



U-COACH

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U-COACH Methodological Framework

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The aim of this document is to present the methodological framework to be used in the U-COACH project. The research strategy or the approach to be taken in the U-COACH project is introduced. This comprises a four stage research methodology. The key stages in the methodology include:

- Understand the area: Here the background and context of the research to be undertaken is discussed. The concept of executive coaching is defined and key issues central to the project are discussed. Emphasis is placed on the softer side of executive coaching with regard to Small to Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs) where possible.
- Define the scope: This section describe the aims and objectives of the research as well as the target audience.
- Develop research tools. A brief questionnaire is created based on findings from a literature survey. A template to help generate regional reports form all partners is also presented.
- Test tools. This section presents how the research tools were evaluated and verified.

Each of these stages is presented in more detail in this document.

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1 INTRODUCTION

Research strategy refers to the particular approach chosen by the researcher to undertake research. Following on from this, specific research designs and data collection methods can be developed. Such research methods are determined not only by the type of research to be investigated but also by the required outcome. In this case, the U-COACH project consortium must attempt to better understand the nature of executive coaching initiatives in European small to medium enterprises (SMEs). Specifically they must attempt to;

- identify the level of awareness and understanding of executive coaching;
- ascertain the attitudes towards executive coaching;
- understand why SME executives might employ an executive coach;
- assess the perceived benefits of executive coaching;
- determine potential barriers to using executive coaches;
- identify whether there is a need, or appetite, for specific training programmes in the area

By following a structured approach to the research, the project team increases the likelihood of success. If an established methodology in place from the outset the data collection and analysis can happen quickly and predictably. The goal of the research methodology is to identify and integrate the most valuable and successful ways to define, target and capture the relevant information required. It ensures that the project team is focused on what it needs to deliver. The research methodology used in the U-COACH project synthesises findings from the literature and brings together a number of support tools. It comprises of four key stages: (a) understand the area; (b) define the scope; (c) develop research tools and finally (d) test tools. Each of these stages is discussed in more detail below.

2 UNDERSTAND THE AREA

2.1 Background and Definitions

Natalie & Diamante (2005) trace the origins of executive coaching back to the 1980's where a financial planner from Seattle, called Thomas J., first offered life planning to high-potential executives. This led to the foundation of Coach University in 1992 which provided a training programme for professionals in the area. Since then the profession of executive coaching has grown to international proportions.

Executive coaching can be defined as a process that is actively performed within a limited time frame in order to develop specific competencies or problem solving skills (Agarwal, Angst & Magni, 2009). The authors point out that the process of executive coaching is further defined by the relationship between an internal or external consultant who supports the executive to become more self-aware through the use of action learning methods.

The role of the coach is to help an individual to set and create goals and action plans whilst holding the individual accountable for these actions. In this way the coach keeps the 'coachee' on track (Riddle, Zan & Kirmycz, 2009). Coaching is an opportunity for self-development and is useful for leaders who may wish to:

- Improve confidence and assertiveness
- Optimise energy & maintain life balance
- Develop a new skill/approach to prepare for a role change
- Improve interpersonal and communications skills
- Identify goals and values
- Enhance the use of experience and emotional intelligence (Reeves, 2006).

It is important to note that executive coaching differs significantly from mentoring (Reeves, 2006). Whilst both aim to develop executive competencies by using one-on-one relationships, a mentor tends to be a more experienced, senior to the mentee within an organisation. Furthermore, mentor feedback tends to be directive and relies on storytelling, demonstration and advice.

As Reeves points out, the executive coach is quite different from a mentor because the coach does not necessarily have functional experience in the same company or industry as the executive. Rather the coach fulfils an essential task in creating a confidential, safe environment for improvement and awareness and assesses the professional skills of the executive in order to provide a platform for the executive grow and develop their performance.

2.2. Observations from Literature Review

In an investigation of very recent literature on the subject of executive coaching, most authors revealed a lack of large amounts of empirical evidence linking the perceived benefits of executive coaching with tangible outcomes to company bottom line. Extensive searching did reveal a case study, described herein, that will be of particular interest to the SME sector since it draws a direct line between investment in coaching and increases in sales revenue.

Authors on the subject do agree that the concept of coaching has become a highly effective tool for achieving positive impact on company performance. One author suggests that the rush toward coaching can be compared with the gold rushes of the 19th century (Riddle, Zan & Kirmycz, 2009).

One astute observation is that the higher executives climb the corporate ladder, the less immediate feedback is available to them and in this situation, coaching provides the essential objective sounding board that managers need (Reeves, 2006).

