


2017

# A Phenomenological Study of Executive's Perspectives of Hope Theory in Executive Coaching

Steven Hodlin  
*Walden University*

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# Walden University

College of Management and Technology

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Steven Hodlin

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Walden University  
2017

Abstract

A Phenomenological Study of Executive's Perspectives of Hope Theory in Executive

Coaching

by

Steven F. Hodlin

MBA, Babson College, 1986

BS, University of Massachusetts, 1982

Doctoral Study Submitted in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

Management

Walden University

November 2017

## Abstract

The executive coaching and positive psychology fields are growing; however, minimal research exists regarding the coaching experiences of executive coachees with the various approaches a coach can utilize. The problem addressed in this study was the lack of research on consistent standards regarding how executive coaching should be conducted. The primary purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of executives who have been coached using approaches based on Snyder's hope theory, Buckingham and Clifton's theories of strength-based approaches to leadership, and the theories of positive psychology advanced by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi. The participants in this study were a purposively selected sample of 20 executives. The primary data collection method was semistructured interviews, and the resulting data were recorded and organized into themes guided by the research questions, and was analyzed for overarching themes, validated, and interpreted against Snyder's hope theory. The findings demonstrated the importance of coaching approaches utilizing all components of hope theory and the importance of the coaching approach being the preference of the executive. These findings can be used by executive coaches to inform coaching approaches that lead to favorable leadership behavioral changes. The potential for social change from this study is that the findings can help guide improvements in leadership in all areas of organizations, including the non-profit sector, that lead to better serving of goals and increasing organizational capacities.

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## Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my best friend and partner in life, Veronica Rohtert, who spent many evenings and weekends alone while I worked on this study, all the while supporting and encouraging me. I want to give a special thanks to my children, Kimmy Hodlin and Brian Hodlin, who followed me in the higher education journey. Hopefully I have been an inspiration for them.

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## Chapter 1: Introduction to the Study

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experiences of executives who have been coached using approaches based on hope theory (Snyder, 2000a, 200b, 2002) and strengths-based positive psychology (Conchie, 2009; Linley, Govindj, & West, 2007; Rath & Conchie, 2008). I intended this study to further explore the coachees' experience of behavioral characteristics in areas such as self-efficacy, optimism, motivation, and resiliency due to this strengths-based and positive executive coaching approach. Executive coaching is a rapidly growing field in the business world that Joo (2005) indicated would double from a market value of \$1 billion worldwide to \$2 billion. The International Coaching Federation (ICF) has indicated that there are an estimated 10,000 to 15,000 coaches worldwide (Baron & Morin, 2010; Joo, 2005; Menghetti, 2007). Demand for executive coaching has grown from 1998 in areas such as application, teaching, and writing (Sperry, 2013). There is a perception that coaching leads to positive impacts on leadership skills and favorable organizational outcomes; this perception likely drives this popularity in executive coaching. Despite this projected growth, empirical research about what coaching approaches result in success in executive performance is lacking (Gray, Ekinci, & Goregaokar, 2011; Jones, Rafferty, & Griffin, 2006; Lewis-Duarte & Bligh, 2012). With the growth of executive coaching continuing without evidence of what coaching approaches influence change in their clients (Gentry, Manning, Wolf, Hernez-Broome, & Allen, 2013), the risk of failure by an executive engaging in a coaching relationship can be significant.

The executive coaching process involves a one-on-one relationship between a coach and a business leader or manager client. The ICF (2015) defines coaching as a partnership between a coach and client, where the coach uses a creative process to enable the client to achieve their potential. Several trade associations and universities adopted another definition. This definition has been expanded and adopted for executive coaching to mean “executive coaching means regular meetings between a business leader and a trained facilitator, designed to produce positive changes in business behavior in a limited time frame” (Sherpa, 2017, p. 8). Corbett and Coleman (2006) reported a slight modification to that definition in *The Sherpa Guide*, defining executive coaching as “a personal and frequent one-on-one meeting designed to produce specific, positive changes in business behavior within a fixed time frame” (p. 1). *The Sherpa Guide* (Corbett & Coleman, 2005) is a textbook for executive coaches and is used at eight major universities (Sherpa, 2017). It provides one of the most widely-used processes for executive coaching. There is a third party involved in the executive coaching process. This third party is the executive’s organization (Bozer & Sarros, 2012).

Coaching success can be dependent on the influence of each of the three parties of the coach, coached executive, and organization (Sherman & Freas, 2004). The executive coach utilizes various behavioral and organizational techniques to guide the client to the attainment of goals. These techniques are designed to improve their effectiveness in their role in leading the organization (Bennet, 2006; Joo, 2005; Menghetti, 2007; Miller, 2000). Through the use of behavioral techniques in the executive coaching process,



executive coaching can lead to behavioral change. The executive coach develops a trust and alliance with their clients, leading them to self-awareness and learning (Joo, 2005).

Consistent standards that address how coaching should be conducted are lacking. As can be seen in Table 1, coaching approaches endorsed by certifying bodies are not consistent as certification organizations focus on various methods and standards. Individuals- with varying backgrounds in business, personnel management, psychology, and sociology-apply these standards. Also, there is no requirement for executive coaches to be certified by any organization. Executive coaches bring their particular expertise to the coaching engagement, resulting in several approaches being deployed to coaching. Moreover, there has been little empirical research focused on the best approach for coaching executives. Although the ICF, a support network and certifying body for professional coaches, offers a certification program, there are several other certifying organizations in the industry (Menghetti, 2007). ICF is a large non-profit professional association of coaches with chapters available around the world that focuses on the integrity of coaching through internationally accepted professional standards (ICF, 2014). A sample list of certifying organizations is displayed in Table 1. As a result of these multiple approaches, more research is needed to determine whether any particular approach to executive coaching is more effective than another (de Haan, Culpin, & Curd, 2011).

Table 1

*Sample List of Coaching Certification Organizations*

Organization	ICF Approved	Description of Approach
International Coach Federation (2017)	Yes	Approach based on 11 core competencies. Meeting Ethical Guidelines and Professional Standards, Establishing the Coaching Agreement, Establishing Trust and Intimacy with the Client, Coaching Presence, Active Listening, Powerful Questioning, Direct Communication, Creating Awareness, Designing Actions, Planning and Goal Setting, Managing Progress and Accountability
Coaches Training Institute (2017)	Yes	Co-Active Coaching Approach
Center for Executive Coaching (2017)	Yes	Focused on Marketing and the CASTLE Process (Control, Aspirations, Strategy, Tactics, Leverage, Evolution)
International Association of Coaching (2017)		Based on 9 coaching masteries including Establishing and Maintaining a Relationship of Trust, Perceiving, Affirming and Expanding the Client's Potential, Engaged Listening, Processing in the Present, Expressing, Clarifying, Helping the Client Set and Keep Clear intentions, Inviting Possibilities, and Helping the client Create and Use Supportive Systems and Structures
US Life Coach Association (2017)		Primary focus is life and business coaching
Sherpa (2017)	Yes	The model for Sherpa executive coaching is the Himalayan Guide. The guide helps climbers choose a course and reach the summit. In the same way, Sherpa coaching skills provide tools and share knowledge of the best path for others to follow.
World Coach Institute (2017)	Yes	Executive Coaching- Client Types, Mission & Motivation, Influence, Networking, Making Conversation, Conflict Management, Return on Investment, Assessments, Coaching Packages; Personal Foundation- Personal Vision, Values Based Living, Goal Setting, Law of Attraction, Mindset for Success, Managing Emotions, Transformational Coaching, Creativity, Time Management, Conflict Success; Foundational Coaching Skills- Meeting Ethical Guidelines, Establishing the Coaching Agreement, Establishing Trust and Intimacy, Coaching Presence, Powerful Questioning, Active Listening, Empowering, Acknowledging, Direct Communication, Designing Action, Planning and Goal Setting, Managing Progress and Accountability, Coaching Models for Creating Awareness; Marketing the Business

(table continues)

Organization	ICF Approved	Description of Approach
Center for Coaching Certification (2017)	Yes	Focuses on: Ethics: Code of Ethics and Core Values Understanding your Client: Understand different styles of thinking, processing, and deciding Communication: Listening Skills, Assertive Communication, and Effective Questioning Focus and Motivation: Learning Styles, Focus, and Language that Motivates
MentorCoach (2017)	Yes	Evidenced-Based Coaching and Positive Psychology Approach
Coach U (2017)	Yes	Based on ICF 11 Core Competencies
Center for Creative Coaching (2017)	No	Focused on teaching coaches how to help leaders understand themselves more fully so they understand their strengths and can utilize their strengths, and develop more potential. Prepares coaches to help leaders become clearer about their motivations, aspirations, and behavioral change commitments. Based on six principles: create a safe and challenging environment; work with coaches agencies; facilitate and collaborate; advocate self-awareness; promote sustainable learning from experience; model what you coach.

Note: Adapted from the websites of the organizations listed. Descriptions of approaches derived from website information.

As pointed out, coaching has become popular in the business, non-profit, and government sectors (Horn, Elliott, & Forbringer, 2010; Orenstein, 2002; Paluka & Kaifi, 2015), while consistent standards are lacking in the executive coaching field regarding how coaching should be conducted (Hauser, 2009). Several researchers note that studies on what executive coaching approaches have the most impact on executive motivation and achievements are limited (Bono, Purvanova, Towler, & Peterson, 2009; Clayton, 2011). There is a lack of research with regards to what executive coaching knowledge, skills, and abilities are the most helpful to leaders in gaining insight and motivation for behavior change. The lack of research extends to what strategies are the best predictors of long-term behavior change in coached individuals. There are research opportunities for

the study of the competencies most critical to the executive coaching process, however, there has been little empirical attention paid to the traits of executive coaching that prove to be successful in leadership development.

Being a relatively new field, with various accepted approaches, more research is needed regarding the coaching focus that works best for the intended impact. In this study, I focused on the lived experiences of the coachee's coaching experiences that use hope theory and their strengths in the context of positive psychology (Bono et al., 2009; Bozer & Sarros, 2012; Joo, 2005; Smither, London, Flaiutt, Vargas, & Kucine, 2003). I reviewed each participant's experience with that of other participants that changed their focus from the strengths-focus to weakness-focused or a combined focus.

By focusing on a leader's strengths, while providing hope, positive emotions may result, further improving the leader's strengths (Froman, 2007; Senf & Liao, 2012). Hope can provide motivation for a leader to utilize their strengths to impact positive change (Froman, 2007). Positive change can influence positive emotions, which can broaden the thought processes of individuals and may lead to more creativity, flexibility, being open to information, and greater efficiency (Wood, 2007). Goals are the starting point for hope; however, there needs to be an actionable approach, provided by pathways and motivation (Froman, 2009).

With regards to positive social change, leaders are found in many situations, including nonprofit organizations and in social reform initiatives. The results of this study have significance to positive social change as I focused on developing a better understanding of the use of positive psychology theories, such as hope theory, on the

coaching of executives and leaders. I explored the lived experiences of leaders coached using this approach with the intent to better understand how coaching can improve the leader's perceived behavioral changes, such as self-efficacy, optimism, motivation, and resiliency.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will provide the key elements of this study. I will present the background of coaching and positive psychology, the research problem statement, the purpose of the study, the research questions, the conceptual framework definitions, assumptions, scope delimitations, the significance of the study, and a summary. Through this introduction, I will lay the foundational basis for this study.

### **Background of the Study**

Coaching has become a popular method for developing managers and executives. The ICF defines coaching as “an ongoing professional relationship that helps people produce extraordinary results in their lives, careers, businesses or organizations” (Natalie & Diamante, 2005, p. 372). There are several estimates of the number of coaches in the world, with evidence that the field is growing rapidly. Bono et al. (2009) estimated that there were at least 30,000 coaches worldwide and noted that membership in the leading executive coaching certification body, ICF, doubled from 2002 to 2007 from approximately 5,500 members to 11,000 members. The ICF estimates that there are 10,000 to 15,000 coaches worldwide (Baron & Morin, 2010; Menghetti, 2007, p. 1). Other estimates put the figure higher to about 30,000 (Bono et al., 2009). These numbers include various types of coaches, including career coaches, life coaches, business coaches, and executive coaches (Bono et al., 2009). There is a gap in estimates that break

out the numbers of the various types of coaching. This could mean the number of executive coaches worldwide is likely to be significantly less than the reported estimates, but growing (de Haan, Bertie, Day, & Sills, 2010). In 2003, it was estimated the market for executive coaching was 1 billion dollars worldwide and growing (Bono et al., 2009). There is evidence that coaching growth is sensitive to economic conditions (Maher, 2003; Sherpa, 2014). Sherpa Coaching (2014) reported results from a 2014 research study indicating that 43% of executive coaches were over the age of 56 and 53% percent of executive coaches are women. Despite this popularity in executive coaching, there is a lack of peer-reviewed empirical studies on the topic (Bono et al., 2009; Clayton, 2011; Joo, 2005; Smither et al., 2003).

There are no standards regarding what entails effective executive coaching. Clayton (2011) contended that the lack of established executive coaching practices, combined with the experienced growth in the field has led to arguments amongst practitioners in the appropriate executive coaching approaches. Without adequate research in the area of executive coaching methods, the result may be poorly developed and trained coaches, leading to ineffectiveness in the coaching process. Therefore, identifying the executive coaching approaches that result in favorable outcomes in the executive and their leadership is important (Clayton, 2011).

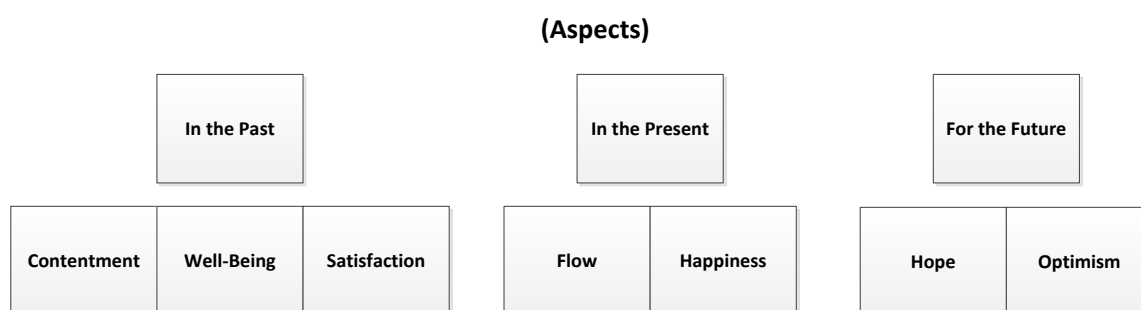
The executive coaching process is intended to influence sustained behavior change in the executive, leading to improved performance (Bono, et al., 2009; Hauser, 2009). With no consistent standards for executive coaching, coaching approaches and behaviors associated with a successful behavioral change in the coach's clients are not

clear. These approaches include the knowledge, skills, and abilities coaches need to be successful in creating sustained behavioral change in their coached clients.

The intent of executive coaching is to improve the performance of a leader. The research on executive coaching is lacking regarding its influence on leaders' success (Lewis-Duarte & Bligh, 2012). The most used processes in coaching today are Sherpa, Co-active (Newnham-Kanas, Morrow, & Irwin, 2012), GROW, Goldsmith, Combined, and Hudson (Sherpa, 2014). Sherpa and Goldsmith were the focus of executive coaches, while life and executive coaches use Co-active and GROW models (Sherpa, 2013). Many of these approaches use a positive approach to coaching.

Positive psychology approaches are one way to approach coaching. Knowledge of what coaching knowledge, skills, and abilities are the most helpful to leaders in gaining insight and motivation; how executive coaching changes executive behavior, such as self-efficacy, motivation, hope, optimism, and resiliency; and what coaching behaviors are the best predictors of long-term behavior change is lacking (de Haan et al., 2011; Lewis-Duarte & Bligh, 2012). Aspects of positive psychology began with the focus on humanistic psychology and it did not become fully introduced until 2000 (Lambert, Passmore, & Holder, 2015). Since then, there have been several studies leading to relevant theories in the discipline (Peterson, 2006, p. vii) to be useful in the field of executive coaching. The field of psychology has traditionally focused on individual weaknesses and mental illness (Snyder & Lopez, 2007). Positive psychology departs from focusing on the individual's weakness to an approach that centers on the individual's strengths (Snyder & Lopez, 2007). The study of positive psychology focuses

on what is right with people (Peterson, 2006). The field has scientific and applied aspects and is intended to help determine the strengths of people and to promote the active functioning of those strengths (Snyder & Lopez, 2007). Knowledge of how positive psychology research can be applied to executive coaching is lacking. This is important to understand since positive psychology research has demonstrated favorable outcomes from a focus on strengths and the positive in people (Biswas-Diener & Dean, 2007). This knowledge is needed because it is important to understand which methods have the desired effect on the behavior change for the coached executive.



*Figure 1.* The field of positive psychology. Valued subjective experiences of the field of positive psychology shown as aspects of the subjective level (past), individual level (present) and group level (future). Developed from “Positive Psychology: An Introduction”, by M.E.P. Seligman and M. Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, *American Psychologist*, (55), p. 5.

As shown in Figure 1, one aspect of positive psychology is hope theory, which involves developing pathways and agency among individuals (Smedema, Chan, & Phillips, 2014; Snyder, 2000). Pathways include attitudinal, behavioral, and tactical paths to the achievement of goals (Snyder, 2000a, 2000b). Snyder states that hope theory involves the setting of goals; the strategies, tactics, and methods for achieving those goals; and the motivation to follow the pathways to the achievement of the goals.



Milestones mark the path to achievement and represent the expectations, and expectations are used to measure progress (Coffman, 2006). There has been little research in this area of positivity. Focusing on an individual's weaknesses may be an obstacle to the leader developing hope. Hope might be influenced by high-performance resulting from an individual being competent in an area and motivated by that particular area (Dempsey, 2007), whereas, a strength-based coaching focus may result in the individual improving their strengths. Improving on strength areas energizes the individual, and this strength-based focus may be supportive of the individual in developing hope, leading to enhanced motivation and goal focus (Snyder, 2000). Snyder and Lopez (2007) believed that hope is a learned mental set that aligns with the role of an executive coach.

Authentic leadership plays a role in the executive understanding of strength. Authentic leadership starts with self-awareness by the leader, including awareness of their strengths and weaknesses (O'Malley & Gregory, 2011). It is a positive perspective of human physical, social, and psychological functioning from a strength-based view (Luthans & Avolio, 2003; Macik-Frey, Quick, & Cooper, 2009). Authentic leadership involves understanding oneself and being true to oneself (Novicevic, Harvey, Buckley, Brown, & Evans, 2006). This understanding can be useful in the executive's focus on behavior change.

With the executive coaching and positive psychology fields being relatively new, research on positive psychology approaches to the coaching of executives is minimal, leading to a lack of knowledge regarding the effectiveness of the positive psychology approach with regards to executive efficacy, optimism, motivation, and resiliency. Much

of the research available is from the perspective of the coach rather than the coached executive. It is important to understand the approaches to coaching that lead the executive to experience behavior changes in areas such as efficacy, motivation, optimism, and resiliency.

### **Problem Statement**

Executive coaching is a rapidly growing field that Joo (2005) indicated would double from a market value of \$1 billion worldwide to \$2 billion worldwide. The International Coaching Federation (ICF) has indicated that there are an estimated 10,000 to 15,000 coaches worldwide (Baron and Morin, 2010; Joo, 2005), Menghetti, 2007). The investment in executive coaching has been growing in several areas since 1998 (Sperry, 2013). The general problem is that despite this growth and projected future growth, empirical research about what coaching approaches and characteristics result in successful changes in executive performance and perceived behavior are lacking (Bozer, Sarros, & Santora, 2014; Gray et al., 2011; Jones et al., 2006; Lewis-Duarte & Bligh, 2012) and consistent standards regarding how coaching should be conducted are lacking. Coach certification is not required, and certification organizations focus on varying methods and standards. The specific problem is that with the growth of executive coaching continuing without evidence of what coaching approaches influence change in their clients (Gentry et al., 2013), the risk of failure by an executive engaging in a coaching relationship could be significant.

My intent of this study was to explore the lived experience of coached executives. The results of this study are intended to provide some insights in the understanding of

how leaders perceive and experience executive coaching using positive psychology approaches such as hope theory and a strength-based focus. The purpose of the study follows in the next section.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The primary purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of executives who had been coached using approaches based on hope theory and strengths-based positive psychology and how this approach to executive coaching affected behavior changes from the perspective of the executive being coached. I intended the study to further explore the coachees' experience of behavioral characteristics in areas such as self-efficacy, optimism, motivation, and resiliency, due to this strengths-based and positive executive coaching approach. The primary focus was on the executives' perceptions, feelings, and the meaning of their lived experiences from the phenomenon of executive coaching that is based on hope theory and a strengths-based focus (Hodlin, 2014). This purpose aligns with the problem statement of a lack of knowledge regarding how differing approaches to coaching influence the perceptions and experiences of the coached individuals.

Since hope involves the development of pathways to achieve desired goals and the development of motivation to use those pathways (Rand & Cheavens, 2009; Snyder, 2000), the role of an executive coach in applying hope theory in the coaching process would be to assist the executive in changing their behavior to accomplish these components of hope. There are other constructs, such as optimism and self-efficacy, that have some similarities to portions of the concepts involved in hope theory. These

similarities have led to some confusion regarding hope theory and those constructs. To provide some clarity of the differences between these constructs, I will provide comparisons between hope theory and other constructs in Chapter 2. I addressed an underresearched area regarding approaches to effective executive coaching.

In this qualitative phenomenological research study, I concentrated on executive experiences of executive coaching and their perceptions of positive and hopeful thinking on their perceived behavior changes such as the areas of efficacy, resiliency, optimism, and motivation. In this study, I focused on the coaching experience of the leaders, the behaviors hopeful leaders perceived; their attitudes towards the pursuit of pathways for behavioral change; their motivational attitudes for achieving the vision and their goals; and their feelings regarding the coaching process they experienced. This study was from the coached leaders' perspective, and I explored the value of coaching with a foundational approach based on hope theory. The purpose of this study was to gain an understanding of the lived experiences of executives who have been coached based on hope theory and strengths-based positive psychology, and how this approach to executive coaching affected behavior changes from the perspective of the executive being coached.

Through the results of this study, I provided insight into the influence of executive coaching using positive psychology approaches to creating pathways and motivation to successful goal achievement by using the lived experiences of the executives interviewed. Research has shown that high hope individuals have heightened feelings of confidence (Snyder & Lopez, 2007). In this study, I reviewed related constructs such as optimism,

self-efficacy, resiliency and self-esteem behavior changes resulting from the coaching experience.

### **Research Questions**

The central research questions (RQs) I developed to guide this study were:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of executives who have been coached based on hope theory and strengths-based positive psychology?

RQ2: What affect does this positive coaching approach and experience have on the executive's perceived behavioral characteristics, such as self-efficacy, optimism, motivation, and resiliency?

### **Conceptual Framework**

I based the conceptual framework for this study on Snyder's (2000a) cognitive theory of hope, Buckingham and Clifton's (2001) theories of strength-based leadership, Snyder and Lopez's (2007) hope theory, and the theories of positive psychology advanced by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000). Although the research in positive psychology and hope has increased since 1998, much of it has been focused on clinical psychology and counseling areas, while there has been little research on the area of coaching a leader (Bozer et al., 2014; Gray et al., 2011; Jones et al., 2006; Lewis-Duarte & Bligh, 2012). Much of the research on strengths-based leadership is empirical from a study conducted by Gallup (Asplund, Lopez, Hodges, Harter, 2007), which has not been subjected to peer review. There is little in the research from a qualitative approach to understanding the feelings and perceptions about motivation, self-efficacy, and confidence of executives exposed to a strengths-based leadership coaching environment.

This research is needed to understand better the behavioral change process from the coachee's perspective as a result of this approach on their motivation to follow pathways to the achievement of their goals.

### **Nature of the Study**

#### **Design**

Using the phenomenological approach, I was interested in what the meaning, structure, and the essence of the lived experience was for the executives being coached. The type of phenomenology was transcendental phenomenology (see Patton, 2002). The qualitative transcendental phenomenological research process involves four phases: epoche, phenomenological reduction, imaginative variation, and synthesis (Moustakas, 1994). Since the primary measurement instrument in a phenomenological study is the researcher, it was critical for me, as the researcher, to set aside any biases or prejudgments about the issues regarding the study. Epoche, also known as bracketing, is the process of a person setting aside their biases or prejudgments (Moustakas, 1994). Imaginative variation involves determining the possible meanings from the textural descriptions through imaginative thinking. Moustakas (1994) described the purpose of imaginative variation as arriving "at structural descriptions of an experience, the underlying and precipitating factors that account for what is being experienced" (p. 98). The fourth phase of the phenomenological research process was represented by the integration of the horizons and descriptions into a synthesized integrated statement.

I chose this research method due to my interest in the experiences of the participants, as opposed to me as the researcher. This led to a description of the

experiences of the participants (see Moustakas, 1994). I chose phenomenology because I was interested in a deeper understanding of the effect executive coaching based on hope theory and strengths-based leadership coaching has on executive motivation and confidence in achieving their goals as well as the executive's perceived success of the executive coaching intervention. I needed to ensure that all of the participants in the study had been exposed to the hope theory concepts of goal setting, motivation, and action planning and a strengths-based focus in their executive coaching.

### **Methodology**

This was a qualitative phenomenology study, focused less on my interpretations as the researcher, and more on a description of the lived experiences of the participants (see Moustakas, 1994). The data collection plan consisted of interviews with executives who had experienced the phenomenon of being coached using hope theory and a focus on the executives' strengths. I employed purposeful sampling to ensure the sample population had been coached using positive psychology and a strengths-based focus. Participants were identified through coaches who used positive psychology and hope theory approaches, including a strength-based focus. My interest and focus was on their perceived motivation, confidence, optimism, resiliency, and perceived behavior changes with respect to their leadership abilities. Interview questions were open-ended, and semistructured. The participants interviewed self-reported their experiences as a result of strengths-based executive coaching using hope theory and its impact on any changes in their attitudes, confidence, motivation, behaviors, beliefs, and actions. I bracketed out my experiences and collected data from several executive participants. The resulting data

were analyzed and organized according to themes. In this study, I provide an overall essence of the executives' experience through a textural description and a structural description of the experiences.

The participants were executives who had been coached using hope theory and a strengths-based focus. As a member of the Center for Executive Coaches (CEC), I had approved access to a population of executive coaches who could connect me with coached executives. I attempted to contact executive coaches from the CEC who use an approach that was strengths-based in its focus and utilized hope theory concepts in their coaching; however, I did not receive responses. As a result, I reached out to executive coaches through colleagues and LinkedIn. The executive coaches were asked to contact their executive clients and introduce the study to them, asking the executive to contact me directly for further information. The executive coaches did not know whether their client contacted me. I did not follow-up with the executive coach after the first contact with them. This approach enabled me to obtain feedback from the client about their experience of the strengths-based and hope theory coaching phenomenon. The sample consisted of 20 coached executives. I was flexible, however, and receptive to opportunistic or emergent sampling as data were gathered.

Data analysis included the identification of common themes that were evident in the feedback. I conducted coding of the responses, followed by analysis to search for patterns in the data. NVivo software was used to assist in the coding process. To ensure quality and validation, member checking was employed with the participants, by having the participants review the transcripts of their interview for accuracy. I had a Ph.D.



coding expert conduct coding of a sample of the responses for calibration of the coding process, and the Ph.D. expert evaluated my coding analysis for bias.

For analysis, I gathered the personal experiences of participants experiencing the phenomenon of being coached. A list of significant statements was compiled, and these significant statements were grouped into larger units of information using the affinity diagramming technique. I reported descriptions of what the participants experienced as a result of strengths-based coaching. I finished with a composite description of the phenomenon incorporating both the textural and structural descriptions. This description was intended to provide the essence of the experience, representing the culmination of the phenomenological study (see Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002).

### **Ethical Issues**

Throughout the study, I was sensitive to ethical concerns. I needed to be prepared to address ethical or illegal activities I might be exposed to during this research. Participant confidentiality was a concern for this study, as was the protection of the coach-executive client confidentiality relationship. All executives in the participant sample were personally contacted by their coach, with the nature and purpose of the study being shared. Coaches advised their executive client to contact me directly if interested in participating in the study. During this communication, I determined their willingness to participate and the appropriateness of their involvement in the study. I communicated the process for conducting the study to each of the participants. Each participant was asked to sign an informed consent form, which followed the Institutional Review Board (IRB) standards and my approved IRB application (Approval # 07-06-16-

0259363). Before every interview, the conditions of the informed consent form were explained to the participant. This notice also highlighted that participation in this research study was entirely voluntary and that the participant had the right to cease participation at any time. During the introduction to the interview, participants were reminded that they were taking part in research and provided with the purpose and procedures associated with the research study. There were no anticipated risks or discomforts from participation in this research. I had completed certification from the National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research through successfully completing the NIH Web-based training course “Protecting Human Research Participants” (Certification Number: 2084548). At the same time, I needed to assure participants of the confidentiality of their responses, and I needed to honor that confidentiality.

