No, I just need to make a change. I know in my gut you are not in the right job. There’s a better job for you. Let’s get you in that job.’ And that was the authentic me speaking. 25 years ago, I couldn’t have had that conversation.

Coaching also helped Tony more effectively communicate with those he led. Communication became a lot easier once he got clear on his social justice mission, which he arrived at through the coaching process. As a passionate educator of his staff, he believed this characteristic has allowed communication to flow more easily in his organization. Tony shared,

The way I inspire others is through education. I am known for this and write blogs that people actually read. I’m an avid reader as well, and if I come across something I think is worth sharing, I’ll immediately send it out and say, ‘Here’s why you need to read this’ and then I’ll explain why the article is relevant for them. What I don’t say is, ‘Therefore you must...’ or ‘Therefore you should...’ I say ‘Read this, and you decide.’

By sharing his passion for education with those that work for him, Tony not only developed his people from a leadership perspective but also created an environment for fluid communication. Due to the lines of communication being open and highly functional, Tony can communicate a vision with ease. In regards to the pillar of intellectual stimulation and progress, coaching is largely responsible for Tony’s understanding of human psychology and getting at questions such as: How do we best understand what motivates others? What drives behavior? How can we get others on board with the vision to help them succeed? Tony said,

I learned that understanding what makes people’s passions come to life, what motivates people’s behavioral choices – that was the most important things I learned from the coaching that I was able to take into my job as a leader.

For the last pillar of transformational leadership, individualized consideration via effective interpersonal communication, Tony gave multiple examples to show how coaching helped him improve in this area. In his very first session with a coach, the word *communication* was broken down for him as follows: *comm* meaning toward, *uni* meaning unity (i.e., common ground, shared vision), and *cation* meaning action taken; altogether communication means action taken towards common ground. Understanding the root meanings of the word *communication* was particularly enlightening for Tony, as from that point on it served as a foundation for understanding effective interpersonal communication. For example, when he found himself in a conversation where there was arguing or anger, he would say, “Okay, what I’m saying is not working. It’s not leading us to common ground. Let me figure out another way to have this conversation.” Tony reported positive results from this approach and that sometimes the two parties would agree to disagree, but many times the other person would approach him later and say, “Well, you know, I’ve been thinking about it and maybe we should look at your point of view.” By choosing to not engage in unproductive, argumentative exchanges, Tony employed a non-judgmental, effective approach simply by gaining an understanding of what *communication* actually was at its core. Another important element discussed by Tony was the idea of responsible communication. He learned through the coaching to be careful when speaking as to

not create passive aggressiveness or even hostility. He knew when to “bite his lip” and wait for the optimum moment when the right collective listening environment was present for him to speak into. For Tony, the strongest tie-in to transformational leadership came via the pillar of individualized consideration by means of strong interpersonal communication.

One of the important distinctions Tony pointed out about his executive coaches was that they would never tell him what to do. They provided feedback and then allowed him to take the appropriate action. This was a rather significant part of the coaching relationship, for Tony to be able to maintain his intellectual independence while working through issues. All but one of his coaches (he had four in total) worked from a psychological approach based on a theory called *holography*. For example, these coaches operated from the standpoint of anything a person says, believes, or thinks, was a representation of everything that person, says, believes, or thinks. They would pick up on Tony’s general phraseology, perspectives, opinions, and points of view, and then relate that to his whole life. In Tony’s words, “They listened intently and then found these sort of gateways into my soul.” These *gateways* that Tony spoke of, typically were accessed by his coach uncovering a blind spot and then creating awareness so that he could choose differently, and ultimately, transform his life. For example, one major paradigm that made an impact on how his career evolved came when Tony realized the degree to which his desire to please others was driving his actions: “Coaching allowed me to see that, understand it, grapple with it, and choose new behaviors.” He began to take to heart that while leaders should be respected, they are not always liked. Lastly, Tony attributed coaching to having played a central part of supporting his lifelong commitment to personal development. So much so, that he has applied for a job only once in his life. He explained,

I like to think that part of the reason for that is I worked on myself and other people saw the effects of that. And I tell my own coaching clients that that’s really the intended outcome – that others see you differently, in a way that makes them want that too. You don’t have to go telling people how great you are. You just are. People see it.

Informant #4 – Alan

The fourth interviewee was a dean from a graduate school of education in a private, liberal arts university on the West Coast, offering both undergraduate and graduate degrees. Alan served two separate stints as an associate dean before deciding he would probably need to leave his institution if he wanted to become a dean. After his first full year of deanship, Alan began using an executive coach, reluctantly. He enrolled in a leadership development retreat, an immersive 10-day experience sponsored by his institution, and was not aware upon signing up that executive coaching was part of the package deal. Feeling devoid of choice in the matter, Alan was not exactly open-minded to the idea of having a coach because he doubted how a coach from the Midwest would know or understand anything about his context on the West Coast. He thought it would be difficult for someone from the outside to offer “anything more than benign, kind of vague references” to what he needed to do. Also, he was skeptical that any coach could really push him and give him the clarity he needed for the work he was trying to accomplish. This resistance, coupled with low expectations, gave way to an attitude of compliance,

When I first started I was just like, ‘Okay. We get eight sessions. I’m going to sign up for them, get them out of the way, and get on with my work.’ So yes, I actually wasn’t very open to what it was going to arrive at.

Despite early trepidation in the coaching process, Alan soon began to greatly anticipate his coaching appointments, “[The process] really kind of flipped my expectations...I actually look forward to the conversations now, each month.” So, what changed along the way to shift his mindset? Before launching into the sessions with his coach, Alan hoped she could serve as a sounding board, allowing him to think out loud and to share things he was experiencing. Since becoming a dean, Alan struggled with the harsh reality of feeling more and more isolated from his peers. “You’re no longer just the colleague down the hall that can shoot the breeze and stuff. There’s an evaluative component now, and there’s a hierarchical piece, and then you bring in things like budget and review...” Because of the isolating nature of the role, Alan looked forward sharing the full picture of his portfolio with his coach; due to confidentiality issues, he is ethically bound to not share certain sensitive issues with faculty. The coaching sessions provided a much needed sounding board and comradery that Alan could rely on, and to his surprise, pushed his thinking about the leadership process. Within the sessions, his coach used the *CliftonStrengths* intellectual property as a basis to work from and that proved to be a good match for Alan much to his surprise,

I have a background in counseling and have done a lot of educational psychology stuff through my doctoral program. I’ve taken basically every personality test and all that. And so at a certain point it started feeling a bit like, ‘What’s your astrological sign?’

Despite his hesitations, he concluded that the *CliftonStrengths* materials helped to identify some broad themes to which his coach would continually remind him, “What is it that you do so well and how can you use that as the center piece of the way you lead?” The constancy of his coach’s nudges, grounded in the *CliftonStrengths* methodology, provided for fluid back-and-forth conversation and then later, self-reflection.

Engaging with an executive coach led to Alan demonstrating behaviors that strongly aligned with three of the pillars of transformational leadership theory. In teasing out the results by asking Alan what he got from executive coaching, two of the pillars, charisma and interpersonal communication, were found to be closely interconnected. First, Alan considered himself to already do a pretty good job at being an interpersonal leader but as a new dean, he felt he was getting so bogged down in the minutia of administration that he was losing his interpersonal and individualized touch. His coach, using the strengths-based approach, would continually remind him to prioritize investing in his people so that they got to know him – “because that’s the way you lead.” Weaving in the charismatic pillar and displaying his affinity for etymology, Alan said,

The *charism* is a kind of gift that people have and that they bring into the world. So I think if I understand, my gifts have been my ability to connect with people, be pretty non-judgmental, and be supportive. Those kinds of things kind of surround the interpersonal.

In Alan’s poignant articulation, charisma and interpersonal communication were nearly inseparable concepts, and his coach helped him develop more confidence in both of these areas.

As further evidence for how his coach aided him in the interpersonal realm, one time she recommended a book for him to think through “because it’s not only about you but it’s also about how you can understand others in the midst of the way they are processing and figuring things out.” The focus on improving interpersonal relations, guided by the strengths-based theory and practice, seemed to be a prominent theme for Alan and his coach.