That said, current researchers agree that the practice of executive coaching is still in its infancy (Natalie & Diamante, 2005) and whilst the market is mature enough to enable a choice of providers (Riddle, Zan & Kirmycz, 2009), the service remains ill defined (Natalie & Diamante, 2005) and there is little agreement on the development of standards and the assessment of coaching outcomes (Riddle, Zan & Kirmycz, 2009).

Furthermore the ethical responsibility of the coach has been highlighted as problematic (Natalie & Diamante, 2005). Communication between the coach, executive and sponsoring firm causes a degree of ethical tension for executive coaches themselves. The coaching intervention may have been sought by the sponsoring firm or the executive, however the disclosure of issues, insights and accountability for ongoing change ought to remain confidential between coach and executive. This may be difficult to balance if the sponsoring firm requires more input or feedback than the coaching relationship can ethically provide.

Finally, much literature centres on finding the right coach and how to approach this. Given the huge rush toward coaching that has been identified, authors agree that the question facing organisations is how to choose the right person for the job (Bono et al 2009).

Suggested key selection criteria for coaches are (Riddle, Zan & Kirmycz, 2009):

- Coaching credentials
- Educational and professional histories
- References from other clients
- Ongoing arrangements for supervision and accountability
- Ability of coach to demonstrate competence to meet & fulfil the needs of the coaching intervention

2.3 Rationale for engaging Executive Coaches

The literature review has revealed a wide variety of reasons for engaging the services of an executive coach that stem from either a personal or organisational need for change.

Traditionally, coaching is frequently seen as an investment by the company in driving forward the performance of already high-performers (Reeves, 2006). In this regard, it is believed that the intervention will have a positive effect on the company's bottom line by increasing the effectiveness of the executive. Reeves points out three profiles of executives that might particularly benefit from coaching and a synthesis is provided in Table 1 below.

Table 1: Profiles of executives who might benefit most from executive coaching adapted from Reeves, 2006

| Executive Profile | Characteristics |
|-----------------------|---|
| The Financial Whiz | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More well rounded today than historically • More of a business partner on management team • Needs a broader view of company's business environment • Role is not just about technical skill • Financial execs also need good communications skills in order to share insights based on complex information |
| High-Energy Executive | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Exceptionally high energy • True asset to the company but very high speeds can cause detriment to the organisation • Can distract/bother colleagues • Can be coached to manage energy • Result is less overbearing and intimidating • More effective without losing individuality |
| Poor communicator | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Not a good public speaker • Career performance is limited by his/her inability to communicate orally or in writing • Poor writing is one thing, but oral communications is more noticeable and more limiting • Coach can use tools like audio/video recording • Coaching helps individual be focussed, concise and impactful when communicating |

Natalie & Diamante (2005) outline that executive coaches are engaged for varying reasons. For example a newly appointed executive may need further development in order to meet the requirements of their new role. Executives also use coaching to assist them manage high stress levels and develop interpersonal relationships. Finally, from an organisational perspective coaches can be engaged to improve overall business performance.

2.4 Benefits of Executive Coaching

The process of executive coaching is often embarked upon for a specific purpose or in order to achieve a set of goals. Furthermore, the process of executive coaching is grounded in the relationship between the executive and their organisation. In this regard, the literature has revealed a wide range of benefits that are associated with both personal and organisational outcomes. Table 2 below has categorised a synthesis of benefits into the categories of 'personal' and 'organisational'.

Table 2: Benefits of executive coaching revealed in literature in two main categories

| Personal Benefits | Organisational Benefits | Source |
|--|---|------------------------------------|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Achievement of personal / professional goals • Promotions • Greater effectiveness through self knowledge • Ability to make quick and better decisions • Higher level of openness • Avoiding defensive behaviour • Creating powerful, effective relationships | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sales increase • Client retention increase • Higher level of employee satisfaction • Productivity increase • Enhancement of organisational and communication effectiveness • Success of team collaboration • Profitability increase • Transformation of individuals and teams • Ability to initiate and lead necessary cultural change • Ability to move on to greater & more complex responsibilities | <p>Natalie & Diamante 2005</p> |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop an identifiable leadership style • Create powerful & effective relationships • Boost effectiveness • Experience greater satisfaction both professionally and personally | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manage complex organisational change more effectively and with greater confidence • Identify stakeholder issues earlier, minimising impact on the organisation • Inspire and empower higher performance from others • Assert authority properly | <p>Reeves, 2006</p> |

Importantly, the literature reveals that executive coaching is a tool that is used to improve business performance and not aimed at personal development per se, although the outcomes of executive coaching do yield benefits in terms of personal growth and self-awareness.