I began the study by contacting executive coaches to determine their approaches to coaching. Coaches, who use hope theory (Snyder, 2000; Snyder, 2002) and strengths-based coaching approaches, were briefed on the intent of the study, and they were asked to introduce the study to their clients. The coach was instructed to advise their client to contact me directly if the client was interested in participating in the study. I did not follow up with the coach, so they do not know whether their client contacted me or not. This approach protected the coach-client confidentiality requirement, as well as safeguarded the anonymity of the client and the confidentiality of their responses.

### **Definitions**

*Agency:* Agency is the motivational component of hope theory used to drive people to utilize their routes to a desired goal (Helland & Winston, 2005; Juntunen &

Wettersen, 2006; Lopez, 2013; Luthans & Jensen, 2002; Peterson & Byron, 2008; Sebbat, Mahmoudzadeh, Ashena, & Parsa, 2015; Snyder, 2001).

*Appreciative Inquiry (AI)*: AI is the study of what gives life to human systems when they function at their best. It involves a focus on strengths rather than deficits as a way to promote growth or improvement (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003).

*Goals*: Goals are the endpoints of mental action sequences. Goals are the foundation of hope theory (Lopez, 2013; Luthans & Jensen, 2002; Peterson & Byron, 2008; Snyder, 2001).

*Hope Theory*: Hope theory is the theory describing hope as the sum of perceived capabilities to develop pathways to goals and includes the motivation to use those pathways (Helland & Winston, 2005; Juntunen & Wettersen, 2006; Lopez, 2013; Luthans & Jensen, 2002; Peterson & Byron, 2008; Sebbat, Mahmoudzadeh, Ashena, & Parsa, 2015; Snyder, 2001).

*Lived Experience*: *Lived experience represents* the way an individual sees the world; in this study it is the leader's reality toward coaching (Van Manen, 1990).

*Pathways*: Pathways are the routes to desired goals (Helland & Winston, 2005; Lopez, 2013; Snyder, 2001).

*Positive Organizational Behavior (POB)*: POB is defined as “the study and application of positively oriented human resource strengths” (Dawkins et al., 2013; Norman, Luthans, & Luthans, 2005, p. 57) and is positive psychology applied to the workplace.

*Positive Psychology:* Positive psychology is psychology primarily concerned with using the psychological theory, research, and intervention techniques to understand the positive, adaptive, creative, and emotionally fulfilling aspects of human behavior, as opposed to the pathological aspects of human behavior (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000).

*Strengths-based:* Strength-based is investing and focusing in strengths in people as opposed to weaknesses in others (Rath & Conchie, 2008).

### **Assumptions**

One main assumption of mine was that executive coaching can improve performance. Both executive coaching and positive psychology are relatively new fields of study. This assumption was reasonable since there are psychology practitioners who are serving as coaches and individuals self-report the value they received. From coaching Since motivation is a factor in the pursuit and achievement of goals and the psychological well-being of an individual can have an impact on their motivation, this seemed like a reasonable assumption.

Another assumption was that coaches would notify their clients about the study and executives would contact me and agree to be interviewed for the study. Knowledge on whether coaches passed on the study information for executive participation could not be known. Executives are busy people and to participate in this study, they needed to contact me and agree to be interviewed for the study. Additionally, the subjective experiences of the interviewed executives were considered to be valid perspectives of truth and their experience. I assumed that the coaches who participated and were asked

about their approaches were truthful about the use of positive psychology approaches in their coaching and that their interpretation of positive psychology approaches were aligned with mine.

### **Scope and Delimitations**

In this study, I addressed the gap in knowledge regarding executive coaching approaches and perceived behavior changes among recipients of coaching. Specifically, my focus was on executive coaching using positive psychology approaches such as hope theory (Snyder, 2000; Snyder, 2002) and a strengths-based focus. I explored the coached executive's perception and experience regarding their perceived self-efficacy, optimism, motivation, and resiliency. I chose this focus due to the newness of the fields of executive coaching and positive psychology, the lack of knowledge and research involving the effectiveness of coaching, and third-party perception of peers and subordinates regarding the effectiveness of coaching.

The scope of this study included open-ended, semistructured interviews of a sample of executives who had been coached through positive psychology approaches. In this study, I used a phenomenological design which did not support a generalization of the results (van Manen, 1990), but did provide insight regarding the usefulness of hope theory based positive coaching.

### **Limitations**

In this study, I explored the executive leader perceptions and lived experiences of positive executive coaching through their perceptions of coaching and behavioral characteristics such as self-efficacy, optimism, motivation, and resiliency. This was a

qualitative study, and qualitative studies are conducted in a natural setting that makes it difficult to replicate in other settings or environments (Patton, 2012; van Manen, 1990). This limits the appropriateness of transferability and generalization.

Another limitation of the study is that the executive coaching field and positive psychology fields are relatively new, resulting in limited research from these new fields with which to develop a foundation for the study. Most of the coaches and executives from the study sample was to be from a population of CEC-certified coaches. Although I am a member of this group, I had limited contact with the other executive coaches, with most of it occurring during the certification training processes. With this limited contact with the executive coaches of the CEC, my membership should not have resulted in bias in the study. There were several other certification organizations available and several LinkedIn coach groups where participants could have come from.

This study was dependent on executives contacting me and agreeing to be interviewed. During the interview process, I assumed that the executive perceptions and expressed experiences were truthful. These limitations can have an impact on credibility and dependability.

I have an interest in executive coaching and positive psychology. As a result, I acknowledge a bias for positive psychology and a focus on strengths versus weaknesses in people. I was aware of this potential bias and used member checking and epoche bracketing to ensure I captured the interview data accurately. I also tested my coding using an expert validator to calibrate the coding methodology. Another limitation of the

study may have been that coaching is intuitively seen as useful by its very nature so there could be confirmation bias.

### **Significance of the Study**

The results of this qualitative, transcendental phenomenological study add to the management and psychology literature on hope theory and executive coaching. Currently, hope theory and positive psychology research tends to be most prevalent in the field of psychology. Insights from this study should aid executives, executive coaches, and executive coach certifying bodies to better understand executives' perceptions of long-term behavioral change experienced due to these approaches to executive coaching and insights into the role that the positive psychology, hope theory, and a strengths-based focused coaching approach can provide in this area. The results of this study are anticipated to guide areas for potential training and development of coaches. This study of the application of hope theory (Snyder, 2000, 2002) in the coaching setting contributes knowledge to the executive coaching approach experience knowledge base, and the coaching approach influence on executive perception of behavioral changes, such as self-efficacy, optimism, motivation, and resiliency. These results on the coach's application of strengths-based coaching add to the knowledge of competencies that coaches can use to develop the capabilities of the executive further.

### **Significance to Practice**

Understanding the approaches for executive coaching using positive psychology focuses, such as strength-based coaching and hope theory on the behavior and perceptions of coached leaders may provide insight, direction, and guidance for executive

coaches, leaders, and organizations on practices that lead to changes in leader self-efficacy, optimism, motivation, and resiliency. As I will indicate in Chapter 2, executive coaching and positive psychology are relatively new fields that have a need for further research to better understand the approaches that are effective in executive coaching and the value of positive psychology in effecting improvements in executive self-efficacy, motivation, optimism, resiliency, and performance. In Chapter 2, my review of the literature will indicate the effectiveness of a strength-based focus and hope theory on these behavior areas and performance. For example, Kiselica and Englar-Carlson (2010) asserted that individuals can become more confident when they become aware of their strengths and have hope. Frederickson (2001) showed that long-lasting effects of positive emotions may result in increased resiliency, hope, and a reduction in lingering negative emotions in an individual. The findings may apply to all people; however, it is expected that the results are specifically applicable to leaders, coaches, organizations, and leadership development theory as it relates to the coaching process and behavior changes.

### **Significance to Theory**

This research is significant to theory because it fills the gap in the literature regarding executive coaching and leadership development regarding the use of hope theory in the coaching approach and the perceptions of leader self-efficacy, optimism, motivation, and resiliency. As highlighted by Joo (2005) and Sperry (2013), executive coaching is a relatively new field of study that has seen increased research over the past 20 years. McNulty and Fincham (2012) and Quidbach, Mikolajczak, and Gross (2015) noted that positive psychology is also a relatively new field of study that has seen



increased research in the past 20 years. In this study, I researched the lived experiences of executives coached using an interaction of these two fields of study and their impact on the personal development of executives and the results contribute to the understanding of coaching as an approach to leadership development. Leaders may be engaged in leading nonprofit organizations or social change initiatives, making this study beneficial for social change.

### **Significance to Social Change**

The results of this study have significance to positive social change as it is focused on developing a better understanding of the use of positive psychology theories, such as hope theory, on the coaching of executives and leaders. As I will outline in Chapter 2, research on hope theory, positive psychology, POB, and appreciative inquiry have demonstrated results indicating increased well-being, self-efficacy, and happiness in individuals, but researchers lack the contextual understanding of how changes are actually perceived by the coached individuals.

The results of this study also further the knowledge of a strengths-based focus. Research has shown a ripple effect on others when a leader is focused on their strengths and the strengths of others, and this is seen in all fields, including the humanities (Peterson, 2006). It is expected that my study contributes to knowledge in the management and psychology disciplines. A better understanding of leadership development approaches, such as coaching, may lead to leadership with more self-efficacy, optimism, motivation, and resiliency in fulfilling visions, missions, and goals with regards to solving social and humanitarian global issues. Ultimately, people's

experience of work is greatly influenced by the relationship they have with their leaders, so determining the effectiveness of this form of coaching will have implications for the broader context of employee engagement at work.

### **Summary and Transition**

In this qualitative phenomenological study, I interviewed executives who had experienced executive coaching using an approach based on hope theory and a strengths-based focus with the intent to explore their lived experiences and their perceived behavior change experiences. In the next two chapters, I will provide a framework for this study. Chapter 2 includes identification of gaps and explores existing literature in the areas of executive coaching, positive psychology, hope theory, appreciative inquiry, POB, authentic leadership and strengths-based leadership. In Chapter 3, I will discuss the methodology used to collect and analyze the data, and I will report on the analysis and results in Chapter 4. In Chapter 5, I will provide my conclusions, based on my analysis of the study results, and I will provide recommendations for further study.

## Chapter 2: Literature Review

### **Introduction**

In this chapter, I will address several of the concepts and models that can affect leadership self-efficacy, motivation, optimism, and resiliency. There are several similarities in these constructs, with some differences. Coaching is one aspect of leadership development. Leadership development is an activity engaged in by organizations to improve leadership performance in guiding the collective work of the organization and this can involve the setting of direction, the creation of alignment, and the maintenance of commitment (Johnson et al., 2012; VanVelsor & McCauley, 2004). The act of leadership may involve the setting of goals. Goal setting is useful since conscious behavior is usually purposeful, with goals providing regulation (Johnson, et al., 2012). Goal setting is also a component of hope theory (Snyder, 2000, 2002). With the many and various issues that tend to compete for a leader's attention and choices, goals can create an anchor for the choosing of areas for focus.

There are several approaches to the coaching field, with the most common approaches being life coaching, career coaching, business coaching, and executive coaching (Hunt, 2009). Each has a different focus regarding its client base and expected outcomes. An individual's intrapersonal and interpersonal issues are the concern of life coaches (Fairley & Stout, 2004), who tend to work with a broad range of clients. Career coaches work with clients in career transitions or professional development. Business coaches work with clients in the business community, such as leaders of companies or leadership within organizations. The focus tends to be on building a business,

organizational development, succession planning, improving communication skills, change management, or business strategy. Executive coaching focuses on executive clients and their ability to develop better decision-making processes and engage in behavior changes to improve their effectiveness in leading their organizations. Lewis-Duarte and Bligh (2012) noted, “references to executive coaching were virtually non-existent prior to 1980” (p. 255). Much of the extant research in the field is from the perspective of the coach; however, de Haan and Nieß (2012) indicated the differences in coachee experiences from the coach’s experience in their studies. As a result, I focused on executive coaching from the lived experience of the coached executive in this phenomenological study.

This review of the literature consists of research in the growing field of executive coaching and aspects of positive psychology. As interest in executive coaching has increased in recent years, empirical studies into the approaches that work in executive coaching have been lacking. Recently, positive psychology has received interest from researchers in the field of psychology. Historically, the psychology field was focused on weaknesses and mental illness.

Given that these two areas are relatively new fields of study, it was necessary for me to explore the relationship of executive coaching and positive psychology. I am interested in aspects of positive psychology, such as hope theory and a strength-based focus, as the primary approach to coaching. In this study, my exploration determined the influence of positive psychology coaching approaches to the lived experiences of

coached executives and their perceived behaviors and perceptions in self-efficacy, optimism, motivation, and resiliency.

This chapter will consist of a review of the literature from several different fields that I used to ground this study. The purpose of this literature review was to identify what is known and not known about the topic of this study. This literature review will include the identification of the theories that form the foundation of my study, and identification of where the gaps and controversies are. I will present the work of primary researchers in the topic areas as an exploration of the conversations going on in the field and discuss fundamental developments and trends. My primary area of interest for this study were positive psychology, hope theory, strengths-based leadership, appreciative inquiry, positive organizational behavior, psychological capital (PSYCAP), positive organizational scholarship, and executive coaching.

This chapter will begin with a review of the literature as it relates to executive coaching. Following the area of executive coaching will be a discussion of the field of positive psychology. The research conducted in the field of positive psychology serves to inform the work that has been done to understand how a focus on strengths, rather than narrowly focusing on problems, can lead to positive emotional states that can lead to engagement and meaning (Lambert & Erekson, 2008). In the third section, I will focus on the area of hope theory, which was a foundational theory for this study. In the fourth section, I will report on literature focused on goal-setting with the next section addressing the literature on motivation. These two areas were important to this study as they make up the critical components of hope theory. In the sixth section, POB and PSYCAP will be

reviewed. POB represents positive psychology as applied to the workplace while PSYCAP involves an organization capitalizing on the human resource strengths in the organization (Luthans, 2002; Rus & Baban, 2013). The seventh section will involve a discussion of the field of appreciative inquiry, which represents an approach to looking at what is going right in an organization, as opposed to what is not working. The field represents a potentially significant skill in the area of executive coaching using hope theory and strengths-based approaches. The eighth topic that I will review is authentic leadership. Authentic leadership involves a leader gaining self-awareness and being authentic, or true, to their self. In the ninth section, I will discuss the literature in the field of strengths-based leadership. This literature review was essential to my understanding of the strengths-based concepts as applied to executive coaching and to illustrate the line of thinking that resulted in this research.

### **Literature Search Strategy**

Leadership development, executive coaching, strengths-based focus, and positive psychology are relatively new fields of study, with foundations based on research throughout the fields of psychology and coaching. My literature search strategy was based upon searches of studies and literature in the areas of *executive coaching, positive psychology, hope theory, motivation, goal-setting, appreciative inquiry, positive organizational behavior, positive organization citizenship, psychological capital, strengths-based leadership, strengths-based focus, leadership development, leader development, positive emotion, optimism, resilience, resiliency, hope, confidence, self-*

*efficacy*, and *efficacy*. The searches consisted of each of these terms individually, as well as combined with AND and OR functions.

I primarily used the Walden University Library for my searches in the subject areas of business and management, psychology, and multidisciplinary databases such as ProQuest Central. Other databases I used included Business Source Complete, ABI/INFORM Complete, Emerald Management, PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, PsycCRITIQUE, PsycEXTRA, and PsycTESTS. I also used Google Scholar alerts to be notified of new literature in the various fields. I also used Google, Bing, Wikipedia and other nonscholarly sources to cross-reference some information. I used references to cross-reference some information and broaden my search. I used references and bibliography lists from other studies to identify possible new sources. I also reviewed books written by authors who had published peer-reviewed articles as another source of pertinent information.

### **Conceptual Framework**

The conceptual frameworks for this study were based on Snyder's (2000a) cognitive theory of hope, Buckingham and Clifton's (2001) theories of strength-based leadership, Snyder and Lopez's (2007) hope theory, and the theories of positive psychology advanced by Seligman and Csikszentmihalyi (2000). Although the research in positive psychology and hope has increased since 1998, much of it has been focused on clinical psychology and counseling areas. There has been little research on the area of coaching a leader. Much of the research on strengths-based leadership is empirical from a study conducted by Gallup, which has not been subjected to peer review. There is little in

the research from a qualitative approach to understanding the feelings and perceptions relative to motivation, self-efficacy, and confidence of executives exposed to a strengths-based leadership coaching environment. This is needed to understand better the behavioral change process from the coachee's perspective as a result of this approach on their motivation to follow pathways to the achievement of their goals.

## **Literature Review**

### **Executive Coaching**

Executive coaching is a field that involves a coach and an executive working together to change behavior in the executive's execution of their responsibilities. The origins of executive coaching began in the fields of psychotherapy and psychology (Gentry et al., 2013). Executive coaching is a rapidly growing field in the business world (Joo, 2005; Sperry, 2013), becoming one of the fastest growing intervention approaches for developing leaders (Moen & Federici, 2012). Several professional bodies have emerged, providing accreditation and codes of conduct for applying executive coaching (de Haan & Nieß, 2012). Many of these certifying coaching organizations were established in the past decade, with a list of some shown in Table 1. Among them is the ICF. The ICF has indicated that there are over an estimated 10,000 to 15,000 coaches worldwide (Baron and Morin, 2010; Hodlin, 2014; Joo, 2005; Menghetti, 2007). In 2005, Joo (2005) indicated an expectation of executive coaching doubling from its market value of \$1 billion worldwide to \$2 billion. Demand for executive coaching has grown from 1998 in areas such as application, teaching, and writing (Sperry, 2013). A perception that



coaching leads to positive impacts on leadership skills and favorable organizational outcomes has likely driven this popularity in executive coaching.

There are several definitions for executive coaching. Coaching involves a confidential partnership between the coach and the executive, generally being a business leader or manager (Bozer & Sarros, 2012). The client-coach relationship is an essential factor in any coaching engagement (McKenna & Davis, 2009). The executive coach utilizes various behavioral and organizational techniques to guide the client to the attainment of goals, with the techniques sometimes being customized to the needs of the individual executive being coached (de Haan & Nieß, 2012). The techniques are designed to improve the effectiveness of the executive in leading their organization (Bennet, 2006; Hodlin, 2014; Joo, 2005; Menghetti, 2007; Miller, 2000).

Successful executive coaching requires a readiness from the client for it to be effective. The coach and coachee relationship is the most significant predictor of the outcomes of the coaching experience. (de Haan & Nieß, 2012). The individual being coached needs to have the capacity and will or motivation for change (McKenna & Davis, 2009). The coach needs to focus on the goals that are important to the client. The role of the coach then becomes one of assisting the motivated executive to discover pathways for that change. This coaching role represents the development of options and possibilities (Grant, 2013). This coaching function involves helping the client become aware of their strengths and the resources that can be deployed to effect the change (McKenna & Davis, 2009). This awareness results in the development of specific action steps for the coachee to take to move towards their goals. The result of this coaching

interaction results in the coach instilling a level of hope in the motivated executive being coached through the development of pathways to the achievement of goals (Grant, 2013). This activation of hope serves to advance “the probability of change at every stage of the coaching process” (McKenna & Davis, 2009, p. 253).

There are several approaches a coach can take with their client. While there are standards, they vary, and there is not a universal standard but instead a lack of common standards (Sherpa, 2015). As executive coaching grows, there may be a development of a universal licensing board, and this could add awareness to an importance in studies of approaches to executive coaching to inform the standard licensing developers. Sherpa (2014) reported the top five most widely used executive coaching processes from their Executive Coaching Survey. Table 2 shows the most widely used coaching processes.

Table 2

*Most Widely Used Executive Coaching Processes*

Certifying Body	Approach
Sherpa	The model for Sherpa executive coaching is the Himalayan Guide. The guide helps climbers choose a course and reach the summit. In the same way, Sherpa coaching skills provide tools and share knowledge of the best path for others to follow.
Sociedade Brasileira de Coaching (S.B.C.)	Largest coach training organization in Brazil. Coaches develop the skills: capacity, ethics, responsibility, skills, excellence, commitment and inspire others.

(table continues)

Certifying Body	Approach
Hudson	<p>Focus on self-development to build the capacity to coach. Outcome driven coach methodology that is measured.</p> <p>Understanding developmental pathways of the client—toward the whole person. This includes the developmental pathway across one’s lifespan as well as the internal pathway that evolves as the individual moves through transitions and changes.</p>
Integral	<p>“Integral” means inclusive of everything, entire, complete, whole. So, at its deepest root, Integral Coaching® refers to a way of coaching that is whole, complete and integrated. Based on adult development theory. Developed and adapted Integral Lenses based on Ken Wilber's AQAL model including the lenses listed below. AQAL is a short-form term meaning All Quadrants, All Levels, All Lines, All Types, All States.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Quadrants Lens (Orienting Structure, Competencies)</li> <li>2. Embodied Levels of Consciousness Lens</li> <li>3. Lines of Development Lens</li> <li>4. Type Structure Lens (Enneagram)</li> <li>5. Type Structure Lens (Gender)</li> <li>6. States of Consciousness Lens</li> </ol> <p>These Integral Lenses aggregate into an Integral framework that becomes the coach's road map for building new capabilities with their client ensuring that the focus is based on the client's needs rather than the coach's biases or preferences.</p>
Combined	Using more than one approach.

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Note: Adapted from “Executive coaching survey ’14: Evidence & interaction”, Sherpa,

2014. Retrieved from <http://www.sherpacoaching.com/executive-coaching-surveyfp.html>

There are two basic schools of thought in executive coaching. One is focused on understanding the strengths of leaders and working to improve in the strength area. The other focuses on recognizing the weaknesses in the leader and working to improve on the leader's weaknesses (Sherpa, 2015). Sherpa (2017) reported that the coaches that focus on strengths outnumber those who focus on weaknesses by a 4 to 1 ratio, with strengths coaches being primarily women. Other coaches can focus on an individual's weaknesses and utilize strategies to improve in the areas of weakness for their client. Coaches could concentrate on the client's strengths, furthering developing and leveraging the client's strengths in achieving results. Ting (2006) expressed the Center for Creative Coaching's (CCL) approach to executive coaching as focused on teaching coaches how to help leaders understand themselves more fully, so they know and utilize their strengths, and develop more potential. This view aligns with the research on authentic leadership awareness and the focus on strengths represents a positive psychology focus. Grant (2013) reported that praising and complimenting on what the coached individual is doing well can build their self-confidence. Compliments can be used to focus the coachee on their strengths.

Co-active coaching (Newnham-Kanas, Morrow, & Irwin, 2012) is an approach that is utilized by some coaches. Co-active coaching is based on four foundational beliefs. First is the belief that people are naturally creative, resourceful, and whole. People are capable of developing their answers to their questions (Betz, n.d.; Kimsey-House, Kimsey-House, Sandahl, & Whitworth, 2011). The second belief is that there is a focus on the moment. This focus means being fully present in the here and now, being

open and agile, and ready to respond. The third belief is that the co-active coach focuses on the whole person in their client. They go beyond just problem solving with their clients and focus on their client's heart, mind, body, and spirit. The final area is to evoke transformation. Evoking transformation represents a commitment to sustainable change, and not just on the current issue (Betz, n.d.; Kimsey-House et al., 2011).

Bono et al. (2009) highlighted several differences in executive coaching, such as the coaching medium, approaches, assessment tools, and areas of focus. Research conducted on coaches regarding what they believe are the best practices for coaching support these coaching difference findings (Gentry et al., 2013). These research results demonstrated the variation of coaching practices in the field, which could have an impact on the results achieved.

Bozer and Sarros (2012) reported that coached executives set more specific goals than non-coached executives. However, empirical evidence lacks in support of this (Bono et al., 2009; Feldman & Lankau, 2005; Finn, 2007; Levinson, 2009). With the field being relatively new, even though coaching is continuing to develop, the study of coaching is showing inconsistencies. These inconsistencies may be due to the different approaches used in coaching; the different methodologies used; the lack of consistent certification or no certification, helping to raise questions in coaching credentials; and the challenges experienced in measuring the effectiveness of coaching.

Coachee readiness is a significant factor in the executive coaching process. The demand on executives continues to evolve, and the executive needs to accept coaching as a positive intervention for their growth and development, and not one indicating their

failure in their roles. Executive coaching involves feedback from the coach and potentially colleagues for the coachee. Coachee receptivity to feedback is an essential component for understanding whether the behavior changes they are developing are being acted on, are sustained, and are effective (Bozer et al., 2013). The coachee motivation is critical to success in the coaching relationship. Coachee self-efficacy can have a strong influence on coachee receptivity to coaching and feedback. Best (2010) proposed a measurement tool called The Leadership Readiness Index to determine the extent of executive readiness to coaching. The Leadership Readiness Index (Best, 2010) utilizes developmental personality style theory in its construction. Developmental personality style theory comes from a “counseling model that seeks to reframe client distress and counterproductive behavior as a logical adaptation to setbacks or traumas that have occurred during the course of development” (Best, 2010, p. 26).

The executive coaching literature suggests that the approach used for coaching may make a difference in the results, and that coached executives set more specific goals more often than noncoached executives (Bozer & Sarros, 2012). Based on this, I studied the coached executive’s perceptions regarding their behavior changes from positive psychology coaching. The focus on hope theory ensured the development of goals by the executive.

The psychology and human behavior fields represent major components of the coaching field. Much of executive coaching involves developing an executive’s motivation and igniting behavior change. Moen and Federici (2012) reported executive coaching is effective in raising the intrinsic motivation of the coach, due to increased

needs satisfaction. Therefore, the field of psychology is relevant to the study of coaching approaches. Executive coaching methodologies focused on an executive's strengths present an opportunity for the application of positive psychology concepts (Madden, Green, & Grant, 2011). Positive psychology as an approach can have favorable effects on executive coaching since the coach is attempting to influence sustainable behavior changes in the executive coachee. As Verdugo (2012) noted, "positive emotions are among the dispositional antecedents that promote sustainable behavior" (p. 657). In the next section, I will address knowledge in the field of positive psychology.

### **Positive Psychology**

The study of positive psychology has received a renewed focus and has grown in the last 15 years (McNulty & Fincham, 2012; Quoidbach, Mikolajczak, & Gross, 2015). Hart and Sasso (2011) highlighted the growth in literature associated with positive psychology through an analysis of 1,135 articles published in counseling psychology journals. During a 20-year period between 1970 to 1990, positive psychology constructs were represented in 25% of the literature analyzed. The positive psychology constructs analyzed increased to 34% in the 1990s, and again in the first 5 years of the 2000s to 40%.

Positive psychology is the study of what is best in people, rather than focusing on pathology (Gander, Proyer, Ruch, & Wyss, 2013; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Positive psychology focuses on the strengths and well-being of people, with the well-being theories split between eudaimonia and hedonia. Eudaimonia is defined as

functioning well and having meaning while hedonia is represented as feeling well and experiencing pleasure (Lambert, Passmore, & Holder, 2015).

There were several precursors to positive psychology. The humanists focused on the qualities of healthy individuals and the pathways to wellness. Adler (1956) believed that individual values and attitudes linked to life goals, with the life goals directed to success. Abraham Maslow is considered to be the founder of humanistic psychology (Lambert et al., 2015). Maslow's focus on humanistic aspects is evidenced in the social and self-actualization phases of his theory of the hierarchy of needs (Maslow, 1943, 2000). In his theory on the hierarchy of needs, Maslow concluded that individuals move through a progression of needs with each needing to be satisfied to move to a higher level of needs. The progression involves moving through the following needs: physiological needs, safety, belonging, esteem, and self-actualization (Harrigan & Commons, 2015). Maslow later added self-transcendence as a progression (Koltko-Rivera, 2006). Rogers (1961) believed that individuals were open to both positive and negative experiences and that they were naturally fully functioning and in a state of self-actualization. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) proposed a theory based on a positive state of flow. Csikszentmihalyi (1990) defined this state of flow as an optimal experience achieved when an individual engages in activities that challenge their skills in providing a sense of mastery and competence. Flow is referred to as a pleasing state as the individual engages in the activity, focusing and losing track of time through the experience. Humanistic psychology lost favor due to the difficulty in measuring and testing the concepts of the theories (Lambert et al., 2015).