Intellectual stimulation, the final pillar to hold a strong association, was also abundantly groomed in the executive coaching process. Alan’s coach would frequently recommend books or podcasts at the end of their sessions, ones targeting key issues he was wrestling with. These recommendations for continued learning between the coaching sessions were important for Alan because they kept him in a state of self-reflection about leadership, as opposed to becoming simply reactive in responding to leadership dilemmas. For example, she recommended the book *Leadership and Self-Deception* because of Alan’s internalizing approach, and as a result it helped him understand others more completely in the change process. Another area where he acknowledged intellectual growth from his coach was in working to better understand how his school contributed to the unique development of students, given the institution’s religious (yet, nonsectarian) identity. Alan commented on the increase in regulation which has led to isomorphism in the field and institutions doing the same things and looking the same; which begged the question from a programmatic standpoint, “Does it really matter which program a student goes to?” Alan responded, “I think the executive coaching has really helped me to reflect on that. Just because she’s constantly brought that back up – ‘What is the uniqueness about the context in your university?’” Alan’s coach provided consistent intellectual stimulation that led to learning and positive change.

On the other hand, Alan has struggled to communicate a vision clearly within his school. On a recent yearly survey about the school, one faculty member commented, “We’re not exactly sure where Alan stands on his vision and direction for the [school].” Alan preferred a methodical, collegial, community-based approach to developing, articulating, and practicing the mission of a school. Many faculty were too impatient with Alan’s style of vision creation, but pulling from past experiences where he has seen disastrous results, he was weary of speedy change. “I’ve been exposed to the *visionary leader* who typically comes in and takes the school by storm, saying ‘This is where we’re going so get on board or else...’. It doesn’t end well.” Of course, Alan’s methods may not be the only thing causing faculty distress. The University as a whole plans to release a strategic planning document within the next school year. The collective sentiment of Alan’s leadership team was, “Well, let’s wait and see how the university’s strategic planning process goes. And then make sure that we align ours with what the university is doing, so that we have greater cohesion between the university and the [school].” Moreover, Mike is the seventh dean in the last 10 years at his school. The tremendous amount of churn could be impacting the speed at which he will be able to build trust and cast a vision that will inspire others’ participation. Alan sums up the quandary in his own words,

One of the questions I’m asking my coach tomorrow is, how do I both honor my own perspective of ‘the vision needs to be collectively developed, articulated, and pushed forward’ with the understanding that people are looking to me for greater guidance and direction in that vision?

The coaching process with Alan is ongoing and perhaps, predictably through a strengths asset-based approach, Alan will continue to hone his gifts and discover how to do both.

Informant #5 – Lynn

Lynn, the final interviewee, serves as a school of arts dean at a private, mid-sized coeducational university in the Southwest. She first heard about executive coaching when a colleague at a non-profit foundation was promoted from director to CEO. Her colleague ended up having a positive experience with her executive coach, citing that the coach was especially helpful in her transition to CEO and in facing new leadership challenges. When Lynn was offered the dean position, she remembered her friend's experience and thought she too could benefit from having a coach. A few months before the dean position was offered to her, Lynn had just started working with a personal trainer for the first time in her life. She had never participated in sports in high school or college, and she was not aware that one could benefit from a coach (or, personal trainer) if a team sport was not involved. Nonetheless, a light bulb went off for Lynn when her trainer said, "So you do that same workout all the time? You've never varied it? Like, that actually isn't very good." Lynn realized that she valued coaching in multiple areas of life as coaches represented opportunities for her to learn new things. If that was not enough, Lynn then recalled an instance where she and a former supervisor had to deal with a very challenging person. She was impressed with how her supervisor dealt with the matter and asked how she came up with the strategies. Her supervisor's reply, "Oh, from my executive coach." Lynn's response, "I'm completely persuaded. That's really smart. I bet I could benefit from something similar." She valued it so much that she paid out of pocket for her executive coach. She admitted that it might be possible to get reimbursed for the coaching through the institution's vendor approval process, but initially she wanted to start up quickly and did not have the luxury of waiting around for the typical, snail-paced academic bureaucracy to grant approval.

While Lynn was certainly sold on the benefits of executive coaching from the start, finding a suitable fit was not easy. The first candidate she spoke with was incredibly aggressive and uncompromising, suggesting she "come in there and let them know who's boss and draw the line." Lynn, a proponent of the tradition of faculty governance and consensus building to gain buy in, replied to him "No, I have to work with people who have tenure, who will have permanent jobs for the rest of their life." In her opinion, the first candidate did not seem to be familiar enough with higher education and instead relied on tools one might use in the corporate setting, which are not necessarily transferrable in Lynn's estimation. The second candidate Lynn interviewed was an instant hit; the coach specialized in strategic planning and organizational change, which was rather convenient since Lynn would be taking those topics on almost immediately upon assuming her deanship. Also, Lynn perceived the second candidate to be thoughtful about the realities of gender constraints and other issues that women encountered as leaders, especially in the South.

In the beginning, Lynn hoped her coach would assist in prioritizing her agenda and in breaking larger action items into smaller tasks. In hindsight, Lynn revealed that her coach helped her in many more ways such as problem solving to identify possible solutions, managing people and change, identifying resources for further learning, and self-care. An example for the last area of growth, self-care, stemmed from the belief her coach had that in order to be an effective leader, Lynn needed to take better care of herself. Lynn's coach convinced her to take a vacation in order to be high functioning, something she had not given herself the luxury of in over a year. Lynn worked with her coach on setting boundaries so that she could prioritize the activities that gave her energy and vitality, such as research and writing time, exercise, and adequate sleep. An

example encompassing the areas of managing change and identifying solutions, came early on when Lynn knew she needed to hire a new staff but did not have experience in onboarding and setting up support systems. Lynn's coach helped her clearly articulate expectations and then taught her how to provide the necessary support in order for her team members to meet those expectations.

Lynn's executive coach influenced her actions as a dean and as a person; indeed, she experienced many improvements in her overall leadership IQ, as demonstrated in the following analysis using the lens of transformational leadership theory. Lynn's descriptions of her coach's contributions had a moderately strong association with the interpersonal communication (i.e., individualized consideration) pillar of transformational leadership theory. Lynn was initially taken aback at the level of customization and individualization her coach provided, but it has inspired her to infuse more of a personal touch in the way she led her team. Lynn shared,

I've been trying to do the same thing for my [department] chairs and directors, get them personal development and trying to enhance their skills as [department] chairs and directors. She's been helping me think about ways to build them up and empower them.

Lynn and her coach have also been working on how to communicate to various faculty members in order to increase the effectiveness of meetings and manage venting. Lynn role-played, "You're venting about something that none of us in the room can problem-solve for you. You may feel better now that you got this off your chest but you made nine other people miserable. Thank you very much." It can be a slippery slope – if Lynn cut that faculty member off s/he was likely to become more frustrated, but if she allowed that person to vent, then everyone else would surely become irritated. Lynn and her coach strategized about ways to engage in interpersonal dialogue with individual faculty members for the good of the unit. A final example of the interpersonal communication pillar comes from Lynn's newfound appreciation for recognizing another person's learning style. Through the executive coaching process, she has learned to cater to the preferences of the individual in order to be a better teacher for him/her. Lynn described the effectiveness of this approach,

If I can figure out the way you learn and the way you operate in a workplace situation, I can then learn that I better not come to you with a memo that morning and say, 'I need your sign-off on this.' Instead, I'll recognize that since you are a judger, you will want a long time to review something. Or perhaps you're an intuitive thinker in which case I better just come in and give a verbal pitch to you and just say, 'I'll take care of all the rest; please just give me your blessing.'

Lynn's responses to the interview questions did not align executing coaching with the charisma pillar of transformational leadership theory. In her words, "I don't think the coaching has touched that. If I've got any charisma, I think that came from teaching." The word *charisma* invoked a stream of consciousness from Lynn, "It's good for rallying the troops, getting people behind something. They can get people excited... As soon as you said that, I was thinking of some people that are very quiet that I consider to be absolutely terrific leaders." Lynn wrestled with the idea that charisma was a precursor for effective leadership, going on to recount that she knew many charismatic people that were terrible leaders. She went on to describe that the problem was charismatic leaders can be narcissistic, with no empathy, and simply be out for self-dispaly and the adulation of the crowd. Needless to say, Lynn did not connect with the word

charisma and was clearly cautionary in considering it to be a non-negotiable quality of great leadership. Rather, she emphasized being a good listener and appreciating the perspectives of others. Continuing to grapple with charisma and leadership, she asked, “Are charismatic people always good listeners? Are they always willing to walk a mile in someone else’s shoes? I don’t know if those two things always go hand-in-hand.”