2.5 The Process of Executive Coaching

Whilst a myriad of certification bodies each advocate their own methodology, Riddle, Zan & Kirmycz (2009) have identified that there are five key stages in common amongst all.

1. **Initial Phase:** This phase is characterised by identifying the need for coaching and establishing the coaching relationship whilst building relationships with key stakeholders. Natalie & Diamante (2005) note that openness and full disclosure demonstrate a best-practice approach to this phase and additionally writing a roadmap can create a strong alliance between coach and 'coachee'.
2. **Contracting Phase:** This phase creates a binding agreement on the expectations, needs and wants, processes and boundaries and any ethical commitments the coach might have in relation to the 'coachee' and the organisation. Natalie & Diamante (2005) note that best practice steps in this phase should define a written contract

that includes the terms of service provision defined by length, amount and medium in addition to confidentiality and a statement of fees to be charged.

3. **Assessment & Data Gathering Phase:** The objective here is to determine areas for development and the underlying causes of the need for development. The coach collects data on the history, performance and challenges of the executive using methodologies that can include interviews, personality and background research and also direct observation.
4. **Development Planning Phase:** In this phase the coach and executive jointly identify and commit to development activities and set specific goals that the executive will be accountable for. The coach's role is to help the executive to draw their own insights rather than being a mentor.
5. **Development and Change Phase:** This phase marks the implementation of the executives agreed goals. The coach helps the executive stay on track and overcome any barriers they encounter. Here Natalie & Diamante (2005) advocate that the documentation of behaviours and thoughts that require modification can act as a 'radar' for the executive. This document could perhaps include cues for alternative approaches that will enable more positive growth than before.

2.6 Tools and Techniques for Effective Coaching

Coaching is based upon an assumption that people have an innate capacity to grow and develop where there is a focus on mutually agreed goals and an understanding that the process is collaborative (Beswess-Dener, 2009). Using this assumption, Bono et al (2009) outline that there are several approaches to executive coaching:

- behaviour modification
- cognitive behavioural
- process/facilitation oriented
- goal setting
- neurolinguistic programming
- psychoanalytic/psychodynamic
- skill training.

Wasylyshyn (2003) demonstrates that the indicators of successful coaching are measured by the sustainability of the outcomes and behaviour changes brought about, any increase in self-awareness and understanding and correspondingly any measured increases in effective leadership. However in order to measure such indicators a range of tools must be employed by the coach.

Beswess-Dener (2009) reveals that most coaches are trained to use tools such as active listening and open-ended questions in addition to a set of encouragement tools and a framework for accountability. Bono et al (2009) reveal that coaches employ a wide range of assessment tools in order to benchmark and assess the impact of their intervention in terms of quality and quantity. Executive coaches may:

- Arrange interviews with the client, their supervisor, peers and family members to gain a 360 degree picture.
- Employ ability and/or aptitude tests to quantify certain skills or abilities
- Generate an inventory of interests, hobbies and activities for the client

- Employ a tool called the Personality inventory, which details strengths, weaknesses, likes and dislikes
- Use multi-source ratings which is a tool to gauge management/leadership behaviours
- Engage in role-playing
- Arrange access to performance data via the sponsoring company

In a quantitative study of 87 executives who had been coached in the past, Wasylyshyn (2003) reveals that critical success factors the frequency of contact between coach and executive and the quality of the face to face element of their interaction. The same study revealed that the top three coaching tools that are most in favour with executives are:

- Face to face sessions
- 360 degree feedback and
- Personal relationship with the coach

2.7 Case Study: Advantage Valley Entrepreneurial Development System

A recent case study undertaken in the USA by Kutzshanova, Lyons & Lichtenstein in 2009 highlights the potential of executive coaching for the SME sector. The authors illustrate the case of the Advantage Valley Entrepreneurial Development System (EDS) which used a skill development approach to coaching entrepreneurs and small business owners.

The Advantage Valley EDS accepts that managers in the SME sector often play numerous roles in the business and can develop differing skills that reflect the path of the business and their role within it. As such this case study refers to 'entrepreneurship coaching' as opposed to executive coaching since it focuses on developing the SME manager/executive as opposed to the traditional application of executive coaching in a multi-national environment.

Seventeen entrepreneurs were accepted to the programme in the hope of developing their competencies across four key categories; technical, managerial, entrepreneurial and personal skills. These skills were initially graded using a system similar to the American Baseball scheme where a Rookie, A, AA, AAA and Major League was allocated as a benchmark for moving forward with development goals.