After World War II, the field of psychology was focused on attempting to correct behavioral and psychological issues with people. Researchers and practitioners concentrated on pathologies, with this focus dominating the applied psychology literature (Kiselica & Englar-Carlson, 2010). In the 1950s, Abraham Maslow identified this shortfall in the psychology science (Lopez & Gallagher, 2009). Maslow (1999) advocated the direct study of healthy rather than sick people. Positive psychology was reintroduced by Martin Seligman when he was president of the American Psychological Association (APA) in the late 1990s (McNulty & Fincham, 2012). He advocated spawning another branch of psychology. This branch is one that focuses on the building of positive qualities and the study of what is going right in individuals who are happy, optimistic, and satisfied (Norman, Luthans, & Luthans, 2005). Therefore, the focus of positive psychology shifts from repairing mentally damaged individuals to focus on building on their positive qualities, emphasizing the well-being and resiliency of individuals (Aspinwall & Staudinger, 2003; Kiselica & Englar-Carlson, 2010). The result of this focus was the study of positive psychology being on the strengths and virtues of individuals over their weaknesses and disease. By accentuating the positive, individuals focus on the parts of themselves that serve as strengths, which can be used to help individuals grow using the parts of themselves that are good, creative, and capable. Individuals can become more confident when they become aware of their strengths and have hope (Kiselica & Englar-Carlson, 2010).

Positive psychology is an approach where the interest is in what is right with people (Norman et al., 2005; Proyer, Ruch, & Buschor, 2013). Instead of focusing on

fixing something that is wrong with an individual, the positive psychology approach focuses on building on the strengths of the individual (Cheavens, Feldman, Woodward, & Snyder, 2006; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000; Sheldon & King, 2001). Positive psychology involves the study of emotions and character traits from the positive perspective, rather than the pathological view. Positive psychology studies include a focus on enabling institutions (Gable & Haidt, 2005; Seligman, Steen, Park, & Peterson, 2005). Concepts of positive psychology include flourish psychology, flow psychology, and performance psychology (Johnston & Beck, 2012; Seligman, 2012). Flow is a concept where the individual loses any sense of time and boredom when accomplishing a task (Dempsey, 2007), and involves a deep sense of concentration, leading to more productivity and creativity (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990). Seligman (2011) described the topic of positive psychology as flourishing, with the metric of well-being being flourishing. This focus on flourishing led Seligman to describe the goal of positive psychology as increasing flourishing. Seligman referred to this connection as well-being theory.

There are seven aspects in the field of psychology. Three aspects are the result of the past, two happen in the present, and two focus on the future. These can be seen in Figure 1. The three aspects of positive psychology associated with the past are contentment, well-being, and satisfaction. The two in the present are flow and happiness, and the two focused on the future are hope and optimism (Seligman, 2001; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). With regards to the future, both hope and optimism have been shown to be predictors of better outcomes (Norem & Chang, 2002; Peterson & Luthans, 2003). The focus is on thriving individuals, especially on their strengths and virtues, and

their subjective experiences (Hodlin, 2014; Robbins, 2009). Therefore, positive psychology is focused on “living the good life” (Peterson, 2006, p. 8). It involves focusing on the strengths of people and enabling them to utilize their capabilities, which can lead to increased optimism, hope, resiliency, and efficacy (Hodlin, 2014; Seligman, 2002). Seligman (2011) provided further preliminary research findings from the Comprehensive Soldier Fitness program that supported favorable positive psychology results in adaptability, catastrophic thinking, character strength, coping skills, and optimism (Johnston & Beck, 2012; Seligman, 2011).

Positive psychology interventions often focus on increasing individual happiness. A focus on strengths and the positive in people can result in a reduction in negative thoughts and emotions, which can influence the motivation of the executive (Harris, Thorensen, & Lopez, 2007; Hodlin, 2014). Norman et al. (2005) concluded that an executive with negative thoughts and emotions can create more adverse reactions among their followers. However, positive emotions have been found to predict happiness, well-being, better outcomes, satisfaction and success at work (Cohn & Frederickson, 2009; Diener & Seligman, 2004; Hodlin, 2014; Kahneman, Kreuger, Schkade, Shawartz, & Stone, 2004; Losada & Heaphy, 2004; Lyubomirsky, King, & Diener, 2005). Gander, Proyer, Ruch, and Wyss (2013) conducted studies on the impact of nine strengths-based positive interventions on individual well-being and depression. Gander et al. (2013) concluded that an individual’s happiness and depressive symptoms can be altered through positive intervention. A positive leader fuels positive emotions within themselves and their followers (Hodlin, 2014). A leader focused on positive psychology will reward

behaviors they want to encourage (Dempsey, 2007). This approach represents a form of positive reinforcement. Rath (2004) noted that this could lead to more job satisfaction, greater engagement in their work, increased performance and better moods (Hodlin, 2014). A theory related to positive emotions is the broaden-and-build theory (Frederickson, 2001). Although a positive emotion is often considered to be a fleeting feeling, the belief behind the broaden-and-build theory is these positive emotions may have more long-lasting effects and may broaden a person's ability to act and think (Cohn & Frederickson, 2009; Frederickson, 2001, 2004; Gander et al., 2013; Quoidbach et al., 2015). Some of these long-lasting effects may result in increased resiliency, hope, and a reduction in lingering negative emotions in an individual (Frederickson, 2001).

There may be cultural differences with regards to positive psychology. Wirtz, Chi-Yue, Diener, and Oishi (2009) conducted three studies that indicated some cultural differences with regards to positive psychology. Using a quantitative methodology and a sample size of 38 participants, in the first study they assembled a sample of self-identified Asian Americans, European Americans, and Hispanics. Study 2 focused on friendship and consisted of a 67-participant sample of self-identified American Europeans and American East Asians. Study three involved 23 European Americans and 21 Japanese participants. European Americans emphasized positive effect when thinking about future actions. With Asian Americans, the negative effect was equal to or had a higher status compared to positive effect (Wirtz et al., 2009). Therefore, the emphasis in the West was on the positive effect while the negative effect had a unique role in the East.

Much of the criticisms of positive psychology revolve around the foundation being Western assuming, with a focus on the individual pursuit of happiness.

There are views that the assumptions regarding positive psychology overlook cultural strengths and Aristotle's whole person focus (Lambert et al., 2015). Further, the focus on positive emotions, without consideration of negative emotions in the study of positive psychology, has led to some criticism. McNulty and Fincham (2012) highlighted some arguments regarding the focus on the positive of positive psychology in all contexts. They expressed concern over the labeling of psychological traits, which could impose expectations and values on the research. McNulty and Fincham argued that such labeling may influence what is predicted and reported. The view expressed by McNulty and Fincham and shared by other researchers is that "positive psychology needs to be thought of as just plain psychology" (p. 107). However, with such strong linkages to the hope of positive psychology, the next section further describes hope theory. Hope theory (Snyder, 2000, 2002) involves the setting of goals and involves the components of pathways and motivation for the achievement of those goals. Bozer and Sarros (2012) found that coached executives set more specific goals than non-coached executives, leading me to further explore the current knowledge in this area.

Based on the positive psychology area of interest, the lived experience of coached leaders who have been coached using positive psychology approaches will be studied. One area of positive psychology of interest is hope theory (Snyder, 2000, 2002). Hope theory and its three components of goal setting, agency, and pathways is discussed in the next section. It is a key area of focus for this study.

## **Hope Theory**

Hope theory (Snyder, 2000, 2002) represents a segment of the knowledge in positive psychology. Researchers had viewed the concept of hope as an emotional state for many years. Further research has established hope as a cognitive concept, where individuals consciously think about goals they want to achieve in the future, develop the means to achieve those goals, and have the motivation to work towards their goals (Hodlin, 2014). The basic foundation of hope is that people are goal-focused (Rand & Cheavens, 2009). Snyder, Ritschel, Rand, and Berg (2006) argued the pursuit of goals is dependent on human behaviors. The reaching of the desired goal represents a basic assumption of hope and drives behavior (Hellman, Pittman, & Munoz, 2012; Locke & Latham, 2002).

There are three primary components associated with hope (Helland & Winston, 2005; Juntunen & Wettersen, 2006; Lopez, 2013; Luthans & Jensen, 2002; Peterson & Byron, 2008; Sebbat, Mahmoudzadeh, Ashena, & Parsa, 2015; Snyder, 2001). The three components are goals, pathways, and agency. The goal represents the anchor point, the pathways are the means for achieving those goals, and agency represents the motivation to achieve the goals. Each of these components interacts with each other. Hope increases when the individual has established goals, has determined pathways to achieve the goals, and is motivated to follow the pathways (Green, Oades, & Grant, 2006; Lopez, 2013; Snyder, Michael, & Cheavens, 1999). Hope involves the setting of goals, with the other two components of agency and pathways representing the willpower and the waypower thought processes that enable the achievement of the goals (Hodlin, 2014; Snyder et al.,

2006). The agency and pathways components are iterative in their interaction, as well as additive and positively related (Peterson & Luthans, 2003; Snyder, 2000). If an individual has some pathways to achieving a goal but does not have the agency or motivation to pursue those pathways, the goals will likely not be attained (Hodlin, 2014). If an individual is motivated to achieve their goals but has not established the means, or alternative pathways to achieve the goals, it is likely that the individual will not be successful in achieving the goals and overcoming any obstacles to the achievement of the goals. Having some pathways to the achievement of goals may motivate an individual since they can see a means to the achievement of the goals. If a person is motivated to achieve their goals, this motivation may lead them to develop pathways for achieving the goals. This interaction represents ways in which agency and pathways can be iterative and additive. Both components are needed for hope to occur (Luthans & Jensen, 2002).

Hope appears in several different forms. It could be relatively stable as a trait. It can also be a temporary frame of mind or state. Being hopeful can encompass the achievement of goals, in general, certain life arena goals, or a specific goal. These focuses represent traits: domain-specific, or goal-specific respectively (Snyder, Lopez, Shorey, Rand, & Feldman, 2003). These forms of hope support the view that hope is applicable in many different life situations.

Coaching has been described as goal-oriented and collaborative (Johnston & Beck, 2012). Goals are the focus of hope. They represent the anchor of hopeful thought for the individual. This distinction appears to support the use of hope theory in coaching. Goals come in various sizes, big or small (Snyder, 2005). Goals can be one of two types,

approach goals and avoidance goals (Rand & Cheavens, 2009). They can vary regarding the probability of achievement (Snyder et al., 2003). Approach goals are goals where the individual is attempting to achieve something new. Avoidance goals are goals where the individual is attempting to avoid an outcome. Locke and Latham (2002) concluded that goals that are closer to the point of attachment will lead to better performance as compared to remote goals. Hope can increase by a goal with a moderate chance of being achieved. If a goal is perceived to be too difficult or too easy, a lack of individual effort and motivation results (Cheavens, Feldman, Woodward, & Snyder, 2006).

Individuals need to develop a means to achieve the goals that they set. This development requires planning out the means for achieving these goals (Cheavens, Feldman, Gum, Michael, & Snyder, 2006). These means represent the routes, or pathways (Snyder, 2005; Snyder et al., 2001). These pathways serve as the bridge between the current state and the desired future state. Individuals may experience barriers while attempting to achieve a goal. Having multiple pathways to navigate through barriers can be important to success (Rand & Cheavens, 2009; Snyder, Harris, Anderson, Holleran, Irving, Signon, & Harney, 1991). Having multiple routes can provide alternatives to an individual in the event they experience obstacles in the pursuit of their goals. In spite of the need to have pathways, a study by Feldman, Rand, and Kahle-Wroblewski (2009) resulted in a conclusion that goal-specific pathways did not result in goal attainment. Goal attainment requires the other key component of the hope triangle, agency.



An individual's agency may be associated with their efficacy. Having confidence that a goal can be achieved can provide the motivation required to follow the pathways established. Agency comes from the individual's belief in their ability and intention to begin working towards a goal and to persevere in the face of obstacles (Snyder et al., 2001). Agency provides the drive for the pursuit of the goals for the individual. Agency becomes very important in the event obstacles are met in the pursuit of the goals (Rand & Cheavens, 2009). Feldman, Rand, and Kahle-Wroblewski (2009) conducted a study that provided evidence the influential primary component of hope was the agency. Agency thoughts are what provide the motivation for individuals to sustain in their pathways towards their goals (Cheavens et al., 2006). If an individual is not motivated to pursue their goals and their pathways, it appears as though it would not matter that they had goals and pathways (Hodlin, 2014). Agency is the thinking process that motivates the individual to take the appropriate actions.

Research has provided evidence that there are differences between high hope and low hope people. One key difference was the ability of high hope individuals to develop multiple pathways towards their goals. While some low hope people may be able to develop a pathway, upon reaching an obstacle that blocks that pathway, the low hope individual may not have an alternative path to navigate (Juntunen & Wettersten, 2006; Snyder, Lopez, Rand, & Feldman, 2003). Hope is a positive motivational force that can influence organizational outcomes. High hope individuals tend to set more challenging goals with moderate levels of difficulty, forcing the creation of pathways and agency (Cheavens et al., 2006; Peterson & Luthans, 2003; Snyder, 2000). High hope individuals

are more confident in the achievement of their goals and enjoy the challenge of pursuing the goals (Peterson & Luthans, 2003). Peterson and Luthans (2003) reported financial performance was better with high hope leaders. Subordinate retention was greater, and satisfaction outcomes were better, for high hope leaders when compared to low hope leaders (Luthans & Jensen, 2002). Study results have not identified relationships with age or gender (Feldman et al., 2009). Higher hope individuals focus on positive, reaffirming messages while low hope people tend to focus on more negative messages (Snyder, 2000). This focus on positive, reaffirming messages can lead executives with high hope setting goals that stretch themselves, and being excited about the challenge of achieving these stretch goals.

**Hope as compared to other constructs.** There have been several studies that compare hope to other constructs such as self-efficacy, optimism, and resiliency. These other constructs can be misinterpreted as hope theory due to some similarities to the concepts of hope theory, but may be interdependent with the concepts of hope theory. While other constructs may have characteristics that are similar to hope, they do not encompass all of the traits that define hope.

***Self-efficacy.*** Self-efficacy represents the individual's determination of their capability in dealing with a situation or area of focus (Bandura, 1982). The level of self-efficacy an individual perceived they have can influence their decisions and actions, as well as the goals they set and commitment to (Bandura, 1993). If self-efficacy is high, individuals tend to function better cognitively, have higher motivation, be more effective, and are more decisional (Bandura, 1977, 1982; Caprara, Fida, Vecchione, Del Bove,

Vecchio, Barbaranelli, & Bandura, 2008). Bandura (1993) noted that “efficacy beliefs influence how people feel, think, motivate themselves, and behave (p. 118). There is a similarity between agency and efficacy expectations, and there are similarities between pathways and efficacy outcome expectancies (Peterson & Luthans, 2003). Hope and self-efficacy can be complementary. Hope involves the development of pathways and the use of agency. The agency component drives the executive towards the pursuit of these pathways to achieve goals. Self-efficacy can aid in this process since it is defined as an individual’s belief in their ability to achieve the goals. Hope can lead to self-efficacy through perceived improvements in problem-solving abilities, positive outcome expectations, and optimism (Madden, Green, & Grant, 2011). However, hope and self-efficacy can differ in several ways. While the foundation of hope is the setting of goals, self-efficacy can involve belief in an individual’s ability to conduct tasks that are not goal-directed. Also, while there are similarities between pathways and efficacy outcome expectancies, self-efficacy does not necessarily have a pathways component (Peterson & Byron, 2008). Self-efficacy is concerned with what an individual believes they can do. It does not mean that the individual will act. Hope theory’s agency component represents the motivation to take action on the pathways.

***Optimism.*** Optimism is often viewed as hopeful thinking, and it is represented by the belief that outcomes will turn out good. Therefore, there are some similarities to hope theory’s agency in that regard. Optimism can occur without the creation of pathways, and this is an area where optimism and hope differ (Peterson & Byron, 2008). One can be optimistic without possessing the means to achieve a goal. Optimism can also be passive

or active, with passive optimism associating with denial and active optimism being associated with reality and being responsive to the situational demands (Puca, 2004). Optimism may lead to the lack of action or the development of pathways to a goal, or it could lead to the setting of goals that are unachievable. Through mindset theory, researchers have “predicted that having optimistic expectations is detrimental when people deliberate on goals and beneficial when they have to implement selected goals” (Puca, 2004, p. 124). In Table 3 I show some comparisons of hope with the constructs of self-efficacy and optimism.

Table 3

*Comparisons of Hope to Self-Efficacy and Optimism*

<u>Component</u>	<u>Construct</u>		
	<u>Hope</u>	<u>Self-Efficacy</u>	<u>Optimism</u>
Goal-oriented	X		
Agency component	X	X	X
Pathways component	X		
Trait-like	X	X	X
State-like	X	X	X

Note: Created from information in “Exploring the role of hope in job performance: results from four studies”, by S. J. Peterson and K. Byron, 2008, *Journal of Organizational Behavior* 29(6), p. 787. Copyright 2008 by the Wiley Online Library.

Luthans (2012) summarized these three constructs as hope consisting of the will or agency and the ways or pathways, self-efficacy as being the confidence and an individual’s belief in their ability to accomplish a task, and optimism as representing future expectations of positive outcomes. Sebbat et al. (2015) noted the existence of hope

across cultures and described the cause-and-effect relationship of the components of hope. Hopeful individuals are more likely to set meaningful goals that fuel their motivation. Hopeful and motivated individuals are likely to develop multiple pathways to the achievement of their goals, to ensure failure in one area does not lead to failure in the achievement of the goal. Having multiple pathways aids in being resilient when facing and obstacles when striving to achieve the goals, and leads to positive emotions and a lessening of negative emotions.

**Resiliency.** Resiliency represents the ability to recover from setbacks, challenges, or obstacles (Tugade & Frederickson, 2004, 2007). Resilient individuals tend to experience more positive emotions than negative emotions (Tugade & Frederickson, 2007). Individuals who continuously have positive emotions when dealing with setbacks, tend to experience more positive emotions as they demonstrate they can overcome the obstacles they are faced with. This is demonstrated through the broaden-and-build theory, which “states that positive emotions broaden an individual’s thought-action repertoire, which in turn helps to build that individual’s personal resources” (Tugade & Frederickson, 2007, p. 330). Resiliency has a linkage to self-efficacy and optimism. As individuals develop positive emotions to aid in overcoming setbacks, their self-efficacy may increase over time. They tend to be more optimistic and energetic (Tugade & Frederickson, 2004).

**Significant studies.** There have been several studies that have supported Snyder’s (2000, 2002) Hope theory construct, as well as its relationships with other constructs. Chang (2003) conducted a study to determine whether there were sex differences in

agentic thinking and pathways thinking in a sample of middle-aged adults. Chang expected there to be differences between men and women, with Chang's findings indicating a strong difference in pathways thinking between men and women. This difference in men and women is in contrast to Snyder's (2000) report showing no sex differences in his studies. The study also revealed differences between middle-aged men and women in problem-solving, with men reporting greater problem solving. Chang attributed the differences on problem-solving and dysphoria to greater rumination or self-focused attention in middle-aged women. The author reported that this rumination had an effect on agency thinking. It is not clear whether Chang's findings can be generalized to older adults since the sample of participants were restricted to middle-aged adults. The sample included 347 middle-aged adults, consisting of 206 women and 141 men. The participants were parents of students at a mid-sized Midwestern university and an additional sample of men from a large Midwestern university. In addition, the majority of the participants in the study were Caucasian and may not be generalizable across all cultures. The methodology used for the study was quantitative. Measurement instruments used included the Hope Scale. The Hope Scale is a 12-item measure of hope with four items focused on agency, four items focused on pathways, and four items being filler. The Social Problem-Solving Inventory-Revised instrument was used to assess problem-solving. The instrument used for measuring psychological adjustment was the Beck Depression Inventory.

There have been numerous studies using college students as participants. Davidson, Feldman, and Margalit (2012) conducted a study of first-year college students

and the effect of focused intervention on academic achievement. Included in the workshop was a segment on hope theory, along with segments in the sense of coherence (SOC) and self-efficacy. The study included forty-three students. The study was applied to three groupings, with the first group having hope theory emphasized. Prestudy assessments were conducted, followed by post-study assessments a month after completion of the study. The findings regarding high hope students were consistent with other studies that reported comparisons between high hope individuals with low hope individuals (Snyder, Shorey, Cheavens, Pulvers, Adams, & Wiklund, 2002). Snyder et al. (2002) found that the high hope students achieved higher grades than the low hope students. However, in Davidson et al.'s (2012) study, a control group was not used, making it difficult to determine whether student maturation may have contributed to the results. The researchers did compare two distinct groups in the study, with one group showing improvement after the intervention and the other group not showing improvement. Both groups were performing similarly before the intervention. The results could provide support for the view that intervention can develop hope individuals. In this study, hope did not continue to improve since the intervention did not continue over time. Sample selection presented issues with generalization. This inability to generalize was due to the sample being volunteers and coming from the same small college. The students self-reported on questionnaires using the State Hope Scale, the Sense of Coherence Scale, and the New General Self-Efficacy Scale. The implications of this study are that there could be a benefit of higher grades from providing interventions for students designed to increase their hope levels. This increased hope level result raises the question of whether

the intervention could be a benefit for executives in increasing their hope levels. The next study discussed involved a study of a longitudinal aspect of intervention.

Green, Oades, and Grant (2006) examined the effects of a 10-week cognitive behavioral, solution-focused life coaching group program. The methodology used in this study was quantitative and involved 56 adult participants consisting of 42 females and 14 males. The mean age was 42.68 years and ranged from 18 to 60 years of age. The participants were randomly assigned to one of two groupings, a coaching group, and a waitlist group. Participants completed self-report measures at Time 1 and Time 2, with coaching group also completing measures at Time 3, Time 4, and Time 5. Measures focused on personal strivings and goal striving progression. The group that experienced the coaching program demonstrated increased scoring in goal striving, subjective well-being, psychological well-being and hope. The results of the various time measurements showed increases from the baseline to Time 2 in goal striving, positive affect, environmental mastery, positive relations with others, purpose in life, and self-acceptance. These increases were maintained 30 weeks later at Time 5. The significance of this study is that coaching can lead to increases in hope related measures, and the increases maintained as a result of the coaching. A study conducted by Feldman, Rand, and Kahle-Wroblewski (2009) supported these results.

In a quantitative study, Feldman et al. (2009) conducted a longitudinal examination that demonstrated a relationship between the agency hope component with the achievement of a goal. Participants in the study consisted of 162 undergraduate college students, with 99 of them being females. Ages ranged from 18 to 33 years. Since



the intent of the study was to understand longitudinal results, data was collected at two time points, with the second time being three months after the first time point. The researchers used two measurement instruments, the Hope Scale, and the Goal-Specific Hope Scale. The Hope Scale provides for a general measurement of hope as it relates to goals while the Goal-Specific Hope Scale focuses on the measurement of a specific goal at a point in time (Feldman, et al., 2009). Feldman et al.'s results supported Snyder's hope theory that agency is a predictor of goal attainment, although Feldman et al.'s research was limited in that it consisted of undergraduates who may have differing concerns from the general population. The research relied on self-reporting of goal attainment, and it ignored other influences for the achievement of goals such as optimism and self-efficacy. However, their study was an important contribution to the literature through three significant results. First, Feldman et al. found higher levels of goal attainment correlated with high hope individuals three months after the first measurement of their study. The authors also determined that agentic thoughts had more influence on goal attainment than an individual's belief that they could generate multiple pathways to the goal. Feldman et al. concluded "goal-specific pathways generally failed to predict goal attainment" (p. 491). Another major finding was that the importance level of the goal had an influence on both goal-specific pathways and agency (Feldman et al., 2009). The authors concluded goal attainment that an individual's cognitive motivation influenced goal attainment. The individual's cognitive motivation is influenced by the level of importance of the goal (Feldman et al., 2009). A third finding supported Snyder's (2002) iteration hypothesis. The iteration hypothesis states, "individuals adjust their hope

levels based on the relative level of success or failure with goals” (Feldman et al., 2009, p. 493). Feldman et al. (2009) found that their participants’ relative success or failure in achieving their goals resulted in adjustments in their goal-specific hope levels.

In another longitudinal study, Arnau, Rosen, Rhudy, and Fortunato (2007) studied the effects of hope on depression and anxiety. Participants consisted of 522 college students who completed self-report measures in the areas of hope, depression, and anxiety. Approximately 61% of the participants were women, with 83.9% of the participants being Caucasian. Mean age was 18.7 years. Data were collected at three different time points, separated by a month. Measurement instruments included the BDI-II measure of the severity of depressive symptomatology, the CES-D measure of depression symptomatology, the DASS measure of anxiety and depression symptoms, and the Hope Scale. All instruments were self-reporting. Agency was found to have a negative impact on depression while no effect on depression was found with the pathways component. Also, agency was found to have a negative effect on anxiety while pathways had no effect on anxiety. Neither depression nor anxiety had an effect on the hope theory components of agency and pathways. The results of this study are significant in that they support the role of hope in resiliency, having an effect on the reduction of depression symptom severity. Conversely, the severity of depression symptoms did not influence hopefulness in the future (Arnau et al., 2007).

There have been several studies to compare hope theory and its components to other constructs. In one study, Magaletta and Oliver (2009) investigated the relationship between hope theory and its two components, agency, and pathways, with other

constructs such as optimism and self-efficacy. Further, the researchers studied the ability of these concepts in the prediction of general well-being. In conducting the study, Magaletta and Oliver used a convenience sample of 204 students from psychology classes at a midsized Catholic university in the Midwest. Ages ranged from 17-50 years, with women consisting of 73.5% of the participants. The majority of the participants were Caucasian (83%). Sixty-two percent of the participants were Catholic. Several measurement instruments were used in the study, including the Hope Scale, the Self-Efficacy Scale, the Life Orientation Test, and the General Well-Being Questionnaire. This variety of instruments was designed to measure hope, agency, and pathways; perceived self-efficacy; dispositional optimism; and positive mental and physical health. The results of the study supported a relationship between hope, self-efficacy, and optimism while also indicating differences in the constructs. The results also supported the relationship between will and ways; however, they are different constructs (Magaletta & Oliver, 2009). Taken together, the will and ways predict unique variance independent of self-efficacy and optimism. Taken separately, “will predicts unique variance independent of self-efficacy, and ways predicts unique variance independent of optimism” (Magaletta & Oliver, 2009, p. 539). Similarities in the instruments used to measure hope have been evident in the research.

In their study, Robinson and Rose (2010) used three measurement instruments. These were the Dispositional Hope Scale, the Academic Hope Scale, and the Math Hope Scale. The purpose of their study was to determine whether there was evidence to support domain-specific hope theory and to determine measures of domain-specific hope. The

results of this study supported the claim for the domain-specific nature of hope. The authors found the three hope measures to have similarities but differing in constructs. The Academic Hope Scale proved to be a better predictor of the final course grades. There were some limitations to this study. The participants were not representative of a population from different colleges and studying differing degrees. The participants in this research project were studying to become teachers. The study involved self-monitoring by the participants. More research is recommended for determining how self-monitoring “may affect the domain-specific academic measures of hope” (Robinson & Rose, 2010, p. 49). Hopeful perceptions of individuals may change over their life span and life arenas, and, therefore, measures of hope need to be able to measure these domain-specific perceptions of hope.

Peterson and Byron (2008) conducted four studies to determine the effect of hope theory on employee performance. All studies were conducted using a quantitative method. The results supported the hypothesis that more hopeful employees would engage in thoughts and take action leading to enhanced performance. The studies showed that more hopeful employees developed more pathways to their goals and approached problem-solving in a different way from less hopeful employees. Peterson and Byron’s study also involved interventions with employees to improve their hopefulness. The results reported by the researchers may support the view that executive coaching interventions may lead to increased hope.

**Measurement instruments for hope.** Many of the measurements of hope are self-report measures. Self-report measures can be misleading due to confusion or the

reporting by the self-reporter in a way that is believed to be what the researcher wanted to hear. Snyder (2000a, 2000b) developed several measurement instruments for hope, which are used by most researchers in the study of hope theory. The most commonly used include the Trait Hope Scale, the State Hope Scale, and the Trait Children's Hope Scale. The Trait Hope Scale consists of 12 items. Four of the items measure agency, four of the items measure pathways, and there are four fillers. The State Hope Scale consists of six items split equally between agency and pathways. Written at the sixth-grade level, the State Hope Scale measures goal-directed thinking at a specific point in time (Lopez, Snyder, & Pedrotti, 2003). The Trait Children's Hope Scale is designed to assess trait hope in children between the ages of 8 and 16 (Snyder, 2000). Another measurement of hope is the 1975 Hope Scale. The 1975 Hope Scale uses a 7-point Likert scale, using a list of 20 goals that, while focused, are not situation-specific. The goals span an array of common societal goals. Individuals rate the goals on the 7-point Likert scale (Lopez, Snyder, & Pedrotti, 2003). Most of the measures of hope utilize a Likert scale. Snyder's Hope Scale measurement is based upon stable and consistent thoughts of individuals in their ability to develop pathways and motivate themselves for their goal pursuits (Hellman et al., 2012; Snyder, 2002).