The final two pillars, communicating a vision and intellectual stimulation, also had moderately strong associations in Lynn’s reporting of her executive coach’s influence. Given the main thrust of the work with her coach had been in dealing with the strategic plan, Lynn considered that and communicating a vision to be very close cousins. Her coach worked with her on creating the vision as a collective group exercise, as opposed to Lynn being the creator of the vision. This required loads of visioning workshops and exercises before communally arriving at a mission, vision, and values. To gauge whether or not faculty were buying into the vision wholeheartedly, she looked no further than the visioning workshops where she and her leadership team would guide people through the process. One outcome in particular Lynn seemed rather proud of was how the group decided “We would write a plan that, yes, says we need resources to do things, but we also created action that could be done even if we didn’t get the resources.” Whereas previously, faculty could take a passive stance and blame lack of funding for their inaction, her current faculty created a plan that was less dependent on resources in order for action to be taken.

In assessing the progress of intellectual stimulation in the time with her coach, Lynn’s explanations and descriptions of new knowledge around strategic planning and managing change overlapped a bit with the communicating a vision pillar. Her coach’s ability to filter and identify resources shaped to the need at hand was second to none,

She’s really great about helping me define exactly what the problem is. When she said, ‘Oh, what you’re grappling with is managing change.’ Then she would recommend literature, or I could go searching for literature once I had a name to the thing I was grappling with.

Overall, Lynn reported her coach to be a great sounding board, especially in crisis mode. Her coach has held her accountable and challenged the way she looks at things, suggested literature that she would not have looked at otherwise or would certainly have placed on the backburner.

Cross-Case Analysis and Discussion

In the previous results section, I employed a case study approach and analyzed each interviewee separately through the lens of Transformational Leadership Theory. In this section, I used a cross-case analysis approach to identify themes, similarities, and differences among the cases by comparing and contrasting them against each other. Upon synthesizing the evidence, I was better able to determine the overall effectiveness of executive coaching for academic deans. For example, male deans had stronger associations with improvements in transformational leadership skills than their female counterparts. Executive coaches had the most success increasing the intellectual stimulation pillar of transformational leadership, a result not too surprising given the industry and a typical academic’s affinity for learning. The charisma pillar

held the weakest association in regards to dean leadership improvement, especially in female deans. Some deans approached the executive coaching process with enthusiasm and vigor, while others were more reluctant. In the end, deans generally developed greater self-awareness, self-care, and empathy as a result of working with executive coaches. The leadership results of the executive coaching process were not always strongly correlated to the four main characteristics of transformational leadership; however, the deans may have indirectly become better transformational leaders through improving in the areas of self-awareness, self-care, and empathy. Future research studies might want to look more closely at these connections. According to the data, deans' improvements in the areas of self-awareness, self-care, and empathetic behavior, occurred largely as a function of the coaches' ability to build trust, the quality of coaches' listening skills (e.g., serving as a sounding board), and their expertise in offering perspective.

Initial Attitudes towards Executive Coaching

Dean attitudes towards executive coaching differed at the onset of the coaching experience. Three of the deans were eager to engage a coach while two of the male deans reluctantly began the relationship. Deans who were open-minded and willing to hire an executive coach had varied reasons for doing so. One dean had gone to a success and effectiveness seminar called *Workability* that an executive coach was teaching and had an overwhelmingly positive experience; he became aware that he could learn a lot more from that coach/facilitator. Another dean had just accepted her first dean appointment and one of her former colleagues experienced massive success with an executive coach; additionally, she knew what a complex and stressful job being a dean was and thought hiring a coach would be a smart move. Lastly, one dean had previously spent part of her career as an executive coach and thus already held the profession in high esteem.

Laura acknowledged the existing leadership dilemma in higher education as part of her eagerness and overall justification for hiring a coach:

...in a field that is under tremendous pressure to change. So, you don't have anybody that's had any expertise in change management. You don't have people that have managed people before. Faculty are like independent contractors; they're not leaders and managers. Yet who ends up in the chair ranks? The faculty.

This statement connects to the original impetus for this exploratory study in regard to the current promotion and reward structure in higher education. Laura's words also reinforce Carstensen's (2000) work showing that scholarly prestige trumps leadership ability. In Laura's statement, one can sense her frustration in working with academic professionals that may not have had exposure to certain elements and distinctions of effective leadership. However, Laura also understood why the rest of the academy might be leery to wholeheartedly turn to executive coaching, "I also think there is a higher education suspicion of corporate culture and maybe executive coaches are heavily associated in our public understanding of them with a corporate culture." Nevertheless, Laura felt that it would be worth her time to invest in a coach to identify some of the patterns that might be holding her back from achieving more success. Tony also experienced pushback from the academy when initially asking for financial assistance to pay for executive coaching,

I remember at Duke [University] I had a meeting with the entire practice group. That meeting, unfortunately, did not lead to the outcome I was hoping for, and I think it had a lot to do with the arrogance of Duke [University] – ‘No one can possibly come from the outside without credentials and tell us what to do.’ And it was their loss I think.

This did not deter Tony. From very early on, he was confident that executive coaching was a tool that was going to help him. Lynn’s enthusiasm for hiring a coach began after a conversation with her former supervisor about possible strategies of how to deal with a very challenging person they both worked with:

I was like, ‘How did you come up with these strategies?’ and she answered, ‘Oh, from my executive coach.’ The executive coach had used data from a personality assessment done within the organization, and I was like, ‘I’m completely persuaded.’

Not all deans felt it was essential to use a coach that had a fundamental understanding of how higher education operates. For example, Michael asserted that coaches that do not know higher education are, in fact, better coaches. The reason was because they are not afraid to ask *why*. In his opinion, a coach’s lack of bias was more valuable than industry knowledge. For Tony, coaching credentials and higher education knowledge did not matter; rather, what carried the most weight was his “sense of whether this person knew what they were talking about and doing...my BS detector is pretty good, and I can tell people who are shams and I can tell the people who aren’t.” Laura, similar to Lynn, also passed on the first coach she interviewed, “He was a little too creepy for me... I was supposed to fly there, meet him, and have dinner with him, and I thought, ‘I don’t want a relationship with the guy.’ It was a little too personal.” In selecting a coach, Laura looked for a female, anonymity (out of state was preferred), rapport on the first interaction, responsiveness, credibility, exposure to the higher education industry in order to understand the idiosyncrasies, trust, and analytic thinking. The female deans in the study took more time to find their executive coaches and had more selective criteria. The male deans all found their way to executive coaching almost by accident, by meeting a coach at a leadership seminar or by experiencing coaching as a smaller part of a larger developmental program.

As a contrast to the eagerness of Laura, Tony, and Lynn, Michael and Alan showed signs of reluctance at the onset of the coaching relationship. Both were taking part in leadership development programs offered by their respective institutions, and the coaching piece was considered a part of the larger offering. Alan explained,

I’d heard of executive coaches kind of in passing, but I’d never given it any thought at all...and actually, didn’t realize it was part of the [leadership] program until we got to the opening session. And I thought, ‘Oh, I guess I don’t even get a choice of whether I want one or not.’

When I asked Alan if he was open-minded to the experience of executive coaching despite not having a choice, he replied, “Actually, to be honest, not really. We were given eight sessions, and so my plan was to get them out of the way and get on with my work.” Given Alan had already received a graduate degree in counseling, he was not confident the coach could add value beyond what he already understood about behavioral psychology. Additionally, since the coach was from the Midwest, he was not optimistic about the application of coaching principles on the

West coast as the contexts in these regions of the country were so different. Alan, much like the administrators at Duke in Tony's case, could not fathom the usefulness of getting input from a coach that did not fully understand the context in which he was operating. Despite the initial reluctance, by the end of the experience Alan actually looked forward to the conversations with his coach. His coach helped him identify broad themes of his personal strengths and held him accountable to using them "as the centerpiece" of the way he led his organization.

Michael, on the other hand, admitted being inherently skeptical of executive coaching, as well as ignorant. When he heard coaching was a part of his MBA program, he immediately thought of youth soccer coaching. During Michael's onboarding process with his coach, he took a test that indicated he had a low coachability score. Despite his initial reluctance and disinterest in receiving feedback from a coach, he would later experience positive outcomes and credits the coaching process for expanding his self-awareness and for continually challenging his thinking. He said,

I was pushed to the point that I realized I may have had some underlying assumptions, which ultimately exposed some things I believed that in fact were not accurate. By being pushed and challenged to think more carefully, I accessed a higher level of honesty with my coach and with those in my organization as well.