Most notably, for the SME sector, the case study resulted in tangible benefits resulting from the coaching interventions. Whilst previously, literature revealed that the perceived benefits of coaching were not backed up by significant empirical evidence, the findings of the Advantage Valley EDS were much more concrete.

Over the course of the 38 month programme, every US\$ invested yielded US\$33 in sales revenue. Furthermore, 49 new jobs were created by the 17 SMEs involved in the programme which provides a very tangible reward to engaging in coaching. Most notably, the findings of this case study unequivocally demonstrated that increased skill levels across the four categories outlined above yield tangible results for the business. For example median sales revenue for an AA rated entrepreneur was 6.5 times greater than an A rating. Similarly an A yielded 10.7 times the median sales revenue than a Rookie.

The case study highlights that SMEs may need to discuss different topics with their coach than the traditional large multinational executive profile. The focus here was more on routine business processes and general business development problems such as; achieving positive cash flow, the hiring process or delegation skills.

The coaches who participated described their role as that of:

- Being a sounding board for ideas and discussion
- Playing devils advocate and challenging the thinking of SME owners
- Holding participants accountable for goals and actions
- Growing them in areas they have acknowledged they are weak in

The entrepreneurs acknowledged the important role of coaches in overcoming weaknesses and obstacles during the programme and saw the main benefits as:

- Keeping the high-level goals moving forward since it is so easy to get bogged down in the day-to-day running of the business
- Thinking about the business in a strategic way, for example one problem discussed with a coach centred on a legal issue which the coach pointed out was as a result of the lack of HR processes and procedures
- Helping the entrepreneurs to understand the difference between leading and managing the business and keeping their focus on the company vision

2.8 Implications for the SME

Whilst it has been noted that many private and public organisations have sprung up to aid entrepreneurs in the development of their business (Kutzshanova, Lyons & Lichtenstein, 2009), questions regarding its efficacy have emerged. The approach of these agencies is to hand off pre-defined information in short-term transactions which may have no lasting imprint on business growth. For the SME, the sustainable outcomes demonstrated by (Wasylyshyn, 2003), where over half coaches rated the long term impact as a 6-8 out of 10 and over one third rated a 9-10 out of 10, illustrate that coaching could provide a more holistic answer to business development.

Agarval, Angst & Magni (2009) point out that an evolution in organisational design is underway where a key characteristic is the extensive use of coaching to provide performance feedback for managers and for teams. SME's possess the agility to incorporate and leverage this feedback far more swiftly than the large multinational and this may be just one area where the SME can particularly benefit from coaching services.

The synthesis of research outlined in this document has revealed some perceived benefits and some tangible benefits that may also be of great assistance in driving growth and performance for the SME. In addition to the 'soft' personal and organisational benefits revealed by literature, the case study of Advantage Valley EDS clearly link improvements in sales revenue with an investment in executive coaching.

Agarval, Angst & Magni, (2009) outline that individual initiative and entrepreneurship are becoming more important than the traditional managerial skill set, even in the multinational setting. Kutzshanova, Lyons & Lichtenstein (2009) point out that entrepreneurs actively create their knowledge by personally engaging in expanding their expertise and skills. When coupled with the importance of SME's for economic growth, it would appear that SME's stand to benefit far more from the coaching process than in the traditional application setting of the executive in a multinational due to the ways in which the benefits of coaching are applied.

Finally, a key question for SME's who would like to invest in executive coaching services is how to ensure that value for money is achieved. Whilst the literature has revealed that this is a key question for any large or small organisation, it is particularly important for SME's to be aware of the skills required for good coaches. Riddle, Zan & Kirmycz (2009)

point out that across varying worldwide certification bodies there are several key skills in common:

- High ethics & integrity
- Interpersonal sensitivity
- Lifelong learning & self development
- Self-confidence
- Interest in helping & problem solving

The authors further point out that the coach's ability to establish a rapport may be one of the most significant factors in effective coaching. The approach to finding and retaining the best coach herein will be of assistance in the SME sector.

2.9 Concluding Remarks

Through this exploration of literature on executive coaching, a picture of an emerging and impactful service has been revealed, one which can drive improvements to the company bottom line and achieve increases in revenue and profit.

There is little doubt that the SME sector has been stymied by the recent economic crisis and now face many challenges and obstacles if growth, or even survival, is the goal. Executive coaching may provide guidance, structure and an all important 'sounding board' for the creative and innovative solutions that will be needed in the months and years ahead as SME owners, managers and executives steer a course toward recovery.