This study is focused on the lived experiences of executives coached using the positive psychology concepts of hope theory (Snyder, 2000, 2002). Interest is in perceived changes in executive self-efficacy, optimism, motivation, and resiliency due to coaching. These concepts of hope theory are goal-setting, agency or motivation, and pathways. These are discussed in the next few sections.

## **Goal-Setting**

The assumption of individuals being motivated by a purpose is foundational to goal-setting theory (Yearta, Maitlis, & Briner, 1995). Goal-setting theory is an important concept for hope theory since one of the components to hope theory is goals. Helland and Winston (2005) reported on linkages between hope and goal-setting, further supporting this component in hope theory. Goal-setting can be characterized by two phases, content and intensity (Yearta, et al., 1995). Content represents the goal features. Intensity represents the goal-setting process and its accomplishment. Locke (1978) discussed the significance of goal-setting in the theories of motivation. This significance is based on the belief that rational human action is directed by the desire to attain goals. Goals provide a focus for what an individual may want to achieve and attain, resulting in a conscious choice of the direction of an individual's thoughts and actions. Locke discussed motivation theories in several categories, including scientific management, management by objectives (MBO), human relations and Valence-Instrumentality-Expectancy (VIE) theory, job enrichment and the cognitive growth school of thought.

Frederick W. Taylor is credited with founding scientific management, where goals are viewed as tasks. These tasks are a significant aspect of the theory of scientific management (Locke, 1978). MBO associates with a reward system to incent the achievement of the goals and objectives set out. The most significant human resource study as it applies to goals was the Hawthorne studies. The primary conclusion of the Hawthorne studies was that social incentives provided more significance to worker responsiveness than financial incentives. The feedback associated with job enrichment as

a means for increasing an individual's sense of achievement through the attainment of a performance standard serves to act as a goal. The theories of Maslow and Herzberg apply to the cognitive growth school. Their theories are based on an individual's physical and psychological growth needs. Locke (1978) reported from his study of motivation theories that goal setting was the leading action to motivation. Locke and Latham (2002) asserted the most valid and practical theories of employee motivation in organization psychology is goal-setting theory.

This emphasis on goal setting as a motivational factor links it to the agency component of hope theory. While passion towards the achievement of a goal may help individuals persevere through obstacles and challenges, Thorgren and Wincent (2013) conducted a study where results indicated a downside of passion. Passion may lead to quicker goal-setting processes, and could result in less challenging goals as an outcome.

Yearta, Maitlis, and Briner (1995) conducted a study that resulted in the conclusion that individuals may work on easier goals, where they can expect a faster rate of progress when faced with an environment with many complex goals. This conclusion indicates that goal choice may be more influential in the setting of goals than the goal-setting process.

Goal setting can also serve as a demotivator. Puca (2004) conducted a study that showed that expectancies can determine goal setting, effort, and persistence. The goal set can be affected by the expectancy of reaching the goal. If the expectation of attaining the goal is favorable, the individual will persist and continue to provide effort towards the

achievement of the goal. If there is a low expectancy of success, the individual is less likely to persist in the face of difficulty.

### **Motivation**

The agency component of hope theory is the motivation component. Helland and Winston (2005) supported this alignment through the identification of linkages between hope and motivation theories. There are several theories regarding motivation. The central assumption in economics is that people are motivated by incentives (Benabou & Tirole, 2003). There are researchers in the fields of psychology and sociology that reported that rewards can be counterproductive. Rewards represent motivational methods for individuals with extrinsic motivation as their primary motivating driver. The view is that these rewards can undermine intrinsic motivation.

**Intrinsic and extrinsic motivation.** Motivation is viewed from two classes, intrinsic and extrinsic. An individual motivated from internal drives, such as pleasure or satisfaction, is said to be intrinsically motivated. An individual who is intrinsically motivated will engage in an activity for the enjoyment and gratification they derive from the task itself (Vansteenkiste, Timmermans, Lens, Soenens, & Broeck, 2008). An individual motivated primarily to achieve goals associated with receiving an external reward or the avoidance of punishment outcome separate from the activity itself is said to be extrinsically motivated (Vallebrand, 2012; Vansteenkiste et al., 2008). Intrinsically motivated people tend to be inward focused, while extrinsically motivated people tend to be externally focused (Vansteenkiste et al., 2008). Research results have indicated there are four types of extrinsic motivation (Deci, 1991; Vallerand, 2012). These four types are



external regulation, introjected regulation, identified regulation, and integrated regulation. An interest in obtaining rewards or avoiding punishment represents external regulation. If an individual is acting to avoid internal pressures or guilt, they are motivated by introjected regulation. If a behavior is due to choice or volition, the individual is motivated through identified regulation. Fourth, if the individual is behaving out of choice, which is aligned with other aspects of their self, their extrinsic motivation type is integrated regulation (Deci, 1991; Vallerand, 2012). Vansteenkiste et al. (2008) endorsed the concept that motivation could be nonautonomous or autonomous. Nonautonomous motivation is called controlled motivation and is viewed as poorly internalized or noninternalized motivation while autonomous motivation is viewed as intrinsic and well-internalized. There are also different types of intrinsic motivation, including intrinsic motivation to know, intrinsic motivation to accomplish, and intrinsic motivation to experience stimulation (Vallerand, 2012). Each of these represents engaging in activities because of the pleasure and satisfaction derived in learning, exploring, and understanding new things; trying to improve oneself; and stimulating sensations associated with the experience, respectively (Vallerand, 2012).

Vallerand also proposed a third motivational type called amotivation.

Amotivation is defined as the relative absence of motivation (Vallerand, 2012). The importance of this to my study is that a lack of motivation would mean a lack of agency, which is a key component in hope theory. Without agency, the individual may lack the drive to utilize the pathways to the achievement of goals, and may lack the resiliency to overcome obstacles to the achievement of goals.

**Control theory.** One theory applicable to the model of motivation is control theory. Control theory involves feedback associated with the pursuit of goals. Klein (1989) reported two elements in control theory. One element is cognitive, and the other is affective. Cognitive involves the setting of goals and the processing of feedback on the current state relative to the goals. The affective component involves the individual's perception of discrepancies between the expected state and the current state, leading to motivation to resolve these gaps (O'Malley & Gregory, 2011). The control theory linkage to hope theory lies in its focus on cognitive processes underlying motivation and its focus on behavior self-regulation. Other theories of motivation include goal-setting theory, expectancy theory, and attrition theory. Each of these theories is incorporated into control theory.

### **Positive Organizational Behavior and Psychological Capital**

When the positive psychology focus is applied to an organization, POB results, and when the positive aspects of the organization's human resources become the focus and is utilized, the concept of psychological capital results.

**Positive organizational behavior.** Concepts must meet four criteria to qualify as a POB concept. These four criteria are: the concept is based on solid theory and research through valid measurements, consisting of uniqueness in the organizational behavior field, being state-like and open to development and change, and having a positive impact on work performance (Luthans, 2002; Rus & Baban, 2013). Youseff and Luthans (2009) stated that POB consists of measurable psychological capacities, allowing for development and management (Hodlin, 2014). POB enables positive psychological

capital to accumulate. Four of these positive psychological characteristics include efficacy, optimism, resiliency, and hope (Dawkins et al., 2013; Youseff & Luthans, 2009). Therefore, POB leads to increased hope, optimism, resiliency, and efficacy (Hodlin, 2014). These subsume hope theory and the other constructs with similarities to hope. Increases in these areas improve the organization's psychological capital, leading to better leadership effectiveness (Hodlin, 2014; Norman et al., 2005). Studies have shown a linkage between POB and leadership effectiveness (Hodlin, 2014; Norman et al., 2005), with the linkage evolving from the positive psychology discipline (Luthans & Avolio, 2009). In turn, POB can lead to PSYCAP, which has the attributes of self-efficacy, optimism, resilience, and perseverance towards goals.

In comparing positive work environments with negative work environments, negative work environments have led to underperforming organizations due to such symptoms as cynicism and lack of trust. Research has shown that positive organizations consisting of hope, optimism, and confidence result in higher performance (Hodlin, 2014; Luthans & Youseff, 2009). Peterson and Luthans (2003) showed how positive leaders could have a favorable impact on the organization. This favorable impact underscores the importance of leadership development in an organization to develop hopeful leaders who will enable the development of a positive organization (Hodlin, 2014; Luthans & Youseff, 2009).

**Psychological capital.** PSYCAP involves an organization capitalizing on the human resource strengths in the organization. PSYCAP is a relatively new concept, with its initial proposal coming in 2002 (Luthans, 2002; Rus & Baban, 2013) and empirical

research beginning 2005. PSYCAP consists of four factors. These factors include self-efficacy, hope, optimism, and resiliency (Toor & Ofori, 2010; Sebbat et al., 2015). Rus and Baban (2013) asserted that this means that PSYCAP is a psychological state of development characterized by the individual having the confidence to take on tasks to achieve goals and succeed in challenging activities; is optimistic about their chances to succeed; has the perseverance towards the goals, including the changing of pathways to the goals if needed; and having the resiliency to recover from obstacles and challenges (Sebbat, et al., 2015). As a result of these four factors, there are similarities between PSYCAP and hope theory as it applies to individuals. These factors are also found to be significant in hope theory and positive psychology. Research has shown that PSYCAP positively correlates with performance, commitment, satisfaction, and authenticity in leadership (Toor & Oforia, 2010). This last correlation is significant due to authentic leaders possessing stronger psychological capacities leading them to be more hopeful, optimistic, confident and resilient. This stronger psychological capacity implies that more PSYCAP in a leader leads to the development of authentic leaders, which leads to greater performance and commitment. These areas, positive organizational behavior and psychological capital, inform my study relative to the connections between the executive coached using positive psychology and the organization's experience from the executive's behavior changes.

### **Appreciative Inquiry**

Another form of positive psychology, where appreciation for what is going well is the focus, is appreciative inquiry (AI). AI is recognized as being originated by David

Cooperrider (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). AI is experiencing exponential growth in practice and in the literature (Bushe & Kassam, 2005). The critical characteristic of AI is that it supports the practice of focusing on what is going right in the organization, rather than on what is going wrong (Bushe & Kassam, 2005; Cooperrider, Lewis & Van Tiem, 2004; Froman, 2010; Hodlin, 2014; Sorensen, Whitney, & Yeager, 1999; Sorensen & Yeager, 2002). Cooperrider, Whitney, and Stavros (2008) found that the language used resulted in different responses about the same organization. Instead of looking at solving a problem, the AI approach creates a vision of the system at its best. This change in language results in a shift from a negative focus to a positive focus. This response difference demonstrated that perspectives can be framed by language (Buchanan, 2014; Martinez, 2002). AI is defined as being “the cooperative, co-evolutionary search for the best in people, their organizations, and the world around them. The AI search involves systematic discovery of what gives life to an organization or a community when it is most effective and most capable, in economic, ecological, and human terms” (Cooperrider & Whitney, 2005, p. 8). There are eight basic assumptions associated with appreciative inquiry. A summary of these eight assumptions is listed in Table 4.

Table 4

*Eight Assumptions of Appreciative Inquiry*

Number	Assumptions
1	Something works well in every society, organization or group.
2	Our reality is what we focus on.
3	Reality is created in the moment, and there are multiple realities.
4	The asking of questions in an organization, individual or group influences them in some way.
5	People have more confidence in moving to the unknown future when they carry parts of their known past forward.
6	The carrying forward parts of the past works best if it is the best about the past.
7	Valuing differences is important.
8	Our reality is influenced by the language we use.

Note: Developed from “Appreciative Inquiry: A Path to Change in Education”, by P. L. Buchanan, 2014, Electronic Theses, Projects, and Dissertations. Paper 125.

Using the AI approach to inquiry involves asking questions and engaging in a discussion focused on strengths, successes, and hopes for the organization (Hodlin, 2014). The concept is based on these questions and discussions being transformational

(Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). As such, AI has similarities to positive psychology and POB. Five principles compose AI, including the Constructionist Principle, the Positive Principle, the Simultaneity Principle, the Poetic Principle, and the Anticipatory Principle (Wood, 2007).

These principles are supported by four elements consisting of Discovery, Dream, Design, and Destiny (Bushe & Kassam, 2005; Oren, Binkert, & Clancy, 2007; Wood, 2007). The Constructionist Principle links what we do with what we know (Bushe & Kassam, 2005; Hodlin, 2014). The Positive Principle states that positive emotions, supported by hope, excitement, and joy promote momentum and change that is sustainable (Hodlin, 2014). The Simultaneity Principle supports the view that intervention with individuals and human systems leads to change (Hodlin, 2014). The Poetic Principle equates organizations to being similar to a book, which is co-authored every day through stories (Hodlin, 2014). Topics and words have an influence on the change. This influence implies that conducting inquiries can result in important outcomes (Bushe & Kassam, 2005). The Anticipatory Principle is based on the view that the future image guides today's actions (Hodlin, 2014). Discovery is the element where an understanding of what the organization has done is conducted and appreciated for what it is (Hodlin, 2014). The Dream concept involves recognizing the dreams individuals and organizations have for the future (Hodlin, 2014). The dream serves as the potential goal. The Design concept is the phase where the pathways are determined for the achievement of that future, or goal (Hodlin, 2014). It represents the development of the actions that need to be taken to make the dream a reality. The Destiny concept or phase is also involved in the pathways. The

Destiny phase is the planning phase for the actions, along with the determination of the resources needed to achieve the dream (Hodlin, 2014; Lewis, Passmore, & Cantore, 2008; Oren, Binkert, & Clancy, 2007; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003; Wood, 2007). These dreams may provide the motivation to drive towards that future. AI is concerned with the identification of existing strengths, hopes, and dreams of individuals and organizations (Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). It is inquiry-based and involves a positive interview. The focus of AI is on the positive potential of the individual and the organization (Hodlin, 2014; Whitney & Trosten-Bloom, 2003). AI focuses on what is the best in people and encourages them to concentrate on that (Hodlin, 2014). Leaders who utilize AI demonstrate that they support the best in people. The basic premise of AI is to focus on what we want more of instead of what we want less of (Hodlin, 2014). Instead of focusing on the problem or issue, the focus is placed on the positive aspect of what it is we seek (Lewis, Passmore, & Cantore, 2008). An example would be to focus on being healthy rather than focusing on losing weight. AI supports the view of focusing on the strengths of an individual or organization as opposed to focusing on the weaknesses of the individual or organization (Hodlin, 2014). AI is complementary to a strengths-based focus and the concepts of positive psychology (Hodlin, 2014). The process of AI involves discovering the positive experiences of an individual or organization, identifying the dreams for the future, and creating a plan to achieve those dreams based on a focus on those experiences and strengths (Faure, 2006). Appreciative inquiry is an area of interest for how the coached executive's behavior changes may influence the organization. AI represents a strengths focus of the organization.



## **Authentic Leadership**

Authentic leadership starts with self-awareness by the leader, including awareness of their strengths and weaknesses (O'Malley & Gregory, 2011). It is a positive perspective of human physical, social, and psychological functioning from a strength-based view (Luthans & Avolio, 2003; Macik-Frey, Quick, & Cooper, 2009). Authentic leadership involves understanding oneself and being true to oneself (Novicevic, Harvey, Buckley, Brown, & Evans, 2006). The strong sense of self-awareness is likely to result in a stabilization of self-esteem and self-confidence. Novicevic et al. (2006) stated that a "relative indicator of acting on one's true values is individual self-esteem" (p. 70; Deci & Ryan, 1995). Ruderman and Rugolsky (2001) advocated that authentic leaders have "a good understanding of themselves and their priorities" (p. 3).

As outlined earlier, PSYCAP is a significant asset for authentic leaders. As a result, authentic leaders tend to be hopeful, optimistic, and resilient, while possessing a strong sense of self-efficacy (Toor & Oforia, 2010). The positive emotions associated with the traits of being hopeful, optimistic, and resilient can result in an expansion of cognitive and behavioral pathways in the leader, building their ability to navigate through negative or stressful situations. This positive emotion can translate to the leader's followers. The effect of positive emotions on expanding an individual's cognitive and behavior functions can lead the individual to be adaptive and builds an individual's resources to deal with negative or stressful situations (Macik-Frey, Quick, & Cooper, 2009). Leaders who function on positive emotion may become contagious in the relationship with their followers. Positive emotions can become infectious with followers,

leading to better performance, positive acceptance on oneself, and the view that negative events have meaning towards the achievement of goals (Macik-Frey et al., 2009).

Authentic leadership is an important concept for this study, as the coached executive would need to become self-aware of their values and strengths in order to leverage those assets in improving their behavior towards increased self-efficacy, optimism, resiliency, and motivation. Along with PSYCAP and the reinforcement of positive emotions, leaders can be prepared to leverage their strengths with a positive attitude. This can increase the motivation of the leader.

### **Strengths-Based Leadership**

Traditionally, executive coaching has been based on improving the weaknesses of the executive (Welch, Grossaint, Reid, & Walker, 2014). Focusing on a leader's strengths, as opposed to the leader's weaknesses, represents a strength-based focus. Research by Gallup, Inc. has provided data on the impact of a focus on strengths on the well-being and productivity of individuals and organizations (Buckingham, 1999). This work has spawned several other studies regarding the outcomes of a focus on strengths. Most of the results of studies have supported the focus on individual strengths to be positively effective in the achievement of goals, better performance, more engagement, increased energy, greater happiness, and more fulfillment (Govindji & Linley, 2007; Harter, Schmidt & Hayes, 2002; Hodlin, 2014; Linley, Nielsen, Gillet, & Biswas-Diener, 2010; Linley, Woolston, & Biswas-Diener, 2009; Smedley, 2007; Stefanyszyn, 2007; Woolston & Linley, 2008). Rath and Conchie (2008) found correlations between an individual's awareness of their strengths and their self-confidence. Buckingham (2007)

concluded from the Gallup research that individuals would persist more if their goals were in the area of their strength when an obstacle or resistance to their goals confronts an individual (Hodlin, 2014). This phenomenon may support hope in individuals. An awareness of one's strengths may produce a perception of positive competence regarding those strength areas. Thorgren and Wincent (2013) reported that positive perceptions of competence led to increased motivational and greater energy.

Strengths-based leadership is based upon a review of decades of Gallup data, which included data collection methods such as in-depth interviews with senior leaders, studies of work teams, and results from Gallup polls from exceptional leaders. The reviews surfaced three key concepts.

1. "The most effective leaders are always investing in their strengths" (Rath & Conchie, 2008, p. 2).
2. "The most effective leaders surround themselves with the right people and then maximize their team" (Rath & Conchie, 2008, p. 2).
3. "The most effective leaders understand their followers' needs" (Rath & Conchie, 2008, p. 3).

Traditionally, executive coaching has focused on improving the weaknesses of the executive. A strengths-based focus results in a coach focusing on developing the executive's strengths (Welch, Grossaint, Reid, and Walker, 2014). Extrapolating the strengths-based leadership focus to executive coaching, the executive coach takes an approach of focusing on helping leaders to become more self-aware, identifying and developing their strengths and the strengths of others (Hodlin, 2014). The executive

coach develops the strengthspotting abilities in leaders to enhance organizational capability, strengthening the leader's ability to allocate people and resources according to individual and collective strengths as they build strengths-based organizations (Linley, Woolston, & Biswas-Diener, 2009). In executive coaching, the coach is focused on helping the leader achieve goals through the identification of their strengths, development of their strengths, and the achievement of goals through the harnessing of the leader's strengths (Hodlin, 2014; Linley et al., 2009).

It is for the reasons due to information identified in this literature review and the studies highlighted that I used the methodology described in Chapter 3 to explore the experiences and perceived behavior changes of executives who have been coached from a positive psychology perspective. One positive psychology approach is to emphasize the individual's strengths in the coaching process and to continue to develop the individual in these strength areas. In order to coach an individual by focusing on their strengths, the coach and the leader needs to understand what these strengths are. One way to determine the strengths is to measure them.

**Measurement instruments for strengths.** There are several measurement tools for strengths. The measurement tools can be used by coaches to understand their client's strengths. Use of a measurement tool by a coach could be an indication that Strengths-Based Leadership Coaching was the focus.

The Value in Action Inventory of Strengths (VIA-IS) is one. It is an open source psychological test. The inventory is based on 24 strengths in six major categories or virtues, and consists of 240 items. The assessment rank orders an individual's strengths

from highest to lowest. The test provides an assessment of an individual's top three strengths (Seligman, 2002, 2012).

Another measurement instrument is the Strengths Finder 2.0. The Strengths Finder 2.0 assessment measures talent, which is an ingredient in the strengths formula (Buckingham, 2001; Rath, 2007). The focus on talents is based on the view that people change over time; however their talents remain constant (Rath, 2007). The research from this measurement instrument is from studies conducted by Gallup. The measurement tool focus represents a part of the strengths formula, which also includes investment in the development of skills and the time to practice the use of the skills and talents. This multiplier effect results in the level of strengths in an area (Rath, 2007).

A third standardized inventory is the Realise2, renamed Realise2 Strengths Profiler in 2015. Realise2 identifies realized strengths that are known by the individual and used. The measurement tool also identifies unrealized strengths that are known but unused. Another area identified through the measurement tool is learned behaviors. These are where performance was attained, but was not energizing. It also includes weaknesses where both competence and energy is low (MacKie, 2014). Realise 2 identifies 60 strengths, with each linked to one of three areas-performance, energy, and use. The tool organizes data into four distinct categories. These categories are Realized Strengths, Unrealized Strengths, Learned Behaviors, and Weaknesses (Bailey, 2012). Realise2 strengths inventory is an online assessment and development tool. It assesses sixty different attributes in the individual. Responses are done using a 7-point Likert scale for each attribute, across three dimensions: energy, performance, and use. Classifications for

the responses include realized strengths, unrealized strengths, learned behaviors, and weaknesses (Linley et al., 2010).

### **Summary and Conclusions**

Leadership development is an activity engaged in by organizations to improve leadership performance in guiding the collective work of the organization. One approach to leadership development is through executive coaching. Executive coaching is a new field, and it is growing in use (Joo, 2005). There are several approaches used in executive coaching, as evidenced by the differing foci of executive coaching certification bodies (Table 1). This literature review examined the leadership development, executive coaching, and positive psychology literature, discovering major linkages between these concepts and behavioral changes with regards to self-efficacy, optimism, motivation, and resiliency.

The executive coaching literature focused on the coach-coachee relationship in changing behavior of the coachee for improved performance. The role the third part, such as the coachee's organization was also discussed. Different executive coaching processes were reviewed, revealing two different philosophies-an emphasis on leveraging coachee strengths or an emphasis on improving coachee weaknesses.

Positive psychology literature was reviewed. Positive psychology is directed on what people do best and it was explored to determine its potential role in executive coaching from the strengths perspective. This literature review included positive psychology concepts such as hope theory, appreciative inquiry, and strength-based leadership. The primary concepts of hope theory-goal setting and motivation-were

reviewed in the literature. Positive psychology shifts the field of from repairing mentally damaged individuals to an emphasis on building on their positive qualities, emphasizing the well-being and resiliency of individuals (Aspinwall & Staudinger, 2003; Hodlin, 2014; Kiselica & Englar-Carlson, 2010). Seven aspects and several theories of positive psychology were introduced, with review of the literature conducted in these areas. My interest was in exploring this approach as a coaching philosophy and approach to determine its impact on the coachees. In the area of hope theory, I reviewed literature of significant studies that demonstrated a linkage between goals, motivation, and resiliency.

Authentic leadership literature was reviewed due to its connection with self-awareness. Self-awareness is necessary for an individual to understand their strengths and weaknesses, and to better understand what motivates them. The literature on strengths-based leadership informs my study with regards to the same strength-based concepts being applied to strength-based coaching.

This literature review indicated a growing interest in executive coaching and positive psychology. Much of the coaching research was from the coach and coaching perspective and quantitative results. However, there was minimal research on the coaching experience from the perspective of the coached leader (Hodlin, 2014). There was a lack of research literature on the approaches-such as positive psychology-in the coaching process. Therefore, leadership scholars lack knowledge and understanding of how differing approaches to leadership coaching impacts the experiences of coachees. Given this gap in the literature, my study focused on the coached executive's lived experience of applied positive psychology approaches-specifically the use of hope theory

and a strength-based approach-to the coaching process in the development of leaders. In Chapter 3, I will address the research method of this study, including the selection of participants, the data collection process, and the data analysis methods.



## Chapter 3: Research Method

### Introduction

In Chapter 2, I addressed several concepts were addressed associated with and including positive psychology, including hope theory, strengths-based leadership, AI, and POB. This review of the literature was conducted to provide background knowledge on several concepts associated with the RQs that may assist in better understanding the lived experiences of leaders using positive psychology approaches and their perceptions of behavioral characteristic changes, such as self-efficacy, optimism, motivation, and resiliency. I reviewed several studies to determine the extent of literature that was available regarding executive coaching and positive psychology, and I identified of gaps in the literature (Davidson, Feldman, and Margalit, 2012; Green, Oades, & Grant, 2006; Linley, Woolston, & Biswas-Diener, 2009; Magaletta and Oliver, 2009; Peterson & Byron, 2008; and Snyder, et al., 2002)

The primary purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived experiences of executives who have been coached using approaches based on hope theory (Snyder, 2000a, 2000b, 2002) and strengths-based positive psychology (Conchie, 2009; Linley, Govindj, & West, 2007; Rath & Conchie, 2008). I intended this study to further explore the coachees' experience of behavioral characteristics due to this strengths-based and positive executive coaching approach. The phenomenological research approach utilizes empirical methods to develop an understanding of human experience from the unique point of view of the participant. Moustakas (1994) pointed out that the life experiences of the participants experiencing the phenomenon provide the

basis for the data in phenomenological research. Understanding the perspective of participants usually entails the use of qualitative research approaches; in this case, phenomenology. This chapter will include discussions of the research design and rationale; role of the researcher; methodology; participant selection logic; procedures for recruitment, participation, and data collection; instrumentation; data analysis plan; and issues of trustworthiness.

### **Research Design and Rationale**

The central research questions were:

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of executives who have been coached based on hope theory and strengths-based positive psychology?

RQ2: What affect does this positive coaching approach and experience have on the executive's perceived behavioral characteristics, such as self-efficacy, optimism, motivation, and resiliency?

I used a qualitative phenomenology research method and design. Phenomenology was chosen due to my interest in understanding the lived experiences of executives being coached through the positive psychology approaches of hope theory (Snyder, 2000, 2002) and a strengths-based leadership (Conchie, 2009; Linley et al., 2007; Rath & Conchie, 2008) focus. The comparison of qualitative research methods shown in Table 5 identifies the different qualitative research methods considered. As expressed by Moustakas (1994), "the aim is to determine what an experience means for persons who had the experience and are able to provide a comprehensive description of it" (p. 13). Data emerged from the interview process, using inductive theory development (Patton, 2002).

Table 5

*Qualitative Research Methods*

Type	Characteristic
Narrative Research	e.g. Reports the life of a single individual
Phenomenological	e.g. Describes meaning for several individuals of their lived experiences of a phenomenon
Grounded Theory	e.g. Generates or discovers a theory, grounded in data from the field
Ethnographic	e.g. Focuses on the study of an entire cultural group
Case Study	e.g. Study of a complex issue or set of circumstances explored through one or more purposeful examples within a bounded system

*Note:* Developed from J. W. Creswell, 2007. Copyright Sage Publications, Inc.

Each interview consisted of questions related to three phases of the coaching process: before coaching questions, during coaching questions, and after coaching questions. The first phase of interviews was to explore how the leader came to be coached. My intent was to discover the context of their life leading up to their being engaged in executive coaching. This phase of exploration was to understand the *how* for the journey the leader went on to arrive at coaching. In Phase 2 of the interviewing I concentrated on the details of the participant's lived experience during the coaching process. I was interested in as much as possible of the details of the coachee's experience. I wanted to explore what it was like to be coached and what did the participant experience. Phase 3 of the interviews was where I asked the participant to reflect on the meaning of their coaching experience. At this point, I had talked with the participant about how they came to be coached and what it was like to be coached. Phase 3 of the

interviews was where I asked the participant to reflect on the meaning of their coaching experience. At this point, I had talked with the participant about how they came to be coached and what it was like to be coached. This enabled a contrasting of the information from Phase 1 and Phase 3 to see whether earlier challenges were resolved or whether there is a perceived behavior change (see Seidman, 2013).

I developed the interview questions to elicit the executive's reason for engaging in a coaching process and their perceptions of how they altered behavior, especially in the areas of self-efficacy, optimism, motivation, and resiliency. Participants were asked to discuss any evidence that supported their perceptions. The interview questions are listed in Appendix A. Within the phenomenological research method, I used the transcendental approach since I was focused less on researcher interpretations and more on the description of the experiences of participants. Table 6 highlights the three primary phenomenological research types.