This connects with the message of holography from Tony's coach—that how one acts in one area of life (i.e., with your coach) is also how one acts in other areas of life (i.e., with organizational stakeholders).

Whether deans approached the coaching relationship with eager or reluctant attitudes, they all had expectations about correcting certain behaviors and improving leadership skills. More specifically, Laura wanted to address her sarcastic style of communication when dealing with faculty, being too direct and impatient with people, as well as simply expecting too much from them. She also desired to gain more self-acceptance and lower stress levels as a result of the coaching process. From an organizational perspective, Laura needed support in changing the culture of her school. Tony joked that he hoped coaching could help him with one of his glaring weaknesses, "You know, I was born with a very rare inherited problem: I have no inhibitory neurons. I have to kid with people because I know there are some that are frightened by my authenticity." He also knew he needed support in taking action towards continual learning and development. Michael's approach was logical and simple, "I knew I would be taking on higher leadership and administrative roles and while realizing my current skillset at the time was good, I was also aware that I was lacking in other areas too." Lynn wanted help with hiring a new staff (e.g. how to onboard, create support structure for first six months, clearly communicate expectations, etc.), breaking large tasks into smaller ones, and in the creation of a strategic plan.

The Impact of Executive Coaching

Deans developed greater empathy, self-awareness, and better habits of self-care as a result of working with executive coaches. Deans attributed these gains mostly to the executive coaches' skills in listening, and their ability to develop trust and offer new perspectives. All deans showed improvement in one or more of the transformational leadership domains of charisma, the ability to communicate a vision, intellectual stimulation, and individualized consideration via excellent interpersonal skills. One dean, Lynn, had her first experience with an

executive coach right at the beginning of her deanship. Michael and Tony had executive coaching experiences before they reached the dean level, and Tony gave credit to the coaching process for his quick ascension in leadership. Alan and Laura had both been deans for approximately one year before taking on an executive coach. Lynn is the only dean who paid for her coaching out of pocket; all other deans reported that their institutions paid for the fees ranging all the way from \$300 to \$2,000 a session. Sessions ranged anywhere from one to two hours and occurred either once or twice a month. In a negotiation with administration, Tony recalled, “Look, you know you want me in this job, but I’m awfully young and inexperienced. Let me get the coaching I need to make this happen.” While institutions largely covered the majority of expenses, Tony used his own money for further leadership development where additional coaching was part of the package, and Michael received executive coaching in an MBA program which was a shared cost with his institution.

Culture. In addition to financial support, the accepting and open-minded organizational culture towards coaching at each institution contributed positively to supporting executing coaching for deans. In Laura’s case, her provost had a coach and said to her, “If you want a coach, get a coach.” Laura has paid it forward within her school by giving the same offer to her department chairs:

Look, I’ll put my money where my mouth is, but we have got to develop you as managers and supervisors so that you can manage change as well. You’re part of the leadership team. I can’t do your job and my job, and we need to develop you. It’s not fair to dump you into a role and expect that you know how to do it.

In order to convince her chairs to consider a coach for leadership development, she communicated that it is unfair of the institution to expect results without adequate training. Laura’s words about faculty under-preparedness align with this study’s original concerns about the leadership competence gap in higher education. Nevertheless, without a change in heart from the faculty, she will be unable to empower them to affect change nor will she be able to build community among them, ultimately failing on two of the three conditions for effective leadership of deans according to Gmelch and Wolverson (2002). While Laura’s institution seemed open to the practice of executive coaching, the improvements and results she got with her coach had the weakest associations with the four components of transformational leadership theory. This finding connects with Gmelch and Wolverson’s (2002) research that business school deans rated transformational attributes the least characteristic of their behavior as deans.

At Alan’s institution, about ten administrators, including the president and provost, completed a leadership development program that used executive coaching. Michael’s provost required (or, *strongly* suggested) executive coaching for deans and other senior-level administrators. Many of the deans benefitted by having supervisors who had already experienced the benefits of coaching. This made it easier for the practice of executive coaching to emerge at the dean level, and sometimes beyond, within these institutions.

Expectations of coaches. All of the deans had concrete ideas about the results they wanted to get from executive coaching. Laura needed help with strategic planning and in understanding personal triggers from past experiences that manifested in unhelpful ways in the workplace. Strategic planning was also a main priority for Lynn, as well as learning how to run effective meetings. Tony said,

I hoped I would get someone who was willing to look at me honestly and give me the kind of feedback that was going to cause revelations for me, that was going to allow me to see things I wasn't otherwise aware of. That was my aim in coaching.

One of Michael's goals centered on self-improvement,

I wanted help to improve in the areas where I was unaware that I was incompetent. This was made possible through 360-degree feedback, the DiSC, Winslow, and other self-discovery exercises. I had found my sweet spot for self-improvement and saw how the coaching shifted my thinking and prepared me for higher levels of leadership.

He also used his coach to assist in hiring five new chairs, a daunting undertaking. Lastly, Michael acknowledged the rising millennial "it's all about me" workforce and their desire for flexibility and work-life balance, among other things. He relied on his coach to assist him in the transition to understanding the best way to lead others that were very different from him. These are some examples of the issues and challenges, and the resultant expectations, which accompanied the deans into the executive coaching process. Next, I turn to discuss significant themes that arose outside the scope of the Transformational Leadership Theory.

Notable themes that emerged. The themes of empathy, self-awareness, and self-care materialized most prominently as the deans described the results they received from the coaching process. The only theme to be mentioned by all five of the deans was empathy, perhaps signifying it as the most important of the three as they pertain to leadership development in the academy.

Empathy. One particularly intriguing example of a coach developing empathy came from Laura. Instead of receiving coaching for how to have empathy for faculty or other subordinates, she learned how to develop empathy for those up the chain of command, namely, the provost. Laura expressed concern over a long-standing dysfunctional culture at her school that predated her arrival as dean. Her coach offered the following advice, "Have you ever thought that she [provost] feels guilty about what's happened in your school? That she's basically allowed it [the dysfunction] to happen all these years?" Laura responded,

No, I don't think of it that way because I think of it more like a business. She [the provost] needs to understand the implications of where we are today and not let her emotions from what happened in the past get in the way of the difficult work we have to do today.

Laura shared that the empathy piece is a large focus of the work she does with her coach. She cited her performance-driven mentality and the overall stress of the job as roadblocks for becoming a more empathetic leader. According to her coach, if Laura struggled to find empathy for others, part of the root cause was lack of empathy for herself. The deeper theme that ultimately emerged was a lack of self-empathy and Laura's inability to accept herself. This reality is what moved empathy practice up the priority list in the sessions with her coach.

Lynn stressed the importance of empathy when recounting a conversation with one of her faculty members who expressed interest in participating in more leadership opportunities and experiences. When the faculty member first approached her about this, she doubted his aptitude to excel as a leader because up until that point, "he had displayed zero empathy. I just don't see

how far he can go in a leadership position if you cannot envision perspectives other than your own.” Lynn questioned whether charisma, one of the four transformational leadership pillars, and empathy, were always compatible traits: “Are charismatic people always good listeners? Are they always willing to walk a mile in someone else’s shoes?” Not only did Lynn value the skill of empathy in her own practice but was already evaluating the potential of subordinate leaders based on their ability to express empathy.

Alan also provided a convincing anecdote of just how important empathy can be for an academic dean,

I think I am the seventh dean in 10 or 11 years, something like that, and so there’s been this tremendous churn within the administrative roles of our school. And so my coach, often times, would get me to try and think through, ‘How would you feel if you were in the faculty role and you’ve constantly seen this churn of associate deans, deans, whatever; how does that help you understand how you’re being perceived by your current faculty?’ She helped me work through that by identifying things to work on like being patient, building trust, or just helping faculty see that I’m not going to be gone in a blink of an eye as well.

His coach was able to provide valuable perspective that resulted in increased patience and decreased frustration.

Tony credited executive coaching for his effective communication skills, learned through years of examining communication in depth. Part of this exploration was understanding empathy, which Tony now teaches an entire course on. In reflecting on the power of empathy and effective communication, Tony recounted,

My coach said something one day that I think is the most beautiful thing I’ve ever heard any human being say. He talked about generous and stingy listening (Zelman, 2016), and the essence of it was when you open your mouth to speak, are you doing it on behalf of you saying something to someone else that you want them to hear, or are you saying it on behalf of their [interest]? I thought it was the most elegant expression of responsible communication I have ever heard. That I won’t open my mouth needlessly, unless it speaks to what you want to listen to right now.

Michael’s acknowledgment of empathy surfaced in the interview when he shared where he perceived his greatest gains to be made, “I went from being more on the nerdy science end of things to being more aware of empathy and how to influence my followers.” Since the job of an academic dean demanded excellent relational skills to a variety of stakeholders, it is not surprising to learn that having more empathy with others would lead to better results as a leader. However, to contrast, Bloom (2017) promoted the idea that while the benefits of empathy may be well-known, it can be a bad thing as well. For example, there are times when it might benefit a leader to keep a safe distance from an issue. Feeling deep empathy for someone at the wrong time might impair judgment and actually might not be what is best for the individual needing help. Empathy can also lead to aggressive behaviors and cruelty, as well as burnout. With this in mind, compassion might be a more accurate description of what academic leaders should strive for.

Self-awareness. Self-awareness was another popular term that surfaced in the interviews, mainly with the male deans. Tony first became interested in coaching after attending a seminar that addressed what was at the heart of success and effectiveness: “The answer is *you* are, your personal conversation.” Tony was alluding to the internal conversation that occurred for people within their own minds and for the first time, he became aware that his internal dialogue was intimately related to success and effectiveness. He was also certain that another key to success was becoming aware of blind spots, asserting that understanding things about himself that he previously did not know was transformational. Tony recounted,

I’m absolutely convinced that it is the coaching I received that I have to thank for helping me see my blind spots, so that I could start becoming aware of things I wasn’t aware of, and I could begin to incorporate that into who I was as a leader, ultimately transforming into the leader I am today.

For example, Tony was unaware of the degree to which pleasing others was driving his actions. Through the coaching sessions, Tony was able to examine what he referred to as the *Like Respect Axis*, essentially unpacking how leaders should be respected but not necessarily always liked. His blind spot was that he was operating from the *Like* perspective, and the coaching allowed him to see that, grapple with it, and then choose new behaviors. His coach was integral in the process of choosing which new behaviors were going to work, teasing them out, and then honing them. Tony concluded,

Someone else has to see what you can’t see, so the more responsibility you have, the more leadership you are given, the more you need coaching and it is not an option. The single most important factor that leads to failure is that people stop seeking information that’s going to help them be successful the higher up they get in the food chain.

Alan recalled that his work with *CliftonStrengths* assessment contributed generally to increased self-awareness. Alan appreciated how the insights from the assessment allowed his coach to learn more about what made him tick not only as a leader, but as a person too. On the other hand, when prompted for concluding thoughts at the end of interview, Michael offered,

Self-awareness is what I got with coaching. My coach opened my eyes to so many things because he did not hesitate to pointedly ask questions and challenge my thinking. The value is in the reality check you get from this line of questioning, the opportunity to explain something to someone on the outside that does not have the inherent biases you do. If you can’t explain it to your coach, there’s a flaw somewhere.

The executive coaches were able to teach deans something about themselves that they did not know prior to the coaching relationship. The insights the deans got about themselves made noteworthy differences in their ability to lead others.

Self-care. The final theme to arise out of the interviews was self-care, which surfaced predominantly in the female deans. Self-care is supported by the idea that taking better care of yourself as a person leads to better results as a professional. Lynn’s coach subscribed to the following philosophy, “For you to be an effective dean, you have to take care of yourself. You can’t be run down and exhausted.” Lynn also wanted to remain an active, productive scholar

because it “feeds her soul.” As a result, her coach held her accountable with questions such as, “Are you getting enough research and writing time? Are you setting aside enough time to exercise? Are you getting enough sleep?” Additionally, Lynn did not take any vacation days for the entire year preceding her coaching agreement, to which her coach said, “You’ve got to take a vacation, even if it’s only a long weekend. You need to in order to be high functioning.” Admittedly, Lynn was driven and identified best as a type-A personality; thus, she appreciated her coach implementing checks and balances for self-care to achieve better job satisfaction and longevity in the deanship. Laura got similar benefits from her coach taking a stand for her wellbeing. She said, “I’ve learned to take time for myself. I try to do meditation; I’m not very good at it, but I’m making efforts to control my own stress levels.” Laura and her coach prioritized self-care (e.g., no working on the weekends, no sleeping in the same room as cell phone) because they realized the behaviors used that control stress set everything into motion.

If empathy, self-awareness, and self-care are desired leadership traits for executive coaches to develop with academic deans, what were the executive coaches doing in order to produce these results? The deans reported three main characteristics of the executive coaches that allowed for significant progress: their ability to listen, develop trust, and to offer new perspectives and ways of looking at a situation. These findings are similar to Zenger and Stinnett’s (2006) claims that the most qualified coaches are able to build strong relationships, communicate effectively, facilitate action and results, and provide ongoing support and accountability. Trust is fundamental to successful relationships and communicating effectively involves both speaking and listening with high skill. The findings are also similar to those of Paige (2002), who concluded, “Of the four key coaching skills identified by the participants, the most crucial ones were the skill of developing and maintaining a trusting relationship, and a coach’s ability to challenge thinking and move people out of their ‘comfort zone’” (p. 69).

Listening. All of the deans spoke about the importance of listening. Three of the deans reported that the quality of listening skills by their coaches led to insights that would affect their behavior and later, results. Two deans gathered valuable insights about how they perceived their own listening skills needed improvement. Laura spoke about listening in succinct terms, “[Coaches] listen to the latent meaning, not the manifest meaning. That is a really important skill, to listen for the underlying themes and patterns, not the concrete stuff of the stories.” Laura’s coach was able to identify connections between various challenges she was dealing with, ones that she was unable to see herself. Alan saw executive coaching as a place to vent, think out loud, and to share things that he was experiencing. He emphasized the importance of having a coach as a confidant and sounding board, as the role can feel rather isolating. “With an executive coach, it allows you to have another place where you can say, ‘Here’s the fuller picture of what’s going on. I’m curious to know what kind of feedback you could provide on that.’”

Lynn credited her coach’s 30,000-foot view, and the experience of working with clients day-in-and-day-out, for being able to listen well and determine what she needed to work on. She said,

I’m at the standing desk, answering emails, reviewing proposals, signing forms, and just constantly working on what’s right in front of me. [The coach] can step back and say, ‘Well, in addition to all the paperwork you have to process, you have to manage change too.’

Lynn said that the process sounds simple, but in actuality, it is not. She went on to explain, “She’s been a great sounding board to have, especially when I am in crisis mode. She’s kept me on track.” Lynn felt that her coach was able to smooth out some of the rough patches of being a dean simply because of the unique vantage point her coach listened from.

The executive coaches’ prowess in listening skills appeared to have rubbed off on some of the coaches in their own listening skills. “Executive coaching taught me you learn more when you are listening,” Michael said. With this insight in mind, Michael said his perspective on all interactions with people have changed. He came to realize that each and every encounter with a faculty or staff member was a chance to learn more and better understand workplace happenings. Tony shared a similar sentiment about the grand opportunity that comes with enhanced listening skills. He explained,

There were times I’d just bite my tongue. Even though I knew I could say something that could change the conversation and take us down a certain path, it wouldn’t have served me as a leader because it would create passive aggressiveness or maybe even hostility. So, I thought ‘I’ll bite my lip and wait for the moment – the moment when the [right] listening is present that I can speak into.’

In Tony’s case, he was able to put into practice what he learned from his coach about responsible communication. In other words, if the right *collective listening* was not present in a meeting room, he said he would choose to withhold comment until the right moment appeared. Whether the deans commented specifically about the quality of their coaches’ listening skills, or whether it was a more an indirect lesson from observation, the ability to listen well was not only an important ingredient to build trust in the coach/dean relationship, but it served as a catalyst to for the deans to develop into more empathetic and self-aware leaders too.

Perspective. Deans also cited and appreciated their coaches’ ability to provide perspective. Deans shared many examples about the challenges they faced and how their coaches helped them through those difficulties by helping them look at a situation in a different way. Articulating how a coach helped a dean see a situation in a different light is perhaps easier for the deans to explain than describing varying degrees of listening; this might explain why there are more examples in the interviews that point to the coaches’ listening qualities as opposed to their perspective-giving. Laura pointed to her coach’s ability to reframe situations as a powerful piece of the learning,

Since my frustration and anger are really hard to control, one of the things [my coach] said early on was ‘Well, you’ve got to decide regardless of the response you’re getting, how do you want to show up?’ And so considering that perspective of, it doesn’t matter what someone says to you; my choice is, how am I going to show up?