Table 6

*Phenomenological Research Types*

Type	Focus
Existential	Focused on the nature of the reality that holds the concept or phenomenon together
Hermeneutical	Oriented toward lived experience through interpretation of the "texts" of life
Transcendental	Focused less on researcher interpretations and more on the description of the experiences of participants

*Note:* Adapted from M. Q. Patton, 2002. Copyright Sage Publications, Inc.

I was interested in gathering what the meaning, structure, and the essence of the lived experience was for the executives coached using a strengths-based focus and a

positive psychology approach, such as hope theory (see Moustakas, 1994; Patton, 2002). This focus was due to my interest in the experiences of the participants, as opposed to my interpretation as the researcher. I chose phenomenology because of my interest in gaining a deeper understanding of the experience of executive coaching based on hope theory and strengths-based coaching on executive motivation and confidence in achieving their goals as well as the executive's perceived success of the executive coaching intervention.

I needed to be sure that all of the participants in the study had been exposed to positive psychology approaches, such as hope theory and a strengths-based focus, in their executive coaching. I verified the executive participants' exposure to hope theory and a strengths-based focus through discussions with the coaches prior to their being asked to notify their clients of the study. The coaches were asked to brief their executive clients on the study and provide them with instruction on how to contact me. The executive participants' exposure to hope theory and a strengths-based focus in coaching was further confirmed through an introductory meeting with the executive.

### **Role of the Researcher**

As the researcher in this qualitative study, I was the primary data collection instrument. I practiced epoche, which represents the effort to bracket any preconceived notions I may have, as I attempted to see something for what it was (see Moustakas, 1994). As a member of the CEC, I received the same training as the executive coaches of my potential participants. Although this relationship could conceivably contribute to bias, at the time of the study I was not active as an executive coach and have had no contact with the executive coaches I contacted to gain access to my participant pool since. I also

contacted other certifying bodies and coaching groups through LinkedIn to search for participants. Though I also personally favor the positive approach, my questions and analysis of the data collected were checked by another researcher to ensure I had refrained from showing any bias in leading questions, displaying supportive reactions to participant comments, or ignoring contrary findings.

To ensure quality and validation, I also employed member checking where the participants had the opportunity to review and approve my interpretation of the data they provided to me (Carlson, 2010; Doyle, 2007). Being clear with the participants regarding my transcription process was important in maintaining a good relationship with them. I digitally recorded the participants' responses and kept an audit trail through clear documentation of all components of the study to ensure I accurately captured the participants' responses.

I utilized the expertise of an expert in phenomenological coding to validate the alignment of transcripts to the groupings or themes I generated through the coding process. This expert also provided a professional view of my working theories and provided a challenge to them relative to my current thinking. This expert coded a sample of the responses for calibration of the coding process and evaluated my coding analysis for bias. The confidentiality agreement signed by the expert is in Appendix B.

## **Methodology**

### **Participant Selection Logic**

I used purposeful sampling in this study since this approach provided an opportunity to talk with executives coached using hope theory and strengths-based focus.

Patton (2002) discussed purposeful sampling as being nonrandom in the selection of participants in the sample. The trade-off was made to gain a more in-depth understanding of the sample's experience. The participants were executives coached using hope theory and a strengths-based focus.

Ideally, executive participants would have come from one executive coaching community in order to minimize any coaching community influence on the findings. However, when recruiting I needed to branch out to other coaching communities to reach enough participants. The primary participant community was to be executives coached by coaches certified by the CEC because I thought I would have access to a list of coaches certified by VRV since I received my coaching certification from the organization and had access to all coaches in their community as a result. Another coaching organization, the Coaching Training Institute, was also a potential source for recruiting participants. The Coaches Training Institute uses the Co-Active Coaching approach (Newnham-Kanas et al., 2012), which involves positive psychology approaches. Sherpa Coaching was another coaching organization for executive participant selection. A third potential source for the study participants was MentorCoach, which used positive psychology as its coaching approach. Since the desired number of study participants could not be achieved through the CEC, I contacted these other coach certification organizations were contacted to solicit participants. I attempted to solicit participants. However, I ended up needing to use other mediums to acquire my participants such as LinkedIn and through colleagues. A key criterion for the selection of the purposive sample was that the executives experienced strengths-based focus and positive psychology coaching, including the

concepts of hope theory. Other inclusion requirements were that the executive would have been coached for at least 6 months. The client's coach provided the client with information regarding the study, asking the client to contact me directly if interested in participating in the study. The coach was not contacted a second time, and the coach does not know whether their client contacted me to participate. This approach enabled me to obtain feedback from the client about their experience and consequences of the strengths-based and hope theory coaching phenomenon. As a member of the CEC group, I had access to a population of executive coaches who are coaching clients. For convenience, I attempted to gain access to the executives through the executive coaches in the membership list of the CEC, and added to the sample from other back-up coaching organization clients. Most of the participants in the study came from the backup coaching organizations. I am not clear on why I was unable to acquire participants from some of my target areas. It could be that coaches did not want their performance to be exposed, or it could be that their clients did not want to participate. The sample consisted of approximately 20 coached executives. I established how participants were known to meet the criteria through a preliminary introductory meeting and questioning of the coaches and executives prior to engaging with the participants and the interview process. Demographics on the participants was obtained naturally. These included gender, type of organization they worked in, and geographic location.

### **Instrumentation**

In qualitative research, the researcher is the instrument. However, my main data collection process for this qualitative phenomenological study was in-depth,



semistructured interviews with each executive or senior leader in the participant sample. The type of interviewing was responsive interviewing, which involves talking with participants knowledgeable about the coaching process, listening to their experience with the coaching process, asking probing questions where needed, and including follow-up questions in response to the answers provided to the questions (Rubin & Rubin, 2012). The interviews were conducted in person or by the use of Skype. The intent was to conduct the interviews in person wherever possible. Participants were presented with the option of participating through Skype for the participants outside my geographic area. There were two participants who were interviewed through Skype. There are arguments for and against doing interviews by telephone or Skype, as opposed to in person. There have been studies that supported all interview modes. In a study comparing in-person interviews and telephone interviews, Sturges and Hanrahan (2004) concluded there were “no significant differences in the interview data” (p.108), supporting the use of telephone interviews in qualitative research. Skype has an advantage over telephone interviewing in that the interviewer can see the interviewee, enabling the potential to observe body language (Weinmann, Thomas, Brilmayer, Henrich, & Radon, 2012). As a result of this advantage, I only conducted interviews by Skype or in person. I sought permission from the participants to record the interview. All participants agreed to be recorded. The interview began with an ice-breaking conversation and the intent of the study, followed by more specific questions regarding the executive experience from the coaching they received. Open-ended questions were emphasized, allowing each coachee to provide

detailed and rich accounts of their lived experiences. Probing questions were used to obtain more detail and to summarize the interview.

Tools I used to assist in translating voice to text transcriptions included a Philips Voice Tracer digital recorder, iPhone App “Voice Record”, and Dragon NaturallySpeaking software. Upon completion of the interviews, the data was stored on a secure computer, with a back-up stored on a USB drive which was kept locked in a fireproof safe. NVivo software was used with the computer for data analysis and storage.

### **Procedures for Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection**

Phenomenological inquiry was the primary method of data collection since it allows for the utilization of inductive theory development. The data emerged from the interviews of participants experiencing the phenomenon of coaching. The data collection plan consisted of interviews with executives who have experienced the phenomenon of being coached using an approach that utilizes hope theory and focus on the executives’ strengths. The interviews consisted of the same overarching guiding questions (Appendix A) to ensure the results were consistent (Knox & Burkard, 2009). By being consistent, I prevented differences in data gathering having an effect on the outcome, thereby improving the dependability and credibility of the study. The focus was on elicitation as my data collection process (Bernard & Ryan, 2010). An example of the study invitation notice is shown in Appendix C. Each participant received an informed consent form, which included a project description (see Appendix D), to sign before the interview, which outlined the study along with the expectations of the process for the study for the participant. I asked each participant for permission to record the interview. The data was

collected through interviews. The duration of the interviews and the exact number of questions asked varied from one participant to another; however, the context of the core questions was similar for each participant. I asked the overarching research question and let the participant respond. If I needed more detail I would ask a probing question. If the participant stopped perhaps answering some but not all questions, I would ask another question that they had not yet answered. The questions were not asked sequentially. The interviews were more conversational in nature with little interruption by me.

The executives interviewed self-reported their experiences as a result of positive executive coaching, such as hope theory and a strength-based focus influence on their behaviors such as self-efficacy, optimism, motivation, and resiliency. Probing questions were used to obtain more detail and to summarize the interview. Followup interviews were conducted if more information was needed.

The interviews began with an introductory conversation to establish a connection and an environment that is conducive to open discussion. Next, I advised the participants about the nature of the study, promising to share the results and conclusions from my analysis with them. I also advised them that they could discontinue the interview at any time and that I would provide them with the opportunity to confirm the accuracy of my data collection through member checking. After the introductory conversation, the interview began.

The list of questions was addressed through separate phases of the interview with the study participants. All phases were conducted in one interview session for each participant. The first phase explored what led the leader to be coached. The second phase

explored the leader's lived experience of the coaching phenomenon. The third phase explored the perceived behavior changes.

A series of questions were designed to engage the executive in describing how and why the executive decided to be coached and how long the executive has experienced coaching. The executive participants needed to have been coached for a long enough period to have experienced executive coaching and to have had the opportunity for behavioral change to have occurred. These questions were a part of the phase 1 interview. Another set of questions designed to explore the details of the coaching process and to engage the executive in discussing their lived experience of the coaching process. They were designed to probe how the coaching agenda was established and to understand the details of the coaching experience. These questions were asked in the interview during Phase 2 of the interview process. The remainder of the questions were probed in Phase 3, where the coached executive's perceptions and opinions regarding the coaching received and its perceived impact was explored. Setting goals is a critical component of hope theory. An attempt was made to learn about the executive's feelings toward the setting of goals and how the means of achieving goals was accomplished.

### **Data Analysis Plan**

This qualitative phenomenological study used a semistructured interview process. I, as the research instrument, transcribed and coded interviews. Member checking was conducted to ensure understanding and accuracy of the participant's responses during the interview. Once member checking was completed, every statement that contained specific information was coded as an incident. The incidents were sorted into groups or

concepts while I continued gathering data through interviews. Concepts were associated with relevant categories. Transcriptions were produced and verified through comparison with the audio version of the data. Participants received copies of their transcriptions for further verification and suggestions for revision to correct inaccuracies or to clarify comments. The information was analyzed and organized according to themes. I provided an overall essence of the executives' experience through a textural description and structural description of the experiences.

I used phenomenological reduction in the analysis of the data from the interviews. This means that my descriptive analysis was based on the data, with no ambiguities resolved by me unless there was evidence to support the resolution. This means that my analysis was descriptive versus interpretative. With interpretive analysis, the researcher attempts to clarify ambiguities, while with the descriptive the researcher does not go beyond that given from the data (Giorgi, 2009; Vagle, 2014). Table 7 shows the steps of Phenomenological Reduction.

Table 7

*Phenomenological Reduction Steps*

<u>Steps</u>	<u>Description</u>
Bracketing	Focus of the research is placed into brackets, with everything else set aside, resulting in entire research process being rooted solely on the topic and question
Horizontalizing	Every statement treated as having equal value, followed by irrelevant statements, or those that are repetitive or overlapping, being deleted
Horizons	Result from the elimination of irrelevant statements, or those that are repetitive or overlapping
Clustering Horizons into Themes	Group the horizons into themes based on “like” or similar statements
Organizing Horizons and Themes into a Coherent Textural Description	Produce textural descriptions from the themes

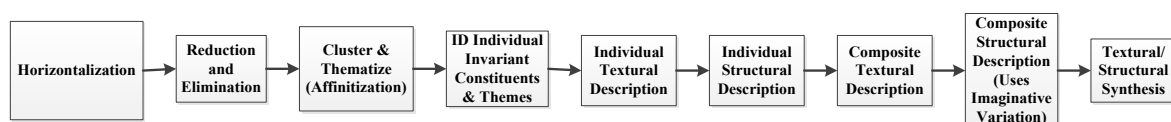
Note: Developed from “*Phenomenological research methods*”, by C. Moustakas, 1994, p. 97. Sage Publications. Thousand Oaks, CA.

Three types of coding approaches were utilized. Open coding was used to read and re-read the transcripts and the analysis of the data. Each code was given an operational definition, and the frequency of the counts of themes was made for each code. Axial coding was then conducted. In this process, relating codes were conducted using inductive and deductive reasoning. This coding resulted in groupings of themes being identified. The last coding process consisted of selective coding. This process resulted in a small number of a limited number of critical code categories.

At least two cycles of coding were conducted. The coding approach changed slightly depending on the results of the data analysis, but I used affective coding methods for coding. Affective coding was appropriate for this study since the interest was in understanding the subjective qualities of the lived experiences of the executives, including their perceptions of the coaching influence on their self-efficacy, optimism,

motivation, and resiliency. Affective coding is useful for exploring the “participant emotions, values, and other subjective qualities of the human experience” (Saldana, 2013, p. 67). Through the executive’s emotions, I expected to receive insights into the executives’ perceptions of the coaching received with regards to the executive’s motivation, optimism, and confidence. An affective coding method I utilized was values coding. In using values coding, I applied codes that reflect the executives’ values, attitudes, and beliefs regarding their lived experience from the coaching process (Saldana, 2013). This coding approach was intended to investigate the executive’s perceived changes to behavior due to the concepts of hope theory and a strengths-based focus approaches that were utilized within their coaching process. For analysis after coding, I themed the data. Holistic coding was used in the theming process.

I utilized a modification of the Van Kaam method of analysis to organize and analyze the phenomenological data (Moustakas, 1994).



*Figure 2.* Modification of the Van Kaam Method of analysis of phenomenological data. Structure of modification of the Van Kaam method of analysis of phenomenological data. Note: Created from “Phenomenological research methods”, by C. Moustakas, 1994, p. 120-121. Sage Publications. Thousand Oaks, CA.

Identification of my experiences with the phenomenon was provided through epoche. I developed a listing of significant statements of the participants’ experiences from the interview data. This involved grouping significant statements from transcribed interviews into larger coding themes. From these themes, I generated a textural

description of what the participants experienced. This was followed with a structural description of how the experience happened. A composite description of the phenomenon was generated, where I integrated the textural and structural descriptions. I utilized various stages in the understanding of the data. The first stage involved reading the text, with step two being to re-read the text. The actual coding consisted of the third step. Coding was conducted in multiple phases. Once the coding categorization and reductions had occurred, the fourth step involved relating any theoretical ideas or concepts to any of the text. For the analysis, personal experiences with the phenomenon under study were described. A list of significant statements was compiled. These significant statements were grouped into larger units of information using the affinity diagramming technique. I finished with a composite description of the phenomenon incorporating both the textural and structural descriptions. This analysis was intended to provide the essence of the experience, representing the culmination of the phenomenological study (Creswell, 2007). I utilized the expertise of an industry expert to validate the alignment of transcripts to the groupings, or themes, I generated through the coding process.

The information received from the interview process was sorted into groups or concepts while I continued gathering data through interviews. Concepts were associated with relevant categories. The transcripts were loaded into NVivo 11 software for organization and analysis. I coded transcribed data using a coding process. Data analysis included a synthesis of the common themes that were evident in the feedback. I conducted coding of the responses, followed by analysis to search for patterns in the data. I used NVivo 11 software to assist me in the coding process. For the analysis, the



personal experiences of the coached executive with regards to the coaching phenomenon under study was described. A list of significant statements was compiled. These statements were grouped into larger units, or themes, of information using the affinity diagramming technique. Descriptions of what the participants experienced as a result of strengths-based coaching was reported. A composite description of the phenomenon incorporating both the textural and structural descriptions was developed. This analysis was intended to provide the essence of the experience, representing the culmination of the phenomenological study (Creswell, 2007).

### **Issues of Trustworthiness**

#### **Credibility**

The quality of the qualitative transcendental phenomenological study is critical for contributing to the knowledge base of the fields of management, psychology, and coaching. According to Patton (2002), “Any credible research strategy requires that the investigator adopt a stance of neutrality with regard to the phenomenon of study” (p. 51). Consequently, I addressed credibility or internal validity by taking on the perspective of epoche. I was aware and made transparent any preconceptions and personal biases in the subject material. By suspending any judgement, I reviewed the coached executive or senior leader’s lived experience from an open viewpoint. This was facilitated through the strict following of the data collection and analysis plan. To ensure the quality of the research, I utilized the eight key markers of quality in qualitative research identified by Tracy (2010). These eight markers can be seen in Table 8.

Table 8

*Quality in Qualitative Research*

Key Marker	Characteristic
Worthy Topic	Relevant, timely, significant, interesting, evocative.
Rich Rigor	Marked by rich complexibility of abundance, variety of theoretical constructs, data sources, contexts, and samples. Rigor questions: Are there enough data to support significant claims? Did the researcher spend enough time to gather interesting and significant data? Is the context or sample appropriate given the goals of the study? Did the researcher use appropriate procedures in terms of field note style, interviewing practices, and analysis procedures?
Sincerity	Authenticity and genuineness achieved through self-reflexivity, vulnerability, honesty, transparency, and data auditing; marked by honesty and transparency about the researcher's biases, goals, and foibles
Credibility	Trustworthiness, verisimilitude, and plausibility of the research findings
Resonance	Research that meaningfully reverberates and affects an audience.
Significant Contribution	Favorable answers to these questions: "Does the study extend knowledge? Improve practice? Generate ongoing research? Liberate or empower?"
Ethics	Consideration of the rightness or wrongness of our actions as qualitative researchers in relation to the people whose lives we are studying, to our colleagues, and to those who sponsor our work
Meaningful Coherence	Meaningfully coherent studies (a) achieve their state purpose; (b) accomplish what they espouse to be about;(c) use methods and representation practices that partner well with espoused theories and paradigms; and (d) attentively interconnect literature reviewed with research foci, methods, and findings.

*Note:* Adapted from "Qualitative quality: Eight "big-tent" criteria for excellent qualitative research, by S. J. Tracy, 2010, *Qualitative Inquiry* 16(10) 837– 851.  
doi:10.1177/1077800410383121

At the conclusion of the interviews, I utilized member checking with the participants to confirm the accuracy and general consensus of the information. There can

be traps in member checking that could compromise the data gathered, so I was explicit regarding my expectations with member checking. When providing instructions to the participant regarding the member checking process, I provided examples of my expectation, so the participant did not change the transcript to the extent where I did not have enough data to reach conclusions (Carlson, 2010). I provided the option for the member checking process, including hard copies, soft electronic copies, and audio recordings. In the information I provided in the cover letter and consent form, I provided information about the member checking procedures, including the choices for participating in the member checking process (Carlson, 2010).

### **Transferability**

Transferability represents the reader's ability to transfer the results of a study to their own circumstances or generalize the results. Both Patton (2012) and van Manen (1990) asserted that phenomenology is not conducive for empirical generalizations of the results. This is partly due to the smaller sample sizes used in phenomenological studies, reader's environment and context (Patton, 2002). There is a possibility for a reader to make connections in another discipline. This study adds to the knowledge base in management, coaching, and psychology. I employed thick description to the participant behavior in this study. I explained not just the behavior, but its context as well. This approach was to acknowledge the unique phenomenological method of study, while recognizing the intention of external validity.

**Dependability**

I adhered to Walden University's quality standards and guidelines to ensure dependability. These guidelines include the Form and Style Review Checklist, the Dissertation Checklist, and the Dissertation Minimum Standards Rubric. Member checking is a process that was used to assist in this area. In addition, engagement of the dissertation committee and the incorporation of their recommendations and suggestions was used to ensure a dependable research study. With regards to the study and the participants, the research study and the environment with which it is conducted was thoroughly described. Interviews were conducted in-person or by Skype, so body language could be captured as a part of the data collection process. Each of these methods were used to ensure the study results can be viewed as a dependable addition to knowledge in the area of executive coaching.

**Confirmability**

For confirmability, I honored the core concept of epoche and bracketing- where I suspended any preconceived bias from my experiences-as essential elements of my research. Phenomenological research is reflexive and fulfills the essence of confirmability. As Moustakas (1994) noted:

verification is enhanced by returning to the research participants, sharing with them the meaning and essences of the phenomenon as derived from reflection on and analysis of the verbatim transcribed interviews and other material, and seeking their assessment for comprehensiveness and accuracy (p. 18).

**Ethical Procedures**

I completed the requirements of the Institutional Review Board (IRB) prior to beginning the study. My IRB approval number is 07-06-16-0259363. Participant confidentiality is a concern for this study, as is the protection of the coach-executive client confidentiality relationship. All executives in the purposeful sample were personally contacted by their coach, with the nature and purpose of the study being shared. Coaches would advise their executive client to contact me directly if interested in participating in the study. During this communication, I determined their willingness to participate, and determined the appropriateness of their involvement in the study. I communicated the process for conducting the study to the participants. Each participant was asked to sign an informed consent form, which followed the IRB standards. Before every interview, the conditions of the informed consent form was explained. This notice also highlighted that participation in this research study was entirely voluntary and that the participant had the right to cease participation at any time. During the introduction to the interview, participants were reminded that they were taking part in research, and provided with the purpose and procedures associated with the research study. There were no anticipated risks or discomforts from participation in this research. I had completed certification from the NIH Office of Extramural Research through successfully completing the NIH Web-based training course “Protecting Human Research Participants”. The NIH certification number is 2084548.

### **Summary**

In this chapter, I provided insight into the methodology, research design, data collection and analysis, and researcher bias aspects of my qualitative phenomenological research study. The purpose of this study was to understand the lived experiences of executive clients from executive coaching focused on hope theory and strengths-based focus as its approach. The intent of this study was to explore the lived experience of coached executives. The results of this study may provide some insights in the understanding of how leaders perceive and experience executive coaching using positive psychology approaches such as hope theory and a strength-based focus. Further intent of this study was to understand the participant's perceived feelings of motivation, self-efficacy, optimism, and resiliency from the coaching experience. It is intended that the study data will advance the literature in the areas of executive coaching, hope theory, and positive psychology in the management and psychology fields.

In Chapter 3, I described the methodology used for this study. In this chapter, the research design, participant selection, data collection and analysis processes, ethical procedures, and limitations were discussed. I will address the results and analysis of this study in Chapter 4.

## Chapter 4: Results

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this qualitative study was to explore the lived experience of executives who engaged in executive coaching for at least 6 months. In particular, I explored the effect of the approaches used in the coaching process, specifically the use of the concepts of hope theory (Snyder, 2000, 2002) and strengths-based theory (Conchie, 2009; Linley et al., 2007; Rath & Conchie, 2008) aspects of positive psychology as a major approach to executive coaching. The study was intended to further understand the self-efficacy, optimism, motivation, and resilience experiences and perceived behavioral changes in coached executives due to the coaching approach used. In particular, the hope theory approach of goal-setting, developing pathways, and engaging agency and the strengths-based and positive executive coaching approach was explored. My primary focus was on the executives' perceptions, feelings, and the meaning of their lived experiences from the phenomenon of executive coaching based on hope theory and a strengths-based focus (see Hodlin, 2014). This purpose aligns with the problem statement of a lack of knowledge regarding how hope theory and a positive psychology approach to coaching will influence the perceptions and experiences of the coached individuals.

This positive psychology approach informed the types of questions I asked, and the methodologies used in answering the question of the perceptions and experiences of the executives coached in the manner of positive psychology. There were two central RQs that can be seen in Table 9. The RQs in this study influenced the interview questions asked of each participant. I collected the data through a series of interviews with

executives, who served as the participants in the study. The interview questions were asked of each participant; however, probing questions that I had brainstormed for practice and were put into the proposal were removed from Appendix A since they were not asked of every participant. Only the questions asked of every participant is included in Appendix A.

I used NVivo software to manage the study project, and to assist in the analysis. NVivo was an aid in quickly sorting the interview data into common words and phrases, which facilitated the development of themes in the coding process. I will present the results of the analysis of the study data in this chapter. Chapter 5 consists of my interpretation of the results.

#### Table 9

##### *Research Questions*

Research Questions
RQ1: What are the lived experiences of executives who have been coached based on hope theory and strengths-based positive psychology?
RQ2: What affect does this positive coaching approach and experience have on the executive's perceived behavioral characteristics, such as self-efficacy, optimism, motivation, and resiliency?

This chapter will include a discussion of the research setting; participant and organizational demographics; the data collection process; the data analysis process; results; and measures taken to address credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability.



### **Research Setting**

In this study, I applied the purposeful sampling strategy since this approach provided me an opportunity to engage with executives coached where the coaching methods used were based on the hope theory and a strengths-based focus. I expected the primary participant community to be executives coached by coaches certified by the CEC because I had access to a list of coaches certified by CEC as a result of my coaching certification from the organization. However, after reaching out to the leader of the CEC and posting invitations to coaches to have their clients contact me if interested in participating, no potential participants contacted me. This lack of response could be because the coaches did not forward the information regarding the study and the invite for a client to participate or because the clients did not want to participate and did not contact me to participate. This phenomenon repeated for other targeted coaching organizations. I then posted invitations to coaches through LinkedIn executive coaching groups (see Appendix C), such as Executive Coaching Network, Executive Coaching Best Practices, and Executive Coaching Circles (Table 10). There were no responses from these groups as well. I then posted information regarding the intended study on LinkedIn to all of my connections, which numbered over 500. This resulted in some connected coaches inquiring about the research and ultimately informing some of their clients about the study. I identified some participants from this approach. Word of mouth discussions with colleagues at Walden and the business community resulted in other coaches and participants contacting me regarding the study.

Each participant received an informed consent form, which included the study description along with the expectations of the process for the study for the participant (see Appendix D). The participants were asked to complete the consent form or approve the consent form through email, indicating their agreement to participate in the study. I communicated the interview protocol and a sample of the interview questions to the participants before they provided their consent to participate in the study. I forwarded consent forms to the participants and scheduled the interviews upon receiving their consent by e-mail.

In this study, I collected data from interviews with the participants. I used the same interview protocol for all interviews. After some general greetings, I asked each participant whether they would agree to be recorded. All participants agreed to being recorded. I then approached each interview with three phases of questions: Questions related to pre-coaching, questions related to the lived experiences of the coaching experience, and questions related to the post-experience of the coaching experience.

Table 10

*Participant Recruitment*

Method	Contact Target	Agreed to Participate	Declined/No response
Email	CEC	0	120
Phone	CEC	0	1
Email	MentorCoach	0	1
Email	Coaches Training Institute	0	1
Email	Sherpa Coaching	0	1
LinkedIn Group Posting	Executive Coaching Best Practices	0	1,720

(table continues)

Method	Contact Target	Agreed to Participate	Declined/No response
LinkedIn Group Posting	ICF Executive and Leadership Coaching	0	1,516
LinkedIn Group Posting	The Executive Coach	0	21,483
LinkedIn Group Posting	Coaching Leaders	0	1,681
LinkedIn Group Posting	The Executive Coaching University	0	626
LinkedIn Group Posting	Coach Village	0	1,748
LinkedIn Group Posting	The Executive Coaching Network	0	1,748
LinkedIn Group Posting	Leadership Think Tank	0	1
Meeting with Coaching Connections	Coaching Connections and Contacts	19	25
LinkedIn Group Posting	Coaching Leaders	0	1,681
Discussion Post	Walden University Class	1	10
LinkedIn Group Posting	Whole Hearted Leadership	0	1
LinkedIn Group Posting	Baldrige Quest for Excellence	0	1,097
LinkedIn Group Posting	Executive Suite	0	1
LinkedIn Group Posting	Senior Executive Exchange	0	1

(table continues)

Method	Contact Target	Agreed to Participate	Declined/No response
LinkedIn Group Posting	Executive Roundtable	0	1
LinkedIn Group Posting	The Executive Club	0	1
LinkedIn Group Posting	Leadership and Organizational Development	0	41,801

All participants were senior leaders in their organizations, engaging in coaching for a minimum of 6 months. All participants began the coaching process from a strengths-based approach perspective; however, some of the participants influenced some change in approach after a few coaching sessions. There were some participants who were coached using a strengths-based focus, some that had a combination of a focus on strengths and weaknesses as an approach, and some participants who focused on weaknesses. I determined this shift in approach focus through responses from participants during the interview data collection process. These differences allowed for reviewing any contrasts in perceived results experienced due to the approaches used. For the rest of this study description, I will refer to the participants as P(number). For example, participant 1 will be referred to as P1, participant 2 will be referred to as P2, and so on. When asked if the focus of the coaching was on strengths or weaknesses, P3 stated: “It was a combination of the two.” The response of P4 and P7 was that “It was a combination of both.” P10 stated that “it was a balance of both...we dropped the strengths and totally focused on weaknesses for like the final few sessions.” After beginning their coaching session focused on strengths, P13 indicated the following.