In this case, Laura needed to visualize herself as a strong leader, undeterred by criticism and opinions. Coaches also used scholarly literature and magazine articles to help the deans look at their current situations from a different viewpoint. Lynn mentioned her coach helped keep her on track by constantly sending her journal articles that she would not have looked at otherwise or that would have been placed on the backburner. In this example, the combination of accountability and giving perspective proved to be the right ingredients to help Lynn get results.

In Alan's case, the lines of empathy and perspective-giving are blurred when the angle given by the coach induces the dean to empathize with stakeholders with whom the dean interacts. As shared previously, his ability to place into perspective that his some faculty and staff in his school have seen seven deans come and go in 10 or 11 years, was initiated by his coach. Tony used the words *blind spot* to signify the perspectives, viewpoints, and insights he received from his coach that he previously was unaware of. According to Tony, "Once I became aware of [the blind spots], it would transform me." Relatedly, Tony believed a lifetime is not long enough to discover one's blind spots,

Certain people get to a level where they say 'I've gotten to the apex of the mountain, so what do I need more coaching for?' They're mistaken in taking that perspective. They believe that because the culture has them believe that. We're taught that subliminally, that if we're at the top of the organization, we are the expert, we are the master, we are the complete human being.

The perspectives offered by Tony's coach through executive coaching were more than a situational remedy for Tony; rather, he viewed coaching as an essential piece, almost as a lifestyle component, of an academic dean. Lastly, for Michael the self-awareness and perspective-giving categories were intertwined. From the introspective activities and sessions led by his coach, the awareness he gained about himself provided fresh perspectives on his relationships and his overall work as dean. He summarized perspective in so many words, "The coaching cuts through [not wanting to offend anyone] and you might even start fidgeting in your seat. My coach provided unbiased and unfiltered feedback that forced me to think about why I do what I do." Michael felt this gave him a unique vantage point to assess whether or not he was making the right decisions and doing the right things for his school.

Trust. Deans also greatly valued their coaches' ability to build trust within the relationship. While all of the deans might agree trust played an important role in the outcomes they achieved, only three mentioned it in the interviews. When asking Laura about her coach's background and qualifications she responded, "I don't think I've ever really questioned much of her interpretations. I have tremendous trust with her." The trust did not come easy though; Laura shared she never mentioned her husband to her coach in the first six months. In other words, it took six months to break the professional barrier and for the relationship to develop beyond a simply transactional one. Michael had a similar experience in that the trust in the relationship grew with time, and he gradually moved from being generally skeptical to instead developing a nice comradery with his coach. His coach ensured confidentiality and as the relationship grew, Michael could see over time how it had become mutually beneficial. Tony received harsh feedback from his coach one time and when asked if he ever doubted the truth of the message, he replied, "No, no, no, because there was tremendous trust. And I think that's part of what makes a coaching relationship work – there's got to be trust." Tony has informally coached others over the years and when he can tell trust is lacking, he shares that fact with the coachee, "I don't think it's going to work. I may not be the guy for you." The coachees were usually shocked by this level of transparency and honesty, to which Tony would double-down, "Look, seriously, do you truly trust me? I don't know that you do." In his mind, the confrontation is necessary because without trust, the coaching process cannot work.

The findings of this study clearly pointed to overwhelmingly favorable outcomes for academic deans who used executive coaches. In light of this, I found it necessary to briefly

explore evidence for why senior-level organizational leaders might not use executive coaches and to better understand, in general, the disadvantageous outcomes of coaching. Paige (2002) noted the importance of identifying the negatives of coaching since, up until that point in time, they typically received little exposure in the literature. She interviewed five business executives in South Australia and reported,

For participants, negative issues [of coaching] were vagueness; a coach's unfamiliarity with the organizational culture; a lack of time for reflection, or transferability of skills; limited respect for the coach; learning only at the abstract level; the personal exposure of coaching; and the 'coaching envy' of colleagues (p. 66).

These negatives can not only limit the effectiveness of coaching, but they can deter industry leaders from considering executive coaching. Feldman and Lankau (2005) added that, unfortunately, the coaching relationship can at times become toxic and cause leaders' careers to nosedive. The blame is on the coaches and the executives both; coaches mistakenly create a dependency relationship instead of an empowering one, and executives resist feedback, lack the desire to change, or might even have complex, interpersonal problems. While this is only a small sampling of some of the reasons why leaders may not be contracting coaches, it is helpful to understand how some of these negative scenarios might be driving the decisions of academic leaders.

Recommendations

Executive coaching can be used as a leadership development tool to assist deans in more capably accomplishing their objectives. The coaching process can address practical, day-to-day challenges deans experience as administrators or other behavioral aspects that seem to hone the dean as a person (as opposed to the dean as a professional). In this section I make recommendations for both practice and research. For practice, I address recommendations for both academic deans and executive coaches. For research, I address both thought leaders and practitioners in making recommendations for future work.

Given the positive outcomes found in this study, academic deans should consider executive coaching as a way to improve their personal leadership capacity as well as to more ably lead their schools. Executive coaching helped to improve leadership outcomes for deans whether they were one year into the appointment or newly appointed.

For Practice: Executive Coaches

In this study I interviewed academic deans and asked them to describe their experiences with their executive coaches. While speaking with the deans' executive coaches fell outside the scope of the study, I do have general recommendations for coaches in practice – especially for those who work in academia or who are looking to better understand how to have a successful practice coaching academic professionals.

Recommendations for executive coaches include the following:

1. Get clear on the dean's preference for his/her coach to have industry experience. Some deans viewed deep knowledge of higher education as a

prerequisite; others found it more helpful if the coach did not have experience in the academic realm.

2. Research the culture of coaching within institutions to gain a better sense of how coaching might be received. Schools where the president and/or provost used a coach and had a successful experience were much more likely to advocate the practice for those down the hierarchy, such as deans and department chairs. This idea is supported by Elliot's (2005) proposition that leadership coaching is more successful when implemented at multiple levels within an institution. Business schools and medical/health professions schools were more receptive to coaching practices than schools of education or fine arts.
3. Given academia's affinity for evidence-based practices, executive coaches should expect to confront a more critical lens of the practice and thus be prepared to approach deans and other academic leaders with a data-based approach when sharing about how coaching can result in improved outcomes. Examples of this might include sharing scholarly articles about the practice of executive coaching, or even asking former clients to quantify what percentage of measured deliverables (e.g., increased enrollment, increased faculty grant or research productivity, reduced school costs, etc.) were related to coaching and then sharing these numbers with prospective clients from academic institutions.
4. Include the full range of activities, when describing the work executive coaches are doing in the field. In analyzing interview data, Kilburg's (1996) description of a coach's activities and processes could be expanded upon the current focus of remediation to include more about developing one's self and expanding what s/he knows. By including more duties related to positive personal development and the broadening of one's skills, Kilburg's description would be more complete rather than anchored in a *fix-it* mentality.
5. Since coaches of the female deans in this study centered more on self-care in their coaching, perhaps female deans feel more overall pressure to perform the duties and responsibilities of the role. Carefully consider the needs of female deans and how to best support them.

Coaches can make a great contribution to leaders of academic institutions but must be willing to appreciate how they have a heavy leniency for evidence-based approaches.

For Practice: Academic Deans

Recommendations for academic deans include the following:

1. View coaching as an ongoing tool rather than a situational fix. There did not seem to be an optimal time frame to use an executive coach; the study showed that the benefits of coaching are not limited to a certain point during the dean career path. Rather, it is recommended that the coaching be viewed as more of an ongoing lifestyle component or tool. Whether deans have informal networks (e.g., peer deans at other institutions, other senior level administrators) or formal networks (e.g., executive coach) or a combination of both, study data showed there was value in having a consistent, trusted source to bounce ideas off of and to hold them accountable to continued learning and

self-care. Coaches served as this vehicle to reliably hold a continuous stand for deans' personal and professional growth, whereas otherwise the stress and demands of the dean role might have taken over.

2. Consider a coach with a strengths-based coaching approach. Data in this study showed that a strengths-based coaching approach resulted in the most positive gains in transformational leadership growth. In recent discoveries in neuroscience, Rock's (2006) characterization of how the brain learns new things suggested that growing people's strengths should replace our desire to find behaviors to fix. Gallup's research reinforced this idea and found that focusing on one's strengths in the workplace can make a powerful difference in regards to workplace engagement (Rath, 2007). For deans and senior administrative leaders looking to hire executive coaches, it is recommended to inquire about a strengths-based approach to improving leadership capacity and self-awareness.