It just felt kind of disingenuous in a way. That sounds horrible but, because I don't think it was intended to be that way, just to me, I was like- Okay, great. I want action. I want to take action, and yes, I've got these strengths, but where I am really feeling the need to focus and need help is over here in this opportunities column.

Although the coach of P13 tried to convince P13 about the importance of developing strengths too, P13 insisted on the focus on weakness. Most of the other participants embraced the focus on strengths and felt uncomfortable with a focus on weakness. This focus on strengths was reflected in the comments of P1, P2, P5, P6, P8, P9, P11, P12, P14, P15, P18, and P19. Several participants used the StrengthsFinder test to identify their primary strengths. P2, P8, and P18 specifically described the StrengthsFinder test in their interview comments. The only participant who described an experience of coaching focusing on an approach that they did not prefer and did not adjust was P16. The comments of P16 regarding the coaching approach they experienced follows:

I absolutely focused on the areas I needed to develop. I was given some feedback on some things that I needed to work on. So, when I first sat down with the coach, I was very upfront with the coach about the feedback I was given and that we needed to work on. I don't know what we would have done by focusing on my strengths, and, and how that would have helped me. I, I was given very specific feedback that I was doing things that were counter to what they wanted me to do, and so that was the complete focus of the exercise. This wasn't like- hey, you

know, there's some things we'd like you to refine and maybe we can exploit further your, your strengths. That wasn't at all how this was positioned. It was very sternly- you're doing this wrong, and you need to fix this, and if you don't fix this we're going to show you the door. So, we had focused, um, very explicitly on those things.

I conducted two interviews using Skype technology and 18 interviews in-person. I conducted the in-person interviews in a private office. Amolto Call Recorder was used to record the Skype interviews, recording audio and video. For the in-person interviews, I used two voice recorders: a Philips Voice Tracer digital recorder and Voice Record Pro App on an iPhone. I intended to make the Philips Voice Tracer digital recorder the main recording tool, along with Dragon NaturallySpeaking software. The Dragon NaturallySpeaking software was to be used to create the transcripts through a download of the data on the recorder into the computer. However, that software did not work well, so I used the Voice Record Pro App primarily due to its better voice recording quality. I asked permission to record from each participant before turning on the recorders.

I created transcripts manually or by use of a transcription service at [www.rev.com](http://www.rev.com). The transcripts that I created manually were done by listening to the interview recordings and typing the information into an Microsoft Word document. The transcripts from Rev were checked by me by listening to the interview recordings and comparing what I heard to the transcript Microsoft Word document. In the transcripts, I included the emotive sounds such as laughs, mmm, hmm, and so forth. I stored the transcripts and audio recordings on my laptop computer, which is and was secured by

password protection. I stored backups on a USB drive. Transcripts were forwarded to each participant for a member checking before I added the transcript into the database. Once approval of the transcript was obtained from the participant, the transcript was loaded into a project on my computer, using NVivo 11 software.

### **Demographics**

Demographic information was determined naturally while setting up the participant pool and conducting the interviews. Twenty participants were interviewed, representing four separate organizations. Of the 20 participants, 60% were female and 40% were male. All participants resided in the United States, with their organizations being *U.S.* organizations. The sample consisted of 12 females and eight males, with one from the West Coast, one from the MidWest, and 18 from the Southeast (Table 11). The participants came from four different organizations. (Table 12). There was one dean of a college, one general manager of a company division, a director in healthcare, 10 directors in software, and seven vice presidents in software. Nineteen of the participants were Caucasian, and one was African American.

Table 11

#### *Participants*

Participant	Title	Gender	Geographic Location
P1	Director	Female	Southeast USA
P2	Vice President	Male	Southeast USA
P3	Director	Female	Southeast USA

(table continues)

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Participant	Title	Gender	Geographic Location
P4	Vice President	Female	Southeast USA
P5	Vice President	Female	Southeast USA
P6	Director	Female	Southeast USA
P7	Dean	Male	West Coast USA
P8	Director	Female	Southeast USA
P9	Director	Male	Midwest USA
P10	Director	Male	Southeast USA
P11	Director	Male	Southeast USA
P12	Vice President	Male	Southeast USA
P13	Vice President/CTO	Female	Southeast USA
P14	Director	Female	Southeast USA
P15	Vice President	Female	Southeast USA
P16	Director	Male	Southeast USA
P17	General Manager	Female	Southeast USA
P18	Director	Female	Southeast USA
P19	Vice President/CIO	Male	Southeast USA
P20	Director	Female	Southeast USA

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Table 12

*Participant Organizations*

Participant	Organization Type	Profit/NonProfit	Industry
P1	Software Development	Profit	Software
P2	Software Development	Profit	Software
P3	Software Development	Profit	Software
P4	Software Development	Profit	Software
P5	Software Development	Profit	Software
P6	Software Development	Profit	Software
P7	Higher Education	NonProfit	Education
P8	Software Development	Profit	Software
P9	University Healthcare	Profit	Healthcare
P10	Software Development	Profit	Software
P11	Software Development	Profit	Software
P12	Software Development	Profit	Software
P13	Software Development	Profit	Software
P14	Software Development	Profit	Software
P15	Software Development	Profit	Software
P16	Software Development	Profit	Software
P17	Online Retail	Profit	eCommerce
P18	Software Development	Profit	Software

(table continues)

Participant	Organization Type	Profit/NonProfit	Industry
P19	Software Development	Profit	Software
P20	Software Development	Profit	Software

### Data Collection

I began searching for participants shortly after I received approval from the Institute Review Board (IRB). IRB approval number assigned is 07-06-16-0259363. I also received certification from The National Institutes of Health (NIH) Office of Extramural Research from completion of the NIH Web-based training course "Protecting Human Research Participants" (certification number is 2084548). The certificate is shown in Appendix E.

I collected data through semistructured interviews of the participants. I provided invitations to coaches and prospective participants (Appendix C). The length of the interviews was kept as short as relevantly necessary, since "everything that is collected has to be analyzed" (Giorgi, 2009, p. 124). The length of the interviews was dictated by the interview questions I had prepared to obtain the data needed for analysis. I scheduled 60 minutes for each interview, with most of them lasting 30 minutes to 45 minutes. A series of questions were used to review the reasons and events that led the participant to be coached, their coaching experience, and the perceived results they experienced from the coaching. The list of questions was addressed through separate interviews with the study participants and consisted of the three phases: questions related to pre-coaching,

questions related to the lived experience of the coaching experience, and questions related to the post experience of the coaching experience. The first phase explored what led the leader to be coached. The second phase explored the leader's lived experience of the coaching phenomenon. The third phase probed the perceived behavior changes the participant experienced including self-efficacy, optimism, motivation, and resilience. The interviews were conducted using Skype or in-person environments. All participants were interviewed in-person except for two, P7 and P9. I recorded notes in a journal following the interviews, indicating my thoughts on the participant's body language and the tone of the interview. The interviews were recorded, then transformed into transcripts.

Transcripts were either created by me by listening to the digital recording of the interview, or by a third-party transcription service at [www.rev.com](http://www.rev.com). The interviews were transcribed in Microsoft Word, then loaded into NVivo 11. I reviewed the transcripts created by [www.rev.com](http://www.rev.com) by listening to the digital recordings and comparing them to the transcripts. The participant names were coded before sending the recordings to the third-party service to protect confidentiality. I forwarded the transcripts to the participants for member checking. Upon successful completion of the member checking process, I loaded the transcript into an NVivo project for coding and analysis. The participants are referred to by the nomenclature of P1, P2, P3...P20. The data collection process followed the steps outlined in Chapter 3 and questions were as shown in Appendix A. I stored the data on my personal computer, which was password protected. I stored backup of the data on a USB flash drive, which is secured in a locked safe. The data will be maintained for 5

years. The intent of the study was to analyze the transcripts to understand the lived experience of the participants during and from this coaching phenomenon.

The point in which research data becomes repetitive is referred to as saturation. Saturation is the point when no new data surfaces during the coding process (Mason, 2010). The saturation point determines the sample size for a qualitative study. I believe that I have reached saturation after 20 interviews of data collection for my study. The data from the interviews was resulting in no new information, and the data began to replicate (Walker, 2012).

I received IRB approval for this study on July 16, 2016. After several months attempting to find participants, interviewing began in October 2016. Interview data collection started in October 2016 and ended April 2017. Detailed audit trails of the consent dates, interviews, development of transcripts, member checking requests, and member checking approvals appear in Appendix F.

### **Data Analysis**

I analyzed the data in several ways. Using the methodology prescribed by Moustakas (1994), I bracketed the focus of the research study, so the analysis process was solely on the topic and research questions. Initially, I treated every statement as having equal value. This process is called horizontalizing. Irrelevant and repetitive statements were removed leaving the textural meanings of the coaching phenomenon. These horizons were clustered into themes, followed by my analysis of the themes and the organization of themes into a description of the phenomenon of executive coaching lived experience. The analysis of data followed Moustakas' modification of van Kaam's

method of analysis shown in Figure 2. I conducted a query of the transcripts to develop word clouds. I plotted the coaching approach and the perceived behavioral changes for each participant in a scatter mapping to look for any patterns.

In my initial readings of the transcripts, I read the transcripts completely through without engaging in any coding, focusing on getting a sense of the conversation from the interview. The second time through the transcripts, I began coding. I used descriptive codes, or nodes, to identify dominant descriptive codes. As suggested by Saldana (2013), the initial coding was influenced by the conceptual framework of the study and the research questions. The codes, or nodes, were created from key words from the conceptual framework, key words and phrases in the transcripts, and from key words in the research questions. The key words and phrases from the transcripts led to several cycles of coding as suggested by Saldana. I created tables to identify the participant data relative to the coding. The analysis included reviewing the input variables of the research questions with the changes in behavior stemming from the executive's lived experience. I used the NVivo word cloud function to identify words in the data that appeared frequently.

### **Codes and Themes from Data**

The analysis of the transcripts led to a set of nodes, or codes, in NVivo. The node count was 12 Level 1 nodes and 41 Level 2 nodes. The research questions and conceptual framework guided the structure of the node hierarchy. These nodes included hope theory, executive coaching approach, self-efficacy, optimism, motivation, and resiliency. Other nodes included gender, demographics, strengths-based, weakness-based, reason for

engaging in coaching, expectations, and satisfaction. Grouping of the lower level, working nodes led to higher level nodes or codes. I developed a mind map based on executive coaching that aided me in the coding process (Appendix G).

I utilized the expertise of an expert in phenomenological coding to validate the alignment of transcripts to the groupings or themes I generated through the coding process. The expert has a Ph.D. in Socio-Cultural Aspects of Sport with a certificate in qualitative research. The expert completed a qualitative dissertation, and currently performs research for a software company, focusing on qualitative analysis and coding of customer survey verbatims. I provided the expert with a sample of the participant transcripts, which were coded to protect the confidentiality of the participant. The expert also signed a confidentiality agreement which can be viewed in Appendix B. After a review of a sample of transcripts and their coding of them, the expert conducted a comparison of their coding to my coding. The expert derived similar themes. This expert provided a professional view of my working theories and provided a challenge to them about my thinking. This expert evaluated my coding analysis for bias and concluded that there was no bias in my coding and that we saw similar themes in the review of the transcripts.

Word frequency queries supported a focus on the conceptual framework areas of positive psychology and goals. Each participant had goals; were motivated to achieve those goals, except for one participant; and developed action plans to achieve their goals. The queries indicate that the three components of hope theory were evident in the coaching experience of the participants (Table 13). This evidence of the three

components was supported by comments made by all participants in their interviews, except for P16, who was missing the agency component. The development of action plans and alternative plans helped to increase resiliency, confidence, optimism, and motivation in most cases. Confidence levels increased for most participants as they gained self-efficacy in the performance of their roles. A strengths-based executive coaching approach, or a combined approach of strengths-based and weakness-based, was associated with improvements in confidence, resiliency, optimism, and motivation. A solely weakness-based coaching approach was associated with some areas not improving, and declining (Table 14).

Table 13

*Participant Data Relative to Hope Theory Components*

Participant	Goals	Pathways	Agency	Satisfaction with Coaching
P1	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
P2	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
P3	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
P4	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
P5	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
P6	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
P7	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
P8	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes

(table continues)

Participant	Goals	Pathways	Agency	Satisfaction with Coaching
P9	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
P10	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
P11	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
P12	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
P13	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
P14	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
P15	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
P16	Yes	Yes	No	Yes; not strong
P17	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
P18	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
P19	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
P20	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes



Table 14

*Participant Data Relative to Approach and Behavior Change*

Participant	Coaching Approach	Self-Efficacy Change	Resiliency Change	Optimism Change	Motivation Change
P1	Strengths	Increase	Increase	Increase	Increase
P2	Strengths	Same	Same	Same	Increase
P3	Mixed	Increase	Increase	Increase	Increase
P4	Mixed	Increase	Increase	Increase	Increase
P5	Strengths	Increase	Increase	Increase	Increase
P6	Mixed	Same	Same	Increase	Increase
P7	Strengths	Increase	Increase	Increase	Increase
P8	Strengths	Increase	Increase	Increase	Increase
P9	Strengths	Increase	Increase	Increase	Increase
P10	Mixed	Increase	Increase	Increase	Increase
P11	Strengths	Increase	Increase	Same	Increase
P12	Weakness	Increase	Same	Increase	Increase
P13	Mixed; more on weakness	Increase	Same	Increase	Increase
P14	Strengths	Same	Increase	Same	Same
P15	Mixed	Increase	Increase	Increase	Increase

(table continues)

P16	Weakness	Decrease	Same	Decrease	Decrease
P17	Mixed	Increase	Increase	Same	Same
P18	Strengths	Same	Increase	Same	Same
P19	M	Increase-	Same	Increase	Increase
	2	especially			
	experiences	strengths-			
	1 weakness	based			
	1 strengths				
P20	Weakness	Increase	Same	Same	Increase

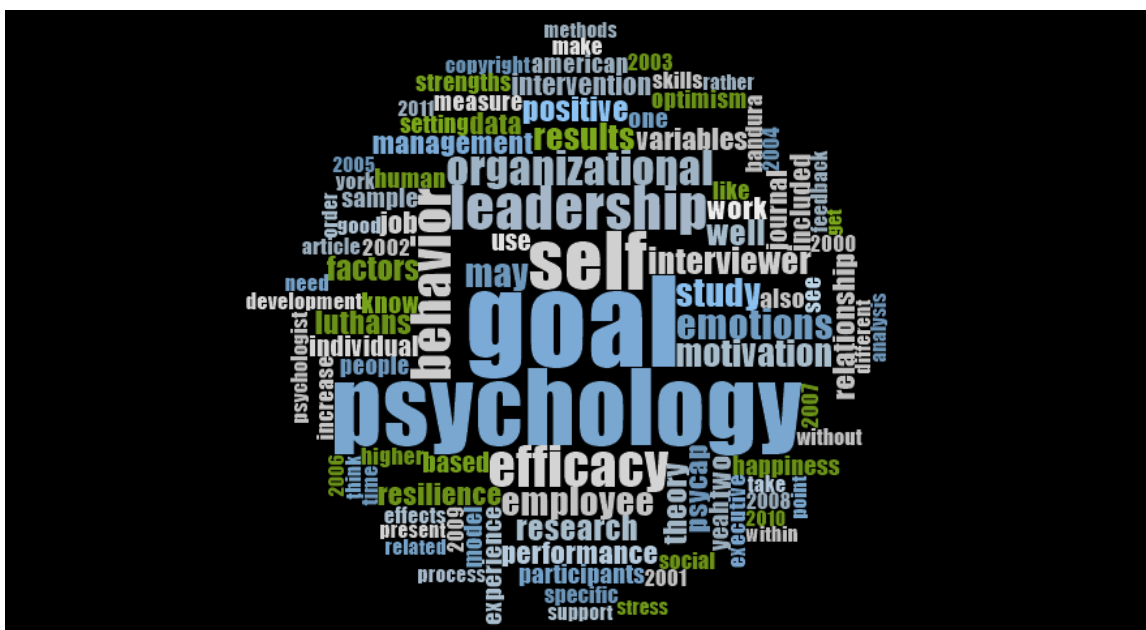
Word queries of the transcripts indicate a high frequency of positive, psychology, goals, performance, efficacy, and executive. Word queries were run for exact matches of the words and stemmed words. A stem is a part of the word and would result in combining goal and goals, for example. Motivation and strengths were also frequently used. The exact match word cloud that resulted from the word query can be seen in Figure 3.





*Figure 4.* Stemmed words frequency word cloud from transcripts. Word cloud created using NVivo 11 software from the analysis of transcript data. The analysis is based on the exact word being part of the stem word as a part of the search. An example would be research as the exact word and researching being a stem word.

A synonym word cloud from the transcripts is shown in Figure 5.



*Figure 5.* Synonym word cloud from transcripts. Word cloud created using NVivo 11 software from the analysis of transcript data. The analysis is based on finding synonyms of the exact word being part a part of the search. An example would be research as the exact word and study being a synonym.

Themes that surfaced were hope theory, coaching approach, reason for engaging in coaching, support, satisfaction with coaching, expectations with coaching, awareness, and results such as changes in confidence and self-efficacy, optimism, resiliency, and motivation. Table 15 shows the themes and nodes. Textual descriptions are provided in the section on data analysis.

Table 15

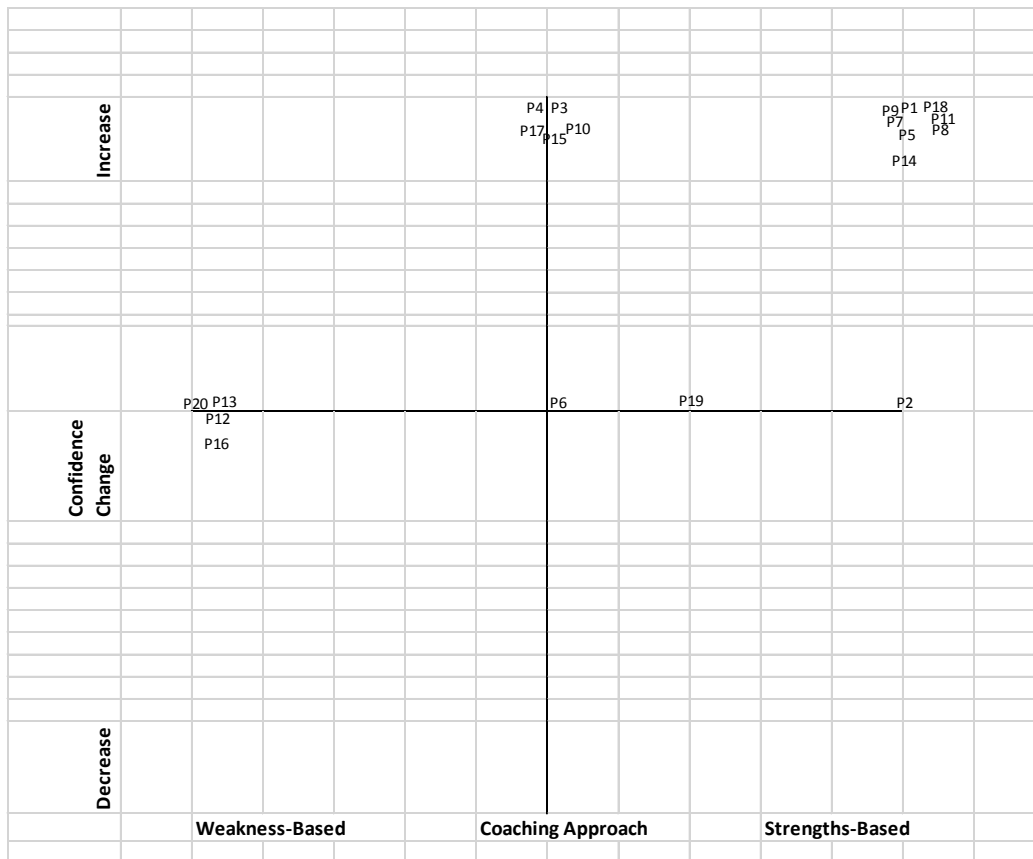
*All Themes and Nodes*

Theme	Node(s)
Awareness	360 Degree Feedback StrengthsFinder
Confidence and Self-Efficacy	Favorable Perceptions of Change Perception of No Change Unfavorable Perception of Change
Executive Coaching Approach	Strengths-Based Mixed-Based Weakness-Based
Expectations of Coaching	Did Not Meet Exceeded Met
Hope Theory	Goals Pathways Agency
Motivation	Favorable Perceptions of Change Perception of No Change Unfavorable Perception of Change
Optimism	Favorable Perception of Change Perception of No Change Unfavorable Perception of Change
Resiliency	Favorable Perception of Change No Perception of Change Unfavorable Perception of Change
Satisfaction with Coaching	Satisfied Unsatisfied
Support	Favorable Unfavorable

(table continues)

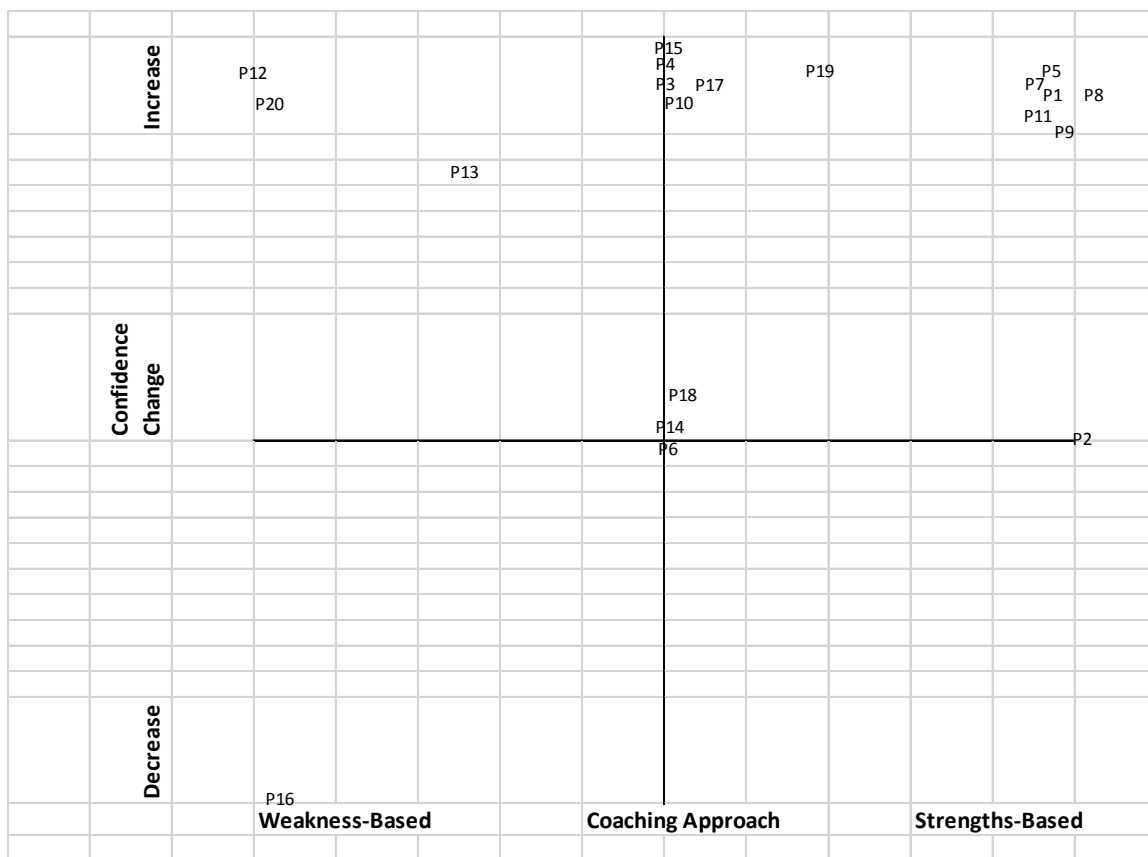
Theme	Node(s)
Reason for Engaging in Executive Coaching	Accidentally Found Way CEO Provided Opportunity Coach Offered Friend Recommendation Individual Desire to Improve Leadership Development Training Program Offered by Manager Performance Issues
Demographics	East Coast Midwest West Coast Female Male
Total 12	41

I plotted the information of each participant into four quadrants of a scatter map to pictorially show a comparison of coaching approach experience with each behavioral change experience. This scatter mapping was done to see the alignment of the three phases of the coaching process experienced by the participants: the reason for engaging in coaching, the coaching approaches and experience, and the participant's perceived behavioral change. Figure 6 shows that approach may have influenced participant experience with resilience, while Figures 7, 8, and 9 shows that approach did not influence the behavioral change experiences of self-efficacy or confidence, optimism, or motivation.

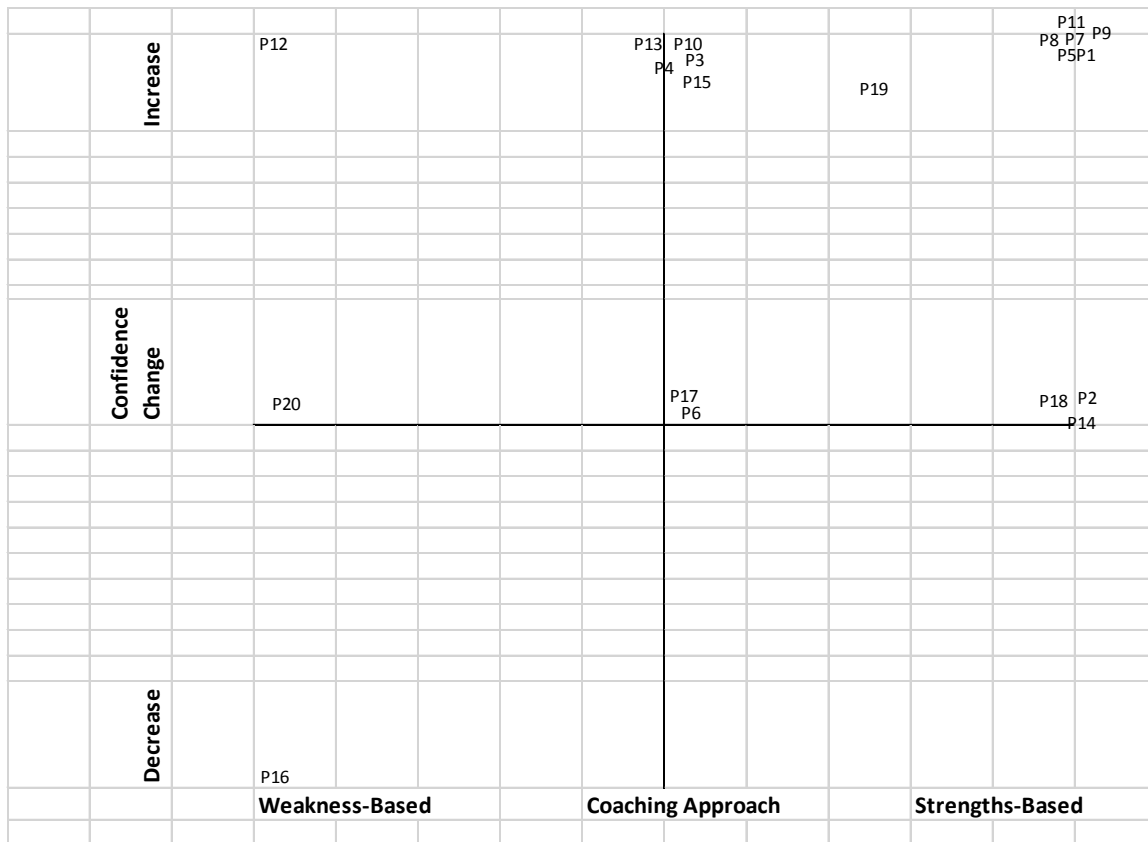


*Figure 6.* Quadrant comparison of approach and resiliency change. Schematic location of participant perceived change in resiliency. X- axis shows the approach on a continuum from weakness-based to strength-based, with the halfway point representing a mixed approach. The Y-axis indicates a perceived increase, or favorable change, in the behavior; a perceived decrease, or unfavorable change in the behavior; or no perceived change.





*Figure 7.* Quadrant comparison of approach and confidence change. Schematic location of participant perceived change in confidence. X- axis shows the approach on a continuum from weakness-based to strength-based, with the halfway point representing a mixed approach. The Y-axis indicates a perceived increase, or favorable change, in the behavior; a perceived decrease, or unfavorable change in the behavior; or no perceived change.



*Figure 8.* Quadrant comparison of approach and optimism change. Schematic location of participant perceived change in optimism. X- axis shows the approach on a continuum from weakness-based to strength-based, with the halfway point representing a mixed approach. The Y-axis indicates a perceived increase, or favorable change, in the behavior; a perceived decrease, or unfavorable change in the behavior; or no perceived change.