Aspiring deans might also consider the practice of executive coaching, as the data pointed to executive coaching being partially responsible for their rise to the position of dean.

For Further Research

Recommendations for further research include the following:

1. Studies that address systematic ways for coaching practices to be adapted to better fit the culture of higher education institutions. Many academics look at executive coaching as a corporate practice and that can come with negative connotations. Data to support how these practices can be tailored to better suit academic institutions could help sway skeptics' resistance to the idea.
2. Studies that take a longitudinal approach to assessing the impact and stickiness of executive coaching. It would be useful to learn if deans are still using the information they learned from their coaches two, three, five, and 10 years down the road. Given the outcomes of this study were most closely aligned with the intellectual stimulation pillar of transformational leadership, we know deans learned a lot from coaches in the short-term but we do not fully understand implications for the long-term.
3. Studies that help us better understand female deans – especially those that may not hold positive associations with the word *charisma*. A multiple-lens (i.e., theory) approach for measuring the effectiveness of executive coaching might be best to encapsulate the full measure of their leadership capacity. Oddly, this recommendation runs counter to existing literature on transformational leadership that best characterizes it as a feminine model of leadership, emphasizing a nurturing and caring style of operating. Further, the transformational leadership model has played “a significant role in raising the profile of women in management and leadership roles, within an organizational context” (Jogulu & Wood, 2006, p. 11). Nevertheless, Servant Leadership Theory may be a useful complementary model given Fridell, Newcom Belcher, and Messner's (2009) findings that showed female leaders in education were more likely to engage in healing relationships, cultivate self-worth, and practice consensus building activities.

Also, future research may want to investigate how males and females might be experiencing the coaching process differently. Female deans preferred female coaches and did not score as well as the male deans when using transformational leadership theory as the lens for effectiveness. We know this is not because the coaches were female because Alan, the dean with the strongest links to improvements in transformational leadership traits, had a female coach. Information to help coaches better understand gender dynamics in coaching academic professional might be helpful. Overall, this study helped practitioners and researchers better understand what occurs during the process of executive coaching and how it connects to leadership outcomes in higher education contexts.

Limitations

Since all the dean informants volunteered their time to share about their experiences with coaches, the results were skewed towards the positive aspects of executive coaching. Deans with negative executive coaching experiences might not jump at the chance to participate in a study like this. Further, deans self-reported their leadership progress via the interview questionnaires; data gathered from those they led could have shed more light on the fullness of their leadership capacity.

In recruiting dean participants, I encountered a bit of resistance from executive coaches due to coach-client confidentiality agreements. One coach said, “I am reluctant to risk disturbing the relationship by asking my clients whether they wish to participate in such a study.” Without the benefit of prior, established relationships with the executive coaches I reached out to, I experienced difficulty recruiting participants. Thus, I relied solely on my networks within academia to find academic deans who had used executive coaches. Trusted connections with executive coaches who have direct access to senior level administrators in higher education might have resulted in a larger and more diverse sample. The need for more rigorous systematic inquiry in the realm of coaching is well documented, and researchers and practitioners alike need to work more closely to identify research participants for scholarly research in order to elevate the professionalism of the practice even more.

Initially, the plan was to interview deans from only one discipline so that the generalizability would hold greater weight for that particular discipline. Instead I recruited deans from multiple disciplines, which limited my ability to make bold claims for executive coaching in schools of education, or engineering, for example. Another limitation to attracting a more robust sample size was the sheer cost of executive coaching, as not all institutions are willing to make the investment. While academic administrators may agree or disagree on the benefits of having executive coach, cost could be a major limiter when thinking about scaling such a practice to all of higher education.

Lastly, the ability to show ROI from executing coaching can be challenging. Traditionally, deans and CEOs self-reported and data from these reports was used to determine the effectiveness of the practice. However, the leader has a strong bias in that he is incentivized to report favorably; otherwise, it could be viewed as wasteful by those holding him financially accountable. Deans and leaders in other industries have recently been asked to quantify which business areas (e.g., increased enrollment, reduced costs, improved cycle development) were impacted by coaching and to give an estimated percentage of how much of the change was related to the coaching intervention. However, some are skeptical about the reliability of ROI measures on executive coaching. The manager of executive coaching at Deloitte & Touch, in an

interview with the *Harvard Business Review*, said “I don’t think ROI is ever going to be able to measure the true success of coaching, so we assess the value with qualitative data” (Sherman & Freas, 2004, para. 3). While an imperfect process, measuring coaching results is becoming more sophisticated and will hopefully be seen less and less as a limiter in the future.

Conclusion

Executive coaching is only one way for academic deans to improve as leaders and to develop into more well-rounded human beings. For the five academic deans interviewed in this study, all had positive experiences with executive coaching and would recommended it to others in academia. A common belief among the deans was that reaching one’s potential as a leader cannot be done alone. By employing executive coaches, institutions benefitted by deans becoming more self-aware and compassionate leaders. These types of changes can change the culture of a school and lead to better results. Higher education institutions that do not invest in executive coaching risk carrying the label of “arrogant”, much like Tony said of Duke [University]. In order to gain access to one’s blind spots, it requires a degree of open-mindedness and humility. Institutions without a culture of executive coaching miss out on the chance for their leaders to uncover critical blind spots and experience transformation.

When asked to provide examples for how executive coaching differed from other leadership development approaches, the deans cited that executive coaching offered more accountability, follow-up, and individualization. Since the relationship is ongoing, as opposed to a one-week leadership conference or something similar, it makes sense that coaching would provide more accountability and follow-up. This connects with Zinger and Stinnett’s (2006) research that discussed the advantage of holding leaders accountable beyond a single event. Deans also appreciated the fact that the coaching was customized and tailored to their needs, allowing for both personal and professional growth. Of the five deans interviewed in this study, four of them chose to stick with their executive coaches indefinitely; only one dean was undecided if he would continue. This demonstrates the degree to which coach accountability and follow-up has impacted the deans through executive coaching. Dean transformational leadership skills were improved by coaches across the board, with the capacity for intellectual stimulation aligning the strongest and the charisma component with the weakest association. Male deans reported stronger associations to improving in transformational leadership skills than did female deans.

The main outcomes observed outside of the transformational leadership lens were a developed sense of empathy, self-care, and overall self-awareness. In determining the kinds of coaching behaviors that might elicit these results, executive coaches were able to develop immense trust by demonstrating superior listening skills and by offering differing perspectives to various challenges and issues that deans routinely encounter. This connects with Bossidy, Charan, and Burck’s (2011) assertion that coaches must be skilled in the art of questioning, which contributes to being a great listener. On the importance of perspective-giving, I am reminded of the axiom “The higher up you go in leadership, the further away you get from the truth.” In other words, those below the dean on the hierarchy are generally reluctant to give honest feedback to those on the upper end, such as a dean. Alan echoed this sentiment when he described how relationships changed when he transitioned from a faculty member to a dean,

It's a very isolating role, because you're no longer just the colleague down the hall and that can kind of...I mean, you can't shoot the breeze and stuff anymore. There an evaluative component now, and a hierarchical piece, budget, and review.

The result of this communication barrier is that it has a suppressive and deafening effect on the organization's creativity as a whole. Without a mechanism to provide feedback to the dean on how s/he is operating, the dean operates in the dark because no medium exists for everything to come to light.

The academic dean role is very complex and to do it well, requires leadership dexterity. Transformational leaders have greater influence in organizations compared transactional leaders (Bess & Dee, 2008). Some see them as essential in order to adapt and deal with the ever changing climate in higher education (Cameron & Ulrich, 1986). Whether the leadership outcomes from executive coaching are directly tied into the transformational leadership model or perhaps to other constructive derivatives of leadership theory, the findings of this study confirm that it is an option academic deans should seriously consider to order to increase their overall effectiveness.

Appendix A



From: IRB Committee

To: Dr. David Bertrand

Date: February 17, 2017

Re: IRB New submission Approval; Protocol # H17-011-BERD - The Practice of Executive Coaching to Improve Leadership Capacity in Academic Deans

Dear Dr. Bertrand,

The IRB Committee completed review of your application and granted approval of your protocol on 02/17/2017. This approval is valid until **02/17/2018**. If work will continue beyond this date, it is the responsibility of the principal investigator to submit an annual review of progress (CFR 21 §56.109(f)). Failure to gain approval of this annual review prior to the expiration date could result in suspension of the work covered under this protocol. This suspension of work would include halting all subject enrollment, collecting data, and/or analyzing previously collected, identified data.

Any proposed changes in the protocol should be submitted to the IRB as an amendment prior to initiation (CFR 21 §56.108 (a)(3); §56.108 (a)(4)). Please be advised that as the principal investigator, you are required to report unanticipated adverse events to the Office of Research Administration within 24 hours of the occurrence or upon acknowledgement of the occurrence (CFR 21 § 56.108 (b)(1)).

All investigators and key personnel identified in the protocol must have documented IRB CITI or NIH Training on file with this office. The certification will expire in 3 years, so please plan your renewal accordingly. For NIH training only, please include a copy of your certificate with your submission.

Southern Methodist University's Office of Research and Graduate Studies appreciates your continued commitment to the protection of human subjects in research. Should you have questions, or need to report completion of study procedures, please contact the Office of Research compliance at 214-768-2033 or at researchcompliance@smu.edu.

Thank You,

IRB Committee Chair

Office of Research and Graduate Studies
Southern Methodist University PO Box 750302 Dallas TX 75275-0240
Office: 214-768-2033 Fax: 214-768-1079

Appendix B

SOUTHERN METHODIST UNIVERSITY PARTICIPATION EXPLANATION AND CONSENT FORM

PROJECT TITLE: The Practice of Executive Coaching to Improve Leadership Capacity in Academic Deans

INVESTIGATORS/CONTACT INFORMATION:

PI: David Bertrand

Co-Investigator: Ashley Tull, Ed.D., Program Director

Introduction:

Before you say that you will be in this research study you need to read this form. It is important for you to understand all the information in this form because it will tell you what the study is about and how it will be done. It will tell you about some problems that might happen during the study, as well as the good things that might happen during the study. When you read a paper like this to learn about a research study, it is called “informed consent”. When you give your consent for something, it is the same thing as giving your permission. If you do not understand something in this form, please talk with one of the staff to answer your questions. Do not sign this consent form unless all your questions have been answered and you feel comfortable with the information you have read. You will be given a copy of the form to keep.

You are being asked to take part in this study because as an academic dean in higher education, you engaged in a formal agreement with an executive coach for a minimum of four months. No other identifiers other than these were considered when selecting study participants.

Why Is This Study Being Done?

The purpose of this study is to understand more about the experiences academic deans have had with executive coaches to increase leadership skills, especially in managing change and people.

How Many People Will Take Part In The Study?

Eight (8) academic deans will be part of this study.

What Is Involved In The Study?

If you agree to participate, you will participate in a one-on-one interview with the PI for no longer than 90 minutes. Questions will cover how you entered the executive coaching relationship, the methods used, and results based on the engagement. Participants will remain anonymous and at any time can withdraw from the study.

How Long Will I Be In The Study?

Participants will commit to one interview session no longer than 90 minutes.

What are the Risks and Benefits of Participation?

Minimal risk exists to the participant and all identifying subject information will remain confidential. The PI will use code sheets to ensure confidentiality during all phases of the

research process. Benefits include a better understanding of how executive coaching impacts academic deans, potentially enhancing current and future coaching relationships.

What Are the Costs and Will I be Paid for Taking Part in the Study?

There is no cost to you for taking part in this study. No payment is being offered either.

What About Confidentiality?

You have a full right to privacy. This means that only the researchers who are part of this study will see the information about you from this study. The results of this study may be published in a scientific book/or journal or presented to other people. If this is done, your name will not be used so no one will know who you are. All information about you from this research project will be kept in the locked office of the PI. Information that is kept on computers will be kept safe from access by people who should not see it, through password-protection.

What are My Rights As a Participant?

Taking part in this study is voluntary. You do not have to take part in this study and it is okay to refuse to sign this form. If a question makes you feel uncomfortable, you may skip it. If you agree to take part and then change your mind, you can withdraw for any reason. Deciding not to be in the study, or leaving the study early, will not result in any penalty or loss of benefits that you would otherwise receive.

If you change your mind and later want to withdraw your permission, you may do so. You may notify the PI through phone or in person. If you decide to do this, all of your information will be destroyed.

Whom Do I Call If I have Questions or Problems?

If you have concerns or questions about the study or have a research-related injury, contact any of the following:

PI: David Bertrand, 214-768-1810, dbertrand@smu.edu

Co-PI: Ashley Tull, Ed.D., Program Director, 214-768-4493, atull@smu.edu

If you have questions about your rights as a participant or feel you have been placed at risk, you may contact:

Austin Baldwin, Ph.D., IRB Chair
researchcompliance@smu.edu
214-768-2033

Statement of Person Obtaining Consent:

I have explained to _____ the purpose of the research project, the procedures required and the possible risks and benefits to the best of my ability. They have been encouraged to ask questions related to taking part.

Signature of Person Obtaining Consent

Date and Time

Confirmation of Consent by Research Subject:

You are making a decision about being in this research study. When you sign this form, you are giving your permission to be in the study. By signing this form, you have not given up any of your legal rights or released anyone from liability for negligence, and you are at least 18 years of age.

The PI has explained to me the purpose of the research project, the study procedures that I will have, and the possible risks and discomforts that may happen. I have read (or have had read to me) this consent form. I have been given a chance to ask questions about the research study and the procedures involved. I believe that I have enough information to make my decision. I have also been told my other options. I agree to give my consent to take part as a subject in this research project.

Signature of Subject

Date and Time

I give my permission to be audio recorded.

I do NOT give my permission to be audio recorded.

Signature of Subject

Date and Time

Appendix C

Interview Protocol

Record time of interview, date, location, interviewer, and interviewee.

Brief description of project: I am conducting a study on the experiences of academic deans with executive coaches, specifically in terms of the impact on leadership skills and in the managing of change and people. I am seeking academic deans that have experienced at least four (4) continuous months of coaching to participate in this research study. The research study seeks to better understand how executive coaching impacts academic dean leadership and the decisions they make that influence their community.

Interview questions:

1. Tell me a little bit about your current dean position and how you got there.
2. How did you first learn of executive coaching? [Grand Tour question]
3. What interested you about it?
4. What specifically did you hope to get from engaging with a coach?
 - a. Follow-up: Did you initiate the relationship as situational, ongoing, or other?
5. For how long did you engage with a coach (e.g., 4mo, 6mo, 1 year) and what was the frequency of the coaching sessions (e.g., weekly, monthly)?
 - a. Follow-up: What was the duration of the sessions (e.g., 30min, 60min, 90min)?
 - b. Follow-up: For how long had you been a dean when you initially hired a coach?
6. What qualifications you were looking for when hiring an executive coach? (e.g., degree, years of experience, certifications, etc.)
 - a. Follow-up: Did you pay out of pocket for your coach or did your institution pay for the coach?
 - b. Do you know what the fee is?
 - c. Do you know how many clients your coach works with at one time?
7. Tell me more about the executive coach's process.
 - a. Follow-up: Did they use role playing or just conversation?

b. Follow-up: Did they participate in your meetings?

TRANSFORMATIONAL LEADERSHIP (Bass, 1985) – Questions 8 through 11

8. Research has suggested charisma to be one of the foundational pillars of transformational leadership (TL). How has executive coaching helped you in developing into a more charismatic leader?
9. Another pillar of TL is one's ability to communicate a vision. How has executive coaching helped you communicate a vision and in others' inspire participation of that vision?
10. Learning (i.e., "intellectual stimulation/progress") is another pillar of TL. What new knowledge did you learn/gain as a function of the executive coaching that supported your leadership role as dean?
11. The last pillar of TL is communication with others (i.e., interpersonal). In what ways did executive coaching support your communication with others such that your organizational goals were met?
12. How would you rate the experience of having an executive coach against your expectations? (On a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being highly effective and 1 being not effective)
13. Executive coaching is one way in which dean's seek to develop and enhance their leadership skills. What other kinds of leadership development experiences have you had, whether formal or informal (e.g., consult with the literature, speak with other deans (peer coaching), attend workshops, etc.), and how are they similar and/or different to having an executive coach?
 - a. Follow-up: [When interviewee answers, can probe for "Were they different specifically to how you were able to develop communication skills, or charisma, etc.?."]
14. How public are you with the fact that you have an executive/leadership coach? (i.e., are faculty, staff, and/or other senior administrative leaders aware of you having a coach)
15. Based on your experience, would you recommend other deans hire executive coaches? Give one reason why or why not. [Concluding question]

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