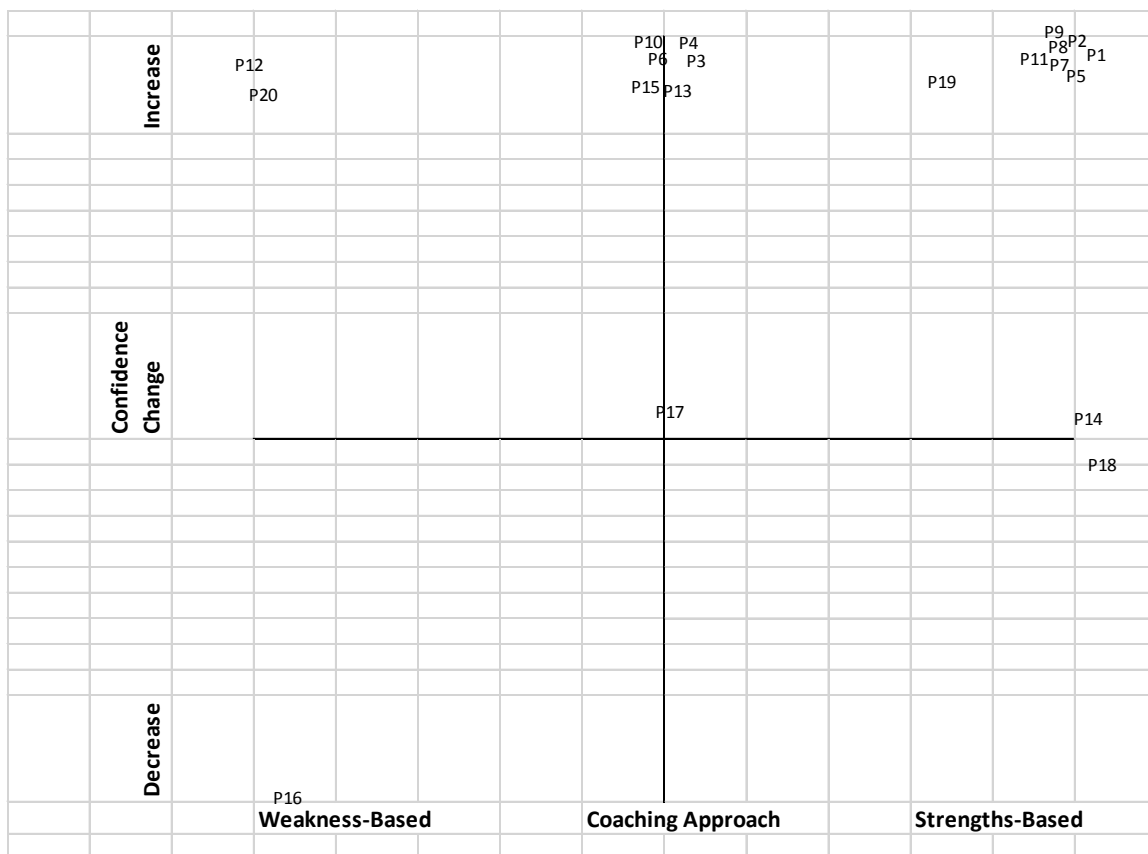


Figure 9. Quadrant comparison of approach and motivation. Schematic location of participant perceived change in resiliency. X- axis shows the approach on a continuum from weakness-based to strength-based, with the halfway point representing a mixed approach. The Y-axis indicates a perceived increase, or favorable change, in the behavior; a perceived decrease, or unfavorable change in the behavior; or no perceived change.

### Evidence of Trustworthiness

There are four major components of trustworthiness. These are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In qualitative research, the researcher is the primary data collection instrument (Patton, 2002), and the importance of avoiding bias becomes more concerning. The researcher needs to suspend their judgment and

bracket, or put aside, their experiences and biases. This practice is called epoche, involves blocking biases and assumptions (Butler, 2016; Thane, 2005), allowing for the observations and data from the study to drive the results and conclusions. Member checking and using a coding expert to calibrate the data analysis coding are other methods that can lead to evidence of trustworthiness. I conducted both member checking and the use of a coding expert in this study.

### **Credibility**

Credibility refers to the degree to which the reader will accept the findings of the study as plausible (Hays et al., 2016). As indicated in Chapter 3, I addressed credibility or internal validity by taking on the perspective of epoche. I was aware and made transparent any preconceptions and personal biases in the subject material. By suspending any judgment, I reviewed the coached executive, or senior leader's lived experience from an open viewpoint. I was aware of my values and reflected on how this may influence question phrasing, data collection, and analysis. I facilitated the leader's lived experience understanding through the strict following of the data collection and analysis plan. I remained curious as I tried to understand the lived experience of executive coaching as described by my participants. I was willing to be proven wrong by the data and analysis, and I was honest and transparent (Hamill & Sinclair, 2010). I used reflexivity and bracketing to monitor any personal bias. I sent the transcript of the data collected from each participant to them to facilitate member checking. To ensure the quality of the research, I utilized the eight key markers of quality in qualitative research identified by Tracy (2010). These eight markers can be seen in Table 8.

Approval by the IRB of Walden University and adherence to its terms set the foundation for the credibility of this study. To support credibility, I gave a detailed description of the research process and results. I also utilized an expert in coding to ensure my coding process was not biased.

Although purposeful sampling was used to find participants, the participants were invited by either their coach or me and were allowed to self-select themselves as participants. This approach was designed to minimize researcher bias in the selection of participants. In some cases, the participants were asked the same question in a rephrased manner, to detect any inconsistencies in the participants' responses. Following suggestions for credibility from Shenton (2004) and as was described in Chapter 3, member checking was used to support credibility. At the conclusion of the interviews, I utilized member checking with the participants to confirm the accuracy and consensus of the information. I conducted the member checking through reviews of the transcripts by the participants. I was explicit regarding my expectations with member checking. When providing instructions to the participant regarding the member checking process, I provided my expectation, so the participant did not change the transcript to the extent where I do not have enough data to reach conclusions (Carlson, 2010).

### **Transferability**

Transferability represents the reader's ability to transfer the results of a study to their circumstances or generalize the results. Both Patton (2012) and van Manen (1990) asserted that phenomenology is not conducive for empirical generalizations of the results. This lack of generalization is partly due to the smaller sample sizes used in

phenomenological studies, reader's environment and context (Patton, 2002). There is a possibility for a reader to make connections in another discipline. I employed thick description of the participant behavior in this study. I explained not just the behavior, but its context as well. This approach is to acknowledge the unique phenomenological method of study while recognizing the intention of external validity.

Since this qualitative study had a small sample size, which is common with qualitative studies, the qualitative results are not generalizable. Qualitative studies can lead to in-depth information regarding a smaller population or situation, which can increase the depth of understanding for that situation (Patton, 2002). Therefore, transferability is used to ensure the context is well-defined for the reader to draw parallels between the study and their experiences. Using the recommendations of Shenton (2004), I considered the following approaches:

1. The number of organizations taking part in the study and where they are based
  - a. Four organizations were represented in the study and included geographic locations of the West Coast, Midwest, and Southeast.
2. Restrictions to the type of people who contributed to the study
  - a. Participants had to have been coached at least six months, with the coach using the concepts of hope theory
3. The number of participants in the data collection population
  - a. There were 20 participants in the participant pool
4. The data collection methods used

- a. Data was collected through interviews conducted in person or through Skype
- b. The data collection allowed for the collection of demographic data

### **Dependability**

I adhered to Walden University's quality standards and guidelines to ensure dependability. These guidelines include the Form and Style Review Checklist, the Dissertation Checklist, and the Dissertation Minimum Standards Rubric. A higher level of credibility can influence a higher level of dependability. So, member checking is a process that was used to assist in this area. Also, engagement of the dissertation committee and the incorporation of their recommendations and suggestions were used to ensure a dependable research study. With regards to the study and the participants, I described the research study and the environment with which it is conducted. I conducted interviews in-person or by Skype so body language can be captured as a part of the data collection process. I used each of these methods to ensure the study results can be viewed as a dependable addition to knowledge in the area of executive coaching. I also utilized a coding expert to review my coding process and codes for bias and validity. I kept a thorough audit trail, including the safe-keeping of notes, interview recordings, transcripts, and various stages of data analysis.

### **Confirmability**

For confirmability, I honored the core concept of epoche and bracketing- where I suspended any preconceived bias from my experiences. I was aware of my efforts to ensure my interpretation of the data was representative of the participants' context. Each

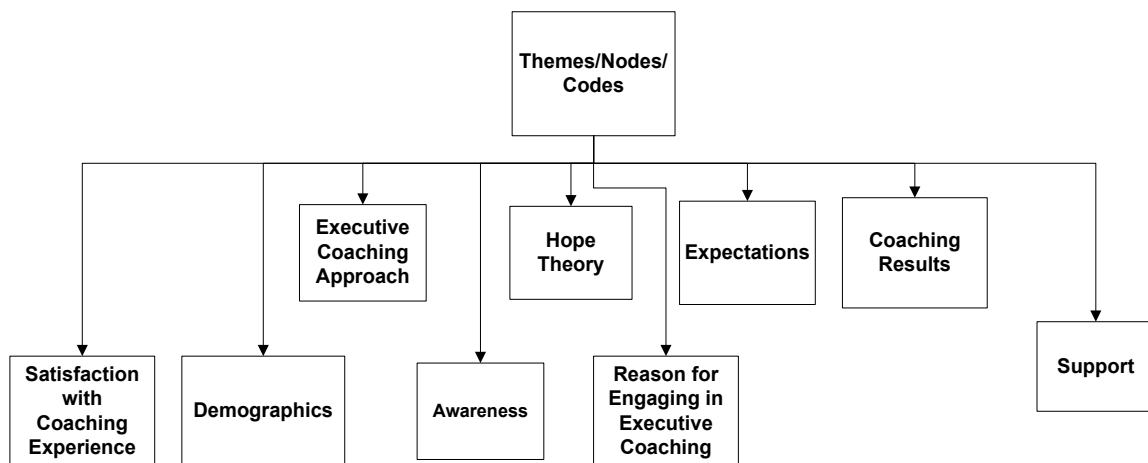
participant reviewed and commented on the transcript. Phenomenological research is reflexive and fulfills the essence of confirmability. As Moustakas (1994) noted: verification is enhanced by returning to the research participants, sharing with them the meaning and essences of the phenomenon as derived from reflection on and analysis of the verbatim transcribed interviews and other material, and seeking their assessment for comprehensiveness and accuracy” (p. 18).

### **Study Results**

My conceptual framework for this study included hope theory and strengths-based focused leadership. This conceptual framework was selected to support the central research questions which were to explore the lived experiences of executives who have been coached using approaches based on hope theory and strengths-based positive psychology, regarding their self-efficacy, optimism, motivation, and resiliency. These research questions support the importance of knowing the theories related to hope theory and a strengths-based focus.

From the 20 interviews conducted, which resulted in twenty transcripts, I linked 1,529 references to nodes. Arranging significant statements results in 41 working themes, or codes. As seen in Figure 10, the themes were further analyzed and affinitized, or grouped, resulting in 12 final higher level themes, or codes. The result was a total of 53 themes, nodes, or codes.





*Figure 10.* Grouped high level themes from coding of transcripts. High level themes from grouping of lower level codes from transcript analysis and coding.

The themes from the data analysis aligned with hope theory (Snyder, 2000, 2002, 2005; Snyder, Lopez, Shorey, Rand, & Feldman, 2003) and the research questions. Participants set goals in their coaching engagements, developed action plans or pathways for the achievement of those goals, and they were motivated to achieve those goals. The motivation, or agency, stemmed from the leader's personal goals and drive, and was reinforced due to the investments their organizations were making in them through the provision of executive coaching.

All participants had experienced the components of hope theory except for P16. These components were the setting of goals, having pathways to the achievement of

goals, and having agency, or motivation, to follow the pathways to the achievement of goals. P16 lacked agency since this participant was being forced to engage in coaching due to poor performance. P16 experienced decreased self-efficacy, decreased optimism, and decreased motivation due to their coaching experience. The participant's resilience remained unchanged from its state before the coaching experience.

Although all participants expressed satisfaction with the coaching experience, many felt that they did not meet often enough and that the experience would have been better had they had more meetings and check-ins with their coach. Many participants expressed that their experience was a monthly meeting, with action plans being implemented between the meetings. Several participants expressed that they would like to continue with the coaching process.

The analysis included reviewing the input variables of the RQs with the changes in behavior stemming from the executive's lived experience.

RQ1: What are the lived experiences of executives who have been coached based on hope theory and strengths-based positive psychology?

RQ2: What affect does this positive coaching approach and experience have on the executive's perceived behavioral characteristics, such as self-efficacy, optimism, motivation, and resiliency?

The key themes that emerged from the higher-level themes were demographics, reason for engaging in coaching, hope theory, satisfaction with coaching, executive coaching approach, coaching results: primarily optimism, resiliency, self-efficacy or

confidence, and motivation; and awareness. I address each of these themes in the next paragraphs. They are not discussed in any particular order.

### **Key Emergent Theme 1: Demographics**

This is a theme that developed as I created working nodes for geographics and gender for the participants. There were no indications of differences in experiences by geographic location. There were no indications of differences in experiences by gender in this study, which supports Snyder's (2000) report which showed no sex differences in his studies regarding hope theory. Each participant was satisfied with their coaching experience and would recommend the experience to others, and there were no noted differences in coaching approaches or perceived behavioral change due to gender.

### **Key Emergent Theme 2: Reason for Engaging in Coaching**

The majority of the participants became engaged in executive coaching as part of a leadership development training program. This program practice is reinforced in the literature where studies have demonstrated that training augmented with coaching can be more effective than just training. This increased effectiveness through integration is due to their approaches being complementary, each with its strengths and limitations (Reddy & Srinivasan, 2015). Classroom training provides information for cognitive understanding, while coaching helps the individual to focus more on changed behaviors. Participants expressed appreciation in the investment being made in them through the leadership development and coaching program, which enriched their experience. For example, participant P6 stated, "I mean I feel like it was an investment in me for which I'm deeply appreciative." This was further reinforced by participant P14 as follows:

I would say, as a-for the company and as an employee, it meant so much to me that they're actually investing in us enough to do it. So, just personally I thought "this is a great thing". The second thing that I thought is that this is a sign of us maturing as a company, because small companies you don't do this kind of thing. Companies that are shrinking and not growing, you know, or companies that don't want to grow inside folks to go on and be leaders- you don't invest in this way. So, um, for me personally, I thought it said actually a fair amount of positive things about the company.

In each coaching engagement where the leader voluntarily engaged in coaching, the leader experienced favorable changes in behavior. Interestingly, in the case where the leader was forced to engage in coaching due to performance issues, the resulting change in behavior was not experienced. This lack of perceived change can be seen for participant P16 in Tables 14 and 15. This phenomenon supports the studies of Csikszentmihalyi (1991) where it was found that if individuals are investing in activities against their own will, they can perceive it as furthering someone else's objectives, rather than their own, leading to the experience being a burden and impacting their motivation. As we see in the next theme, hope theory, motivation is a key component.

### **Key Emergent Theme 3: Hope Theory**

The majority of the participants expressed a strong desire to solve a problem that they had developed an awareness of. In some cases, it was to build on their strengths, and in other cases, it was to strengthen a weakness that they were aware of or became aware of from a 360-degree evaluation. This desire contributed to them setting goals for their

coaching experience. Hope theory has the components of goals or objectives, motivation or agency, and pathways or action plans. As Csikszentmihalyi (1991) identified from his research that when we have clear objectives, action plans to achieve the objectives, a passion for achieving the objectives, and a way to get involved in the passion, goals can serve to give meaning and serve as a driver to achieving the goals. This phenomenon is evidenced in this study for the participants that had the three components of hope theory.

This theme was part of the research questions and its components, and hope theory emerged in the interviews and analysis. Hope theory (Snyder, 2000, 2002) involves the setting of goals and involves the components of pathways and agency for the achievement of those goals. The participants referred to pathways as action plans and agency as motivation. Each participant, except for one, had the three components of hope theory and each perceived favorable change in at least one of the behaviors of optimism, resiliency, confidence, and motivation with the other perceived results being the same as before engaging in the coaching experience. The one participant that was lacking the hope theory component of agency experienced unfavorable declines in all of these areas of perceived behavioral change.

#### **Key Emergent Theme 4: Satisfaction with Coaching**

Coaching involves a confidential partnership between the coach and the executive, with the executive generally being a business leader or manager (Bozer & Sarros, 2012). The client-coach relationship is an essential factor in any coaching engagement (McKenna & Davis, 2009). Each participant expressed satisfaction with the coaching experience. Many did not know what to expect with the coaching experience

before engaging in it, but each was satisfied with the experience. Even the participant, P16, that did not perceive favorable behavioral change expressed satisfaction with the coaching experience. So, all participants were satisfied and would recommend coaching for others. Each participant expressed that they would engage in coaching again.

Participants expressed it is important to find a coach that meets your personality and is flexible to adjust to what the coachee wants to focus on. A textural description of this is in the response from P4 in the following:

I think finding a coach that fits your personality and fits your learning style is probably really important. That's probably why I felt so successful with it, that I felt like I was making progress on my initiatives because he was very insightful, very understanding of our business, um, very understanding where and how I wanted to grow, understood how I wanted to do things. He knew that I wanted to be very tactical. So, that's how he was. He wasn't very theoretical and talking big picture with me. So, perhaps it's important to find the right coach that fits your learning style and your...I hit the lottery.

When I asked P5 about their experience with the coaching journey, they responded:

Well, I've loved it. Um, I have found it to be phenomenally helpful. Um, I mean, I ... I ... She's really grown into coach/mentor/friend but, from a coaching standpoint, you know, there are times I call her um, and you know the first year I did not do this as much, but you know again, it's ... this has been a growth area for

me in terms of using a coach and what ... you know, how I can get the most out of it.

There were several participants who expressed emotion in describing their coaching experiences and their satisfaction with it. In one interview, the coach of a participant had become ill, and the participant was very emotional about their concern for the health of their coach and expressed that concern. All participants had good coaching relationships, which could have contributed to their satisfaction with coaching. Every participant stated that they would continue the coaching experience, would engage in executive coaching again in the future, and would recommend coaching to others.

#### **Key Emergent Theme 5: Executive Coaching Approach**

The scatter map comparisons in Figure 6 and Figure 7 show that the coaching approach had a potential to influence changes in the experience regarding a change in resiliency. However, the coaching approach had little influence on the experiences of changes in confidence, motivation, and optimism. In all participant experiences, except for P16, the coach began the coaching experience with a focus on strengths. Some of the participants were uncomfortable with just a focus on strengths and changed the focus to a combined approach or a weakness approach. This change occurred for P3, P4, P6, P10, P12, P13, P15, P17, and P20. Other participants such as P6, P12, P13, and P20 perceived no change in their resiliency experience. Participant P6 also experienced no change in perceived confidence. P16, P17, and P20 experienced no change in optimism. However, there were some participants with a strength focus that also experienced no changes in some of these behaviors. This lack of perceived behaviors indicates that the influence of

approach, if the type of approach is preferred by the participant, on the behavioral changes may not be the driving factor for the coaching experience and the resulting experiences. The individual's preferred approach may have more to do with their favorable experience than the approach itself, further supporting Csikszentmihalyi's (1991) findings regarding individual's investing in activities that are against their will. Agency, or motivation, had some influence with experiencing perceived increases in motivation. However, P16 had a combination of a weakness-based approach and a missing component of hope theory resulting in perceptions of decreased confidence, optimism, and motivation- and no change in resiliency.

### **Key Emergent Theme 6: Results**

Results in the case of this study are related to perceived behavioral changes experienced by the participants from the coaching experience. Participants who directed the coaching approach used- whether it was strengths-based, weakness-based, or mixed- and who also experienced all components of hope theory tended to perceive favorable results in their work performance and, particularly, the behavioral areas of optimism, confidence, motivation, and resiliency. Missing a component of hope theory, such as agency in the case of P16, unfavorably influenced the results experience due to coaching. Also, being forced into an approach that was not the choice of the participant influenced the perceived results from the coaching experience. There were other perceived results from the coaching experience expressed by the participants. P4 felt as though they now had a voice and was confident enough to speak up at meetings and discussions. Before



coaching, P4 may let others do the talking, and they would just listen. P3 reported the following.

Six months after the coaching- I have all the data- it raised it 28% [satisfaction with the participant's group performance satisfaction] to the minimum now is "meet expectations" and most of them were "exceeds expectations" on every level. And I think that was us simply, literally, me being the leader of the team- I set the tone for the team, and if, if I had not had..if this had not been part of (pause), of the strategy moving forward at this professional, this coaching, that 360-degree, the original survey, this coaching, we would not be where we are today.

Other perceived behavioral changes discussed by all participants as a result of the conceptual framework and research question influence on the interview questions included resiliency, optimism, motivation, and confidence. As addressed previously, the coaching approach had little effect on the experiences of changes in confidence, motivation, and optimism. Each participant, except for one, had the three components of hope theory and each perceived favorable change in at least one of the behaviors of optimism, resiliency, confidence, and motivation- staying the same as before the coaching experience for the others. P5 was one of the many participants that perceived an increase in confidence as a result of the coaching experience. P5 stated that they "wouldn't have been as confident in coming to table with. I mean, confidence is another one I think to in working with [my coach]. I think I have way more confidence."

The one participant that was lacking the hope theory component of agency experienced perceived unfavorable declines in these areas. That participant, P16, expressed some bitterness with the experience mainly due to the coaching approach that was dictated for him. With regards to results, P16 stated “I don’t believe that it has helped affect [the company's] business outcomes. I think some of the things I have adjusted have actually been contrary to improve - it being the business outcomes here.”

Despite the lack of perceived favorable results, P16 still supported the coaching experience, noting “I wish I could be coached from now until the end of time. I think it should be an ongoing part of any senior level and person’s coaching.” P16 expressed satisfaction with the coaching experience as a form of therapy, if nothing else. P16 felt that it was good to have an independent party to talk with.

### **Key Emergent Theme 7: Awareness**

The coaching experience helped the participants become more aware from their coaching experiences. Awareness tools such as 360-degree reviews and the use of the StrengthsFinders tool were common for the participants. A 360-degree feedback survey, typically, is where an individual leader’s staff, peers, and supervisor are invited to provide scores on a range of questions relevant to their leadership role. The leader getting the 360-degree feedback also provides “self” scores against which the perceptions of others are compared. With the 360-degree tool, the individual conducts a survey and receives feedback in several areas including staff, peers, superiors, and managers (Drew, 2009). Use of a 360-degree survey has been shown to be useful in a leader’s

development, and in this study contributed to the favorable experience participants had in the coaching process. P6 reinforced this when they commented:

So, the 360-degree feedback exercise yielded full-scale results. Right? The exercise shows where you and- say- your leadership, or your direct manager, are in close alignment in your view of where you are, and that can show with respect to strengths or areas of opportunity. Right? So, it's both. And so, my conversations with the coach, um, we looked at a couple of opportunities to continue to capitalize on areas of strength and then also focus on some growth opportunities, or areas of challenge.

The StrengthsFinder tool resulted from a study conducted by a team of Gallup scientists where they surveyed more than 10 million people regarding the area of employee engagement (Rath, 2007). The study resulted in a strengths tool that consists of 34 themes of talents. The study that led to the StrengthFinder tool was the basis for much of Buckingham and Clifton's (2001) work on strengths focused leadership. The tool provides individuals with awareness of their top strengths or talents. There were some leaders in this study who completed a StrengthsFinders assessment as well as the 360-degree survey, which aided in the focus on their strengths during the coaching experience. With regards to the focus on strengths, P4 stated that:

I think that the coaching has really helped me identify in me my strengths, in terms of what do I need to pull out in this conversation with this particular person that I know will move the ball forward in a way that may be the old [me] wouldn't have come to the table with.

### **Discrepant and Nonconforming Data**

The participants for this study were intended to be from coaches certified through the CEC as the primary target population, followed by some other coach certifying organizations. This was intended to be a population of coaches that I would have access to. This was not the case, and I needed to find participants through other means, such as LinkedIn, colleagues from Walden University, and other coaches through colleagues of mine. The coaches whose clients became participants were certified through other means. As I discussed in Chapter 1, there is no standard certifying body or approach for executive coaches. Eight participants were coached by a consulting psychologist who has a Ph.D., and serves as an adjunct professor at the College of Charleston. This coach served as an executive at the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL). Another seven participants were coached by an individual who has a graduate degree in counseling from Penn State University. This coach has several years experience as an executive with large for-profit organizations and consulting groups. Both of these coaches favor a strengths-based approach to their coaching, but are flexible to adjust to the needs of the coachee. Two executives were coached by an individual who has been certified through the Results Coaching Program of the Neuroleadership Group, founded by Dr. David Rock and Dr. BJ Frogg's Persuasion Boot Camp. Three participants were coached by an individual who had completed doctoral studies in adult education, with emphasis in clinical and organizational psychology.

I was interested in the lived experiences of participants who were coached primarily through hope theory and a strengths-based approach. Each coach maintained

the hope theory approach utilizing goal-setting, the setting of pathways, and supporting motivation throughout the coaching experience. Each coach began coaching through the strengths-based approach, however some participants wanted to focus more on their weaknesses. As a result, 18 participants were coached from a strengths-based approach or a mix of strengths-based and weakness-based approaches. Two participants started their coaching with a strength-based approach, but switched to a weakness-based approach.

### **Summary**

This chapter contained a discussion of the data collection methods and analysis of data collected through face-to-face interviews in-person or through Skype, using semistructured interview questions from 20 executive participants. The participants were executives in their organization, which included for-profit and not-for-profit organizations in three geographic regions of the United States. I recruited the 20 participants through purposive sampling from four organizations in the United States.

I used NVivo 11 application software for the data analysis of the data collected, which generated 12 higher level themes and 40 working, lower level, themes that were related to the RQs and the conceptual framework of the study. Responses to the interviews as related to each of the research questions were presented. Analyses of the results were also discussed.

In response to the central RQ, (RQ1) What are the lived experiences of executives who have been coached based on hope theory and strengths-based positive psychology?, the majority of the 20 participants reported perceived experiences of increased self-efficacy, increased optimism, increased motivation, and increased resiliency. All

participants had the three components of hope theory, except one participant, who was lacking in agency. The one participant lacking the agency, or motivation, component of hope theory experienced unfavorable changes in perceived behavior. Coaching approach had a potential influence with changes in resiliency experienced. However, the coaching approach had little effect on changes in the participants' experiences in confidence, motivation, and optimism. The type of coaching approach did not influence the perceived behavior change, as long as the approach was the coachee's preferred approach. Agency, or motivation, had an influence in the perceived experience of an increase in motivation. All of the participants were satisfied with their executive coaching experience, would continue to engage in executive coaching if presented the opportunity, and would recommend executive coaching to others. All participants expressed that the coaching experience was a positive one for them. Even the one participant, P16, who did not perceive the favorable results of the other 19 participants, expressed value in having an independent party who he or she could talk with and expressed the experience as being similar to psychological therapy. In Chapter 5, I present my findings on the coaching experiences of the participants of my study.

## Chapter 5: Discussion, Conclusions, and Recommendations

### **Introduction**

The primary purpose of this qualitative phenomenological study was to explore the lived coaching experiences of executives. I was interested in the role hope theory (Snyder, 2000, 2002) and strengths-based theory (Conchie, 2009; Linley et al., 2007; Rath & Conchie, 2008) aspects of positive psychology as a major approach to executive coaching would have on their experience. My objective was to gain insight from the participants regarding their lived experience from executive coaching and their perceived experience of behavioral changes, such as resiliency, motivation, optimism, and self-efficacy. The participant population consisted of a male from the west coast, a male from the Midwest, six males from the southeast, and 12 females from the southeast. Data was gathered through semistructured interviews. I focused on whether the coaching approach was strengths-based, weakness-based, or a mix of the two, the approach preference of the participants, and whether the participants had the three components of hope theory which are goals, agency or motivation, and pathways or action plans. I intended the study for further understanding of the self-efficacy, optimism, motivation, and resiliency behavior change experiences of coached executives due to this strengths-based and positive executive coaching approach. My primary focus was on the executives' perceptions, feelings, and the meaning of their lived experiences from the phenomenon of executive coaching that is based on hope theory and a strengths-based focus (see Hodlin, 2014).

I focused the literature review in this study on hope theory, executive coaching, strengths-based focus to coaching, and positive psychology. The literature showed gaps

in the study of executive coaching, especially from the perspective of the coachee. The gaps in the literature demonstrated the relatively early maturity level of studies in the areas of coaching and positive psychology, including the interaction of the two fields in executive coaching.

In this study, I used a purposeful sampling strategy as a result of the problem statement and RQs. Some participants were identified through snowball sampling. Participants with at least 6 months of executive coaching provided data. I developed interview questions to collect data from participants, and the interview questions aligned with the problem statement, RQs, and conceptual framework of the study. The research interviews were semistructured and open-ended, which allowed me to ask follow-up questions if necessary. Interviews were conducted in-person or through Skype. The data reached saturation when the participant interview responses did not provide any more pertinent information and began to be repetitive (see Patton, 2002). There were 20 participants, representing four organizations.

While I covered positive psychology and a focus on strengths in the literature review, I noted that the research in these areas is in its infancy. The focus on strengths in this study demonstrated minimal impact on the perceived behavior change of the participants, except for resiliency. This study showed that the preferred coaching approach of the coachee might have a greater impact. The literature showed the importance of each component of hope theory, and how missing any one of the components of hope theory impacts the achievement of goals (Snyder, 2000). The results of this study support this finding from the literature.



This chapter will also include steps taken to ensure the validity of data collected in the study. Chapter 5 includes my conclusions and recommendations based on the results of the study. The chapter will also address my recommendations for further studies.

### **Interpretation of Findings**

The purpose of this study was to explore the lived experience of executives engaging in executive coaching for at least 6 months. I explored the lived experiences of the participants and the effect of the approaches used in the coaching process on their experience, specifically the use of the concepts of hope theory (Snyder, 2000, 2002) and strengths-based theory (Conchie, 2009; Linley et al., 2007; Rath & Conchie, 2008) aspects of positive psychology as a major approach to executive coaching. I intended this study to further understanding of the perceived behavior change and experiences in self-efficacy, optimism, motivation, and resiliency of coached executives due to the coaching approach used, and in particular, the hope theory approach of goal-setting, developing pathways, and engaging agency.

This study revealed that participants who had approaches that incorporated all components of hope theory- goals, agency, and pathways- were likely to be satisfied with their coaching experience and to perceive favorable behavioral changes from their coaching experience. This satisfaction and perceived behavioral change is likely due to the setting of goals and pathways or actions to achieve those goals, which can lead to increased confidence in the achievement of the goals and resilience in overcoming obstacles due to the pathways. This confidence in the ability to achieve goals can lead to

motivation in following the pathways (Peterson & Luthans, 2003; Snyder, 2000). There was one participant who was missing one of the components of hope theory, agency, who was not strongly satisfied with the coaching experience and perceived less favorable behavioral changes relative to confidence, optimism, and motivation. This result was supported by previous studies that found that hope increases when the individual has established goals, has determined pathways to achieve the goals, and is motivated to follow the pathways (Green et al., 2006; Hodlin 2014; Lopez, 2013; Snyder, Michael, & Cheavens, 1999).

Hope involves the setting of goals, with the other two components of agency and pathways representing the willpower and the waypower thought processes that enable the achievement of the goals (Hodlin, 2014; Snyder et al., 2006). The agency and pathways components are iterative in their interaction as well as additive and positively related (Peterson & Luthans, 2003; Snyder, 2000). If an individual has some pathways to achieving a goal but does not have the agency or motivation to pursue those pathways, the goals will likely not be attained (Hodlin, 2014). If an individual is motivated to achieve their goals but has not established the means, or alternative pathways, to achieve the goals, it is likely that the individual will not be successful in achieving the goals and overcoming any obstacles to the achievement of the goals (Lopez, 2013; Snyder, Michael, & Cheavens, 1999). Having some pathways to the achievement of goals may motivate an individual since they can see a means to the achievement of the goals (Luthans & Jensen, 2002). If a person is motivated to achieve their goals, this motivation may lead them to develop pathways for achieving the goals (Hodlin, 2014). This

interaction represents ways in which agency and pathways can be iterative and additive. Both components are needed for hope to occur (Luthans & Jensen, 2002).

Participants who had the three components of hope theory in their coaching process had a better coaching experience than those who did not have all three components. P16 was missing the hope theory component of agency, and P16 did not subscribe to the goals as established by his organization as a key to the coaching process. Further, studies have demonstrated that an individual's agency may be associated with their efficacy. Having confidence that a goal can be achieved can provide the motivation required to follow the pathways established (Snyder et al., 2001). Agency comes from the individual's belief in their ability and intention to begin working towards a goal and to persevere in the face of obstacles (Hodlin, 2014; Snyder et al., 2001). Agency provides the drive for the pursuit of the individual's goals and becomes very important in the event obstacles are met in the pursuit of the goals (Rand & Cheavens, 2009). Feldman et al. (2009) conducted a study that provided evidence the influential primary component of hope was the agency. Agency thoughts are what provide the motivation for individuals to sustain in their pathways towards their goals (Cheavens et al., 2006). P16 experienced a decline in self-efficacy as a result of the coaching experience. So, I concluded that if an individual is not motivated to pursue their goals and their pathways, it appears as though it would not matter that they had goals and pathways (Hodlin, 2014). Agency is the thinking process that motivates the individual to take the appropriate actions, and a lack of agency can lead to a less meaningful experience with the coaching process.

The approach for coaching appears to have little influence on the perceived behavioral changes if the approach was the participants' preferred method of approach. A weakness-based approach, if preferred by the coachee, was seen to result in similar results as a strengths-based approach or a combined approach. The one area of influence was in resiliency. As shown in the scatter mapping in Figure 6, a weakness-based approach resulted in no perceived change in resiliency, while a strengths-based approach or a mixed approach did have an influence on the perceived change in resiliency. The same could not be said for coaching approach and confidence (Figure 7), coaching approach and optimism (Figure 8), and coaching approach and motivation (Figure 9).

Participants either experienced an approach focused on strengths, weaknesses, or a mix of both. Most of the participants were either coached from a mixed or strengths-based approach. There were several instances where the coach began the coaching from the perspective of a strengths-based focus, and where the executive coachee guided the approach to be weakness-based or a mix of strengths-based and weakness-based.

One participant was receiving coaching due to a performance issue, leading to a different experience from the other participants. This participant, P16, was not motivated to make the changes in behavior and leadership approaches being asked. They did not subscribe to the goals that were set out for them and they lacked the motivation to pursue them. The coaching approach for the participant was weakness based, and the participant's perceived results regarding confidence, optimism, and motivation decreased. There was no change in resiliency levels for the two participants who were coached by a weakness-based approach. This phenomenon aligns with the findings of deHaan and

NieB (2012), who showed that it is critical for the coachee to be ready for coaching and receptive to feedback to achieve favorable changes due to the coaching. This likely led to the lack of agency for P16. Many of the participants, including those who favored a weakness approach, felt uncomfortable with the feedback regarding weaknesses.

McKenna and Davis (2009) asserted that there must be a will or motivation for change. P16 did not have the motivation for change, expressing that the changes in behavior his leadership asked for were counter to what he perceived to be his success influencers in the past. What I found in my analysis was that participant P16 had a combination of a weakness-based approach to coaching and a missing component of hope theory leading to perceptions of decreased confidence, optimism, and motivation and no change in resiliency.

From the analysis, I concluded that the coaching approach is not the primary influence on the favorable experiences of the participants. The preferred approach of the participants did influence the favorable experiences of the participants. I, further, concluded that it is important to have all the components of hope theory for participants to have favorable experiences in achieving their objectives through executive coaching.

### **Limitations of the Study**

In this study, I explored the executive leaders' perceptions and lived experiences of executive coaching and their perceptions of changes in behavioral changes such as self-efficacy, optimism, motivation, and resilience. I used a qualitative approach, and qualitative studies are conducted in a natural setting with a limited sample size, making it

difficult to replicate. This difficulty limits the appropriateness of transferability and generalization (Patton, 2012).

One of the limitations of this study was the small sample size of participants. The study was limited to 20 participants and cannot be generalized across a larger population. One of the key findings of this study was that missing one of the components of hope theory would unfavorably impact the perceived behavioral change. This finding was based primarily on the experience of one participant. Further study with more participants would be needed to confirm this conclusion.

Most of the coaches and executives from the study sample were from the southeastern United States, with several executives from a software organization. Also, the participant population lacked diversity, with all being Caucasian except for one African-American participant. I had difficulty recruiting participants from the original target population from the CEC-certified coaches, which may have expanded the scope and diversity of participants.

This study was dependent on executives contacting me, self-selecting, and agreeing to be interviewed. During the interview process, I assumed that the executives' perceptions and expressed experiences were truthful. These limitations could have had an impact on the credibility and dependability of the findings.

The study focused on the perceived behavioral change from the perspective of the coachee but lacks supporting objective observations from others interacting with the executive and a comparison with performance metrics before the coaching experience and postcoaching. Data from those who interact with the participants such as managers,

peers, and staff and experience behavioral changes due to the executive would strengthen the study as it would allow for a more rigorous evaluation of observations. Triangulating qualitative and quantitative data from these various sources could add more insights to the study.

A further limitation of the study relates to the executive coaching field and positive psychology fields being relatively new, resulting in limited research in these new areas with which to develop a foundation for the study. I based much of the conceptual foundations of this study on hope theory (Snyder, 2000; Snyder & Lopez, 2007), positive psychology (Seligman, 2002; Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000), strengths-based leadership (Buckingham & Clifton, 2001), and various executive coaching references discussed in Chapter 2.

The study took place in environments where support for development existed. Each participant expressed support from their organization, their managers, their peers, and their staff. It may be interesting to conduct a study where there was less support for development to understand whether the same favorable outcomes and favorable coaching experiences would occur.

I have an interest in executive coaching and positive psychology. As a result, I acknowledge a bias for positive psychology and a focus on strengths versus weaknesses in people. I am aware of this potential bias and used member checking and epoche bracketing to ensure I captured the interview data accurately. To ensure objectiveness in coding, I tested my coding using an expert validator to calibrate the coding methodology and to review my coding for bias. The results from this study did not support my

bracketed bias, and I reported the results as an unbiased observer of the lived experience of the coachees. Another limitation may be that coaching is intuitively seen as useful by its very nature so there could be confirmation bias.

### **Recommendations**

I focused this phenomenological study on exploring the lived experiences of executives who were coached, and their perceived behavioral changes from the experience. In this study, I explored the role hope theory and its components: goals setting, agency or motivation, and pathways or action plans, play in the executive's experience. Semistructured interviews of a purposive sample with 20 participants who had been coached for a minimum of 6 months provided data for the study. I reached data saturation as the data became repetitive. What I found was that all participants had the three components of hope theory, except one participant, who was lacking in agency. The individual lacking agency experienced unfavorable changes in perceived behavior. Coaching approach had a potential influence with changes in resiliency. However, the coaching approach had little effect on changes in confidence, motivation, and optimism. The type of coaching approach did not influence the perceived behavior change, as long as the approach was the coachee's preferred approach. Agency, or motivation, had an influence on the perceived experience of an increase in motivation. Most of the participants were satisfied with their executive coaching experience.

As a result of this study, I recommend utilization of all components of hope theory in any executive coaching experience. Coaches should assist and guide the executive in the setting of goals, developing multiple pathways or action plans to achieve



those goals, and work to provide an environment that supports motivation or agency to achieve the goals. I recommend the coach determine the preferred approach of the coachee for the coaching approach, after introducing the coachee to the various approaches of strengths-based, weakness-based, and mixed-based. However, there are limitations to my study.

Although this is a qualitative study, measurement instruments for further research using quantitative approaches for measuring motivation are available. There are several measurement instruments for motivation. These include the Academic Motivation Scale, Leisure Motivation Scale, Elderly Motivation Scale, the Political Motivation Scale, the Sport Motivation Scale, and the Motivation for Couple Relationship Scale. For this study, further study could be in exploring the self-reported perception of the participant with regards to motivation, and the perceived changes of motivation, optimism, confidence, and resilience of the people who interact with the executive. Studies of the interacted individuals such as peers, subordinates, superiors, friends, and family members can provide for triangulation and more insights into the behavioral changes experienced by the leader. Also, performance data for key areas of responsibility of the executive can also add to the conclusions. Conducting a quantitative study or mixed methodology study involving qualitative and quantitative methodological approaches of the people the coachee's interact with to determine their perceptions of behavior changes would provide more data for analysis regarding the effectiveness of hope theory and the approaches used for coaching. A quantitative aspect of this study would allow for correlation analysis or

analysis of variance (ANOVA) of the various coaching approaches and the behavioral results.

Another recommended study would be to expand the participant pool to include several executives who have been coached using a weakness-based approach, a strengths-based approach, and a mixed approach. This expanded participant pool would provide more data for each approach, leading to more generalization of the results and stronger conclusions. Although I did not see gender differences in the results of this study, adding more diversity to the participant population would provide insights into any cultural or race influences. In this study, my participants were all Caucasian, except for one African-American, and all were from the United States. Most were from the Southeast United States.

Finally, in this study, only one of the 20 participants were missing a component of hope theory, leading to unfavorable behavioral change results and supporting the conclusions of Snyder (2000a, 2000b), who reported on the importance of each component of hope theory and their interaction being necessary for favorable results. A further study that expands the participant pool to include executives who have not had any of the components of hope theory, or lack a complete set of the components of goals, pathways, and agency can provide a richer set of data for analysis and conclusions.

### **Implications**

The implications of my study apply to the field of executive coaching in all areas where leadership is critical to the achievement of goals and objectives. This application includes for-profit, nonprofit, private industry, governmental entities, educational

organizations, medical organizations, volunteer organizations, and more. In the following, I review the impact of executive coaching on positive behavioral in how it favorably affects practitioners, theory, and social change.

### **Significance in Practice**

Understanding the approaches for executive coaching using positive psychology focuses such as strength-based coaching and hope theory on the behavior and perceptions of coached leaders may provide insight, direction, and guidance for executive coaches, leaders, and organizations on practices that lead to changes in leader self-efficacy, optimism, motivation, and resiliency. As indicated in Chapter 2, executive coaching and positive psychology are relatively new fields that have a need for further research to understand better the approaches that are effective in executive coaching and the value of positive psychology in effecting improvements in executive self-efficacy, motivation, optimism, resiliency, and performance. In Chapter 2, literature reviews have indicated the effectiveness of a strength-based focus and hope theory on these behavior areas and performance. For example, Kiselica and Englar-Carlson (2010) asserted that individuals could become more confident when they become aware of their strengths and have hope; Frederickson (2001) showed that long-lasting effects of positive emotions might result in increased resiliency, hope, and a reduction in lingering negative emotions in an individual. The findings may apply to all people; however, I expect that the results will be specifically applicable to leaders, coaches, organizations, and leadership development theory as it relates to the coaching process and behavior changes.

The results of this study may be a guide to areas for potential training and development of coaches. The study of the application of hope theory in the coaching setting to improve self-efficacy, optimism, motivation, and resiliency in the executive contributes to the knowledge in the field of executive coaching in how these coaching skills influence executive behavior and executive performance. Further, this executive coaching guidance may lead to improvements in leader effectiveness.

### **Significance in Theory**

This research is significant to theory because it fills the gap in the literature regarding executive coaching and leadership development regarding approaches to coaching that can improve leader performance and behaviors. This includes the perceptions of leaders in behaviors such as self-efficacy, optimism, motivation, and resiliency. In this study, I researched the interaction of two fields of study, executive coaching and positive psychology, as they impact the personal development of executives and it contributes to the understanding of coaching as an approach to leadership development.

This qualitative phenomenological study adds to the management and psychology literature on hope theory and executive coaching. The study demonstrated the potential influence in perceived behavioral change with regards to resilience based on the coaching approach utilized. It also showed the potential influence on perceived behavioral changes in confidence, resiliency, optimism, and motivation through the use of hope theory in coaching, and of the importance of each component of hope theory of goals, agency, and pathways. Insights from this study aids executives, executive coaches, and executive

coach certifying bodies in better understanding executives' perceptions of long-term behavioral change experienced due to these approaches to executive coaching. Also, this qualitative phenomenological study provides insights into the role that the positive psychology, hope theory, and a strengths-based focused coaching approach can provide in this area (Hodlin, 2014).

### **Significance to Social Change**

This research study has significance to positive social change as it is focused on developing a better understanding of the use of positive psychology theories, such as hope theory, on the coaching of executives and leaders. As outlined in Chapter 2, research on hope theory, positive psychology, positive organizational behavior, and appreciative inquiry have demonstrated results indicating increased well-being, self-efficacy, and happiness in individuals but they lack the contextual understanding of how changes are perceived by the coached individuals. Also, the research furthers the knowledge of a strengths-based focus and its influence on executive coaching. Research has shown a ripple effect on others when a leader is focused on their strengths and the strengths of others. This research result is seen in all fields, including the humanities. A better understanding of leadership development approaches, such as coaching, may lead to leadership with more self-efficacy, optimism, motivation, and resiliency in fulfilling visions, missions, and goals with regards to solving social and humanitarian global issues. Ultimately, people's experience of work is greatly influenced by the relationship they have with their leaders, so determining the effectiveness of this form of coaching will have implications for the broader context of employee engagement at work.

Leaders may be engaged in leading nonprofit organizations or social change initiatives, making this study beneficial for social change. Social change requires leadership to drive the change. This leadership may be in the form of a grass-roots social movement, or through non-profit activity. This study can contribute to positive social change by identifying ways to improve the coaching of leaders and improve leader behavioral changes in confidence, resilience, optimism, and motivation. As coaches apply this knowledge to coaching leaders in the non-profit area, the benefits from the coaching approaches and the use of hope theory may benefit those who are leading missions to improve social areas and enable good to take over the world. Improvements in resilience, as I demonstrated through this study from the coaching focus on strengths or a mix of strengths and weaknesses may assist leaders in the nonprofit organizations persevere through the challenges they experience with meeting expenses, achieving their missions, and continuing to drive donations to their cause.

### **Conclusions**

In this study, I focused on the lived experience of executive coaching from the perspective of the coachee. The participants consisted of executives and explored their coaching approach and their perceived behavior change experiences. The findings of this study showed a phenomenological account of the experiences of 20 executives who received executive coaching. Every participant in the study expressed satisfaction with the coaching experience and that they would recommend it to others. Most of the participants were appreciative that their organizations supported their coaching experience. The study revealed that the approach to coaching had an influence on

perceived experiences in resiliency, but not in the areas of confidence, optimism, and motivation. A weakness-based coaching approach resulted in participant experiences of decreased confidence, while a strengths-based approach or a mixed approach resulted in experiencing increases in resiliency.

The study also revealed that when the hope theory components of goals, pathways, and agency were present, the results were favorable regarding behavioral change experiences in confidence, resiliency, optimism, and motivation. Where a component of hope theory was missing, the coaching experience was not as well received and the perceived behavioral change experiences were unfavorable. The missing component in this study was agency in the case of one participant. A combination of a weakness-based approach and a missing component of hope theory resulted in perceptions of decreased confidence, optimism, and motivation- and no change in resiliency.

My analysis leads me to conclude that the components of hope theory are important to have in a coaching experience. Goal setting, the establishment of action plans or pathways, and agency or motivation leads to favorable experiences. Missing any of these components can lead to a less favorable experience. The approach used, whether it is a strengths-based, weakness-based, or both, is not as influential in the results. What is most important regarding the approach is that it is one that is favored by the participant. If the participant is not the decision maker regarding the approach, it could affect their motivation or agency, which can result in the full aspects of hope theory not being involved in the coaching experience.

As shown in previous chapters, executive coaching is a relatively new and growing field, which lacks regulation. It is important that we understand the approaches that achieve the desired results in behavioral changes and performance to ensure we attain the benefits. The recommendations presented in this study are presented to further the understanding and study of executive coaching and the approaches that are most effective in achieving desired results.



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## Appendix A: Interview Questions

### Coaching Lived Experience Questions

- A. Questions Related to the Lived Experiences of the Coaching Experience
1. Describe your situation prior to engaging in coaching. What are the events that led to your engaging in a coaching process?
  2. Describe your experience with coaching in terms of the coaching process.
  3. What was the approach used by your coach and how you felt about it?
  4. What was your coaching experience with regards to the setting of objectives?
  5. What were your experiences with regards to motivation in achieving your goals and taking action to achieve them.
  6. What were your experiences with regards to perceived behavior changes from your coaching experience?

## Appendix B: PhD Expert Confidentiality Agreement

CONFIDENTIALITY AGREEMENT

Name of Signer:



During the course of my activity in coding data for this research: A Phenomenological Exploration of Hope Theory in Executive Coaching from the Executive's Perspective, I will have access to transcript information, which is confidential and should not be disclosed. I acknowledge that the information must remain confidential, and that improper disclosure of confidential information can be damaging to the participant.

***By signing this Confidentiality Agreement I acknowledge and agree that:***

1. I will not disclose or discuss any confidential information with others, including friends or family.
2. I will not in any way divulge, copy, release, sell, loan, alter or destroy any confidential information except as properly authorized.
3. I will not discuss confidential information where others can overhear the conversation. I understand that it is not acceptable to discuss confidential information even if the participant's name is not used.
4. I will not make any unauthorized transmissions, inquiries, modification or purging of confidential information.
5. I agree that my obligations under this agreement will continue after termination of the job that I will perform.
6. I understand that violation of this agreement will have legal implications.
7. I will only access or use systems or devices I'm officially authorized to access and I will not demonstrate the operation or function of systems or devices to unauthorized individuals.

***Signing this document, I acknowledge that I have read the agreement and I agree to comply with all the terms and conditions stated above.***

Signature:



Date:

7/18/17

### Appendix C: LinkedIn Study Invitation for Coach Groups

My name is Steve Hodlin, and I am a doctoral student at Walden University. I am conducting a study for my dissertation that requires coached executives as participants. The topic of my dissertation is to explore the experiences of coached executives regarding the coaching experience. The purpose of the study is to understand the lived experiences of coached executives and to understand the perceived behavioral changes resulting from the coaching, from the perspective of the coached executive.

The participants I require for the study are coached executives. My primary requirement for the study is that they would be coached using positive psychology approaches with a focus on their strengths. If your clients have experienced coaching for a minimum of 6 months, from a positive psychology perspective that has focused on their strengths, and the coaching has involved goal setting and the development of paths to achieve those goals, they would be an ideal participant. If you are interested in forwarding an invitation letter regarding my study, which I drafted, to your clients on my behalf, please contact me at (XXX) XXX-XXXX or at XXXXXXXX and I will provide you with the invitation of my study to forward to your clients. Participation is voluntary. I would be grateful for your assistance in forwarding my study information to your clients, who would contact me directly if interested in participating.

## Appendix D: Informed Consent Form

### CONSENT FORM

You are invited to take part in a research study of executives who have participated in executive coaching. The researcher is inviting executives who have experienced coaching for a minimum of 6 months, coaching from a positive psychology approach that has focused on their strengths, and coaching that has involved goal setting and the development of paths to achieve the goals to be a participant in the study. This form is part of a process called “informed consent” to allow you to understand this study before deciding whether to take part.

This study is being conducted by a researcher named Steven Hodlin, who is a doctoral student at Walden University.

#### **Background Information:**

The purpose of this study is to understand the lived experiences of coached executives and to understand the perceived behavioral changes resulting from the coaching, from the perspective of the coached executive. Upon completion of the study, you will be provided with a summary of the study results. There are no gifts, compensation, or reimbursement associated with this study.

#### **Procedures:**

If you agree to be in this study, you will be asked to:

- Participate in three separate one-hour Skype or in-person audio recorded interviews to answer a series of questions. The first interview will explore what led the participant to engage in executive coaching. The second interview will discuss the coaching experience. The third interview will explore the participant’s experience regarding behavioral changes resulting from the coaching.
- After the interviews, the transcripts of your interviews will be forwarded to you via email, so you can ensure I interpreted your responses to the questions accurately and as you intended. This should take approximately an hour. Each interview is expected to last no more than one hour.
- The interviews will be conducted over three separate one-hour sessions.

Here are some sample questions:

- Describe your professional situation prior to engaging in coaching.
- What are the events that led to your engaging in a coaching process?
- How has being coached been received by your boss, peers, subordinates?
- What differences in your behavior have they noticed? How do you know?
- How do you overcome barriers to the achievement of your goals?
- How has your resilience in the face of obstacles and challenges changed due to the coaching? In what ways?
- What changes in motivation, if any, have occurred due to the coaching you have received?

(Appendix continued)



## Appendix D: Informed Consent Form

- Do you focus more on your strengths or weaknesses in your behavior change from coaching?

### Voluntary Nature of the Study:

Participation in this study is voluntary. Only yourself and the researcher will know whether you decided to participate or not; even your coach will not know whether or not you participated. No one will treat you differently if you decide not to be in the study. If you decide to join the study now, you can still change your mind later. You may stop at any time without any repercussions.

### Risks and Benefits of Being in the Study:

Being in this type of study involves some risk of the minor discomforts that can be encountered in daily life, such as the time it will take to participate in the interview. Being in this study would not pose risk to your safety or wellbeing.

Benefits of the study are to add to the knowledge of effective coaching approaches leading to an understanding of the behavioral changes experienced by coached executives, and the results on their performance, and possibly improve the coaching experiences of participants or others in the future.

### Privacy:

Any information you provide will be kept confidential. The researcher will not use your personal information for any purposes outside of this research project. Also, the researcher will not include your name or anything else that could identify you in the study reports. Data will be kept secure by loading the data into a computer with password protection, with only the researcher knowing the password. The backup data will be stored in a memory device separate from a computer, with the device stored in a locked safe. Data will be kept for a period of 5 years, as required by the university.

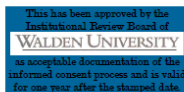
### Contacts and Questions:

You may ask any questions you have now. Or if you have questions later, you may contact the researcher via telephone at (978) 771-1091 or email at [steven.hodlin@waldenu.edu](mailto:steven.hodlin@waldenu.edu). If you want to talk privately about your rights as a participant, you can call Dr. Leilani Endicott. She is the Walden University representative who can discuss this with you. Her phone number is 612-312-1210. Walden University's approval number for this study is **07-06-16-0259363** and it expires on **July 5, 2017**.

Please print or save this consent form for your records.

### Statement of Consent:

I have read the above information and I feel I understand the study well enough to make a decision about my involvement. By replying to this email with the words, "I consent" I understand that I am agreeing to the terms described above.



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Appendix E: Certificate of Completion of Training Course on “Protecting Human  
Research Participants”



## Appendix F: Participant Audit Trail

Participant	Consent Forwarded	Consent Received	Interview	Transcript Created	Member Check begun	Member Check Approved
Participant 1	10/17/2016	10/17/2016	10/20/2016	12/12/2020	4/17/2017	4/17/2017
Participant 2	10/16/2016	1/3/2017	1/4/2017	1/4/2017	1/7/2017	1/10/2017
Participant 3	10/16/2016	10/17/2016	10/18/2016	11/8/2016	11/8/2016	11/8/2016
Participant 4	10/17/2016	10/19/2016	10/19/2016	11/20/2016	11/20/2016	4/17/2017
Participant 5	10/16/2016	10/17/2016	12/20/2016	12/27/2016	4/17/2017	4/17/2017
Participant 6	10/16/2016	10/17/2016	1/19/2017	1/22/2017	1/22/2017	1/25/2017
Participant 7	9/4/2016	9/14/2016	11/4/2016	12/28/2016	12/28/2016	4/5/2017
Participant 8	10/16/2017	10/17/2016	1/26/2017	1/27/2017	1/28/2017	2/13/2017
Participant 9	10/19/2016	10/20/2016	11/4/2016	11/30/2016	11/30/2016	4/4/2017
Participant 10	10/16/2016	10/17/2015	11/15/2016	12/29/2016	12/29/2016	4/4/2017
Participant 11	10/17/2016	10/17/2016	1/25/2017	1/27/2017	1/28/2017	2/13/2017
Participant 12	10/16/2016	2/25/2017	2/24/2017	2/25/2017	2/27/2017	2/27/2017
Participant 13	10/16/2016	10/20/2016	12/6/2016	12/29/2016	12/29/2016	1/4/2017
Participant 14	10/17/2016	10/17/2016	11/8/2016	12/26/2016	12/26/2016	12/28/2016
Participant 15	10/16/2016	10/20/2016	11/21/2016	12/31/2016	1/3/2017	4/19/2017
Participant 16	10/17/2016	10/17/2016	10/21/2016	11/21/2016	11/21/2016	11/21/2016
Participant 17	10/16/2016	10/24/2016	1/25/2017	2/29/17	2/29/17	4/18/2017
Participant 18	10/16/2016	10/18/2016	10/21/2016	1/16/2017	1/16/2016	3/13/2017
Participant 19	10/17/2016	11/22/2016	1/10/2017	1/11/2017	1/23/2017	1/27/2017
Participant 20	2/17/2017	2/24/2017	2/24/2017	2/24/2017	2/25/2017	3/13/2017

### Appendix G: Mind Map of Executive Coaching