3 DEFINE THE SCOPE

This stage of the methodology ensures that the U-COACH project team has a clear understanding of what the project aims to do and who it is targeting. The scope of the study is primarily defined by mutual consensus at the kick off meeting. The scope of the U-COACH study is as follows:

Table 3: Scope of the U-COACH project

| Category | Description |
|------------------------|---|
| Goal | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To improve awareness of executive coaching in European SMEs To make executive coaching common practice in European SMEs To optimise knowledge, competencies and skills relating to executive coaching in European SMEs To help owner managers and middle managers of European SMEs to become more empowered and better positioned To help European SMEs to become more efficient, effective, productive and competitive |
| Research aim | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> To identify the level of awareness and understanding of executive coaching in a sample of European SMEs To ascertain the attitudes towards executive coaching To determine the reasons why SME executives might employ an executive coach To assess the perceived benefits to executive coaching To determine the potential barriers to using executive coaches To identify whether there is a need for specific support structures (such a training) relating to executive coaching |
| Focus | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> People management / Human side of the company Social systems perspective |
| Enterprise size | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Enterprises employing no more than 250 employees |
| Target audience | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Knowledge intensive organizations from any sector Technology entrepreneurs who need to equip themselves with business acumen Owner managers and middle managers are obliged to lead and motivate teams |
| Approach | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> At least 20 questionnaires per partner |
| Time | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Limited to roughly 15 minutes to complete (taking target population into consideration) |

4 DEVELOP RESEARCH TOOLS

Two tools are developed as part of the Methodological Framework. These are the Executive Coaching Survey and the Regional Report Template. A brief cover letter is also included to help identify our project goals and frame the research.

4.1 Cover Letter

Dear xxx,

We are currently working on a European project in the area of executive coaching for SMEs.

Executive Coaching is a process that helps managers to become more self-aware and to develop specific competencies or problem solving skills.

The role of the executive coach is to create a confidential and safe environment for a manager to improve, grow and optimise their performance.

The goal of our project is to better understand the attitude towards executive coaching in small firms in Europe. We hope to assess the perceived benefits of executive coaching, identify the barriers to using executive coaches and to determine whether there is a need for training programmes in the area.

I would be most grateful if you would help us with our research.

In order to gather some relevant data we would be grateful if you would complete a short survey. This survey should take roughly 10 minutes to complete.

Many thanks for your help and support,

The U-COACH Team

This letter can be revised and adapted by each partner depending on the situation and the individual circumstances.

4.2 Executive Coaching Survey

The principal data collection method for the U-COACH project is the Executive Coaching Survey (see below). The aim of this survey is to;

- ascertain the attitude towards executive coaching in European SMEs;
- assess reasons why SME executives may employ an executive coach;
- identify the perceived benefits to executive coaching
- determine the potential barriers to using executive coaches; and finally
- identify whether there is a need (or appetite) for specific support structures such as training in the area of executive coaching

The survey can be completed by the respondents themselves on a stand alone basis or it can act as a guide for structured interviews. It contains an explicit set of carefully chosen and justified statements. The statements have been formulated from best practice concepts that have been compiled from the literature review. Here respondents are requested to circle the extent to which they agree or disagree with the statements.

The advantages from the projects team's perspective of adopting this approach as a data collection tool include:

- Responses are gathered in a standardised way
- Relatively quick to collect information and easy to use
- Can collected from a large portion of a group
- Can capture observations and contextual data

Respondents are also required to identify what areas they would like to see in a training programme. In order to determine the relative importance they were asked to rank a list of options in order to preference. Respondents are also asked to specify how they would like to consume any potential training. Again a ranking mechanism is used to identify the relative importance of each option. An open ended section is also included to allow respondents provide any additional feedback.

Executive Coaching Survey

| Please circle the extent to which you agree or disagree with these statements where 1 represents strongly agree and 5 represents strongly disagree | | | | | |
|--|-------|---|---|---|---|
| Statement | Score | | | | |
| 1. Our company is interested in continuous improvement | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. I am familiar with the term executive coaching | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. I have worked with an executive coach before | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Strategic planning is an important part of my job | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. I have adequate tools to help me develop effective strategies | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Executive coaches can help to challenge existing thinking | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. Executive coaches can help to identify weaknesses | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. Executive coaches can provide me with timely feedback | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. Executive coaches can help to develop goals and action plans | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. Executive coaches can help to develop skills and competencies | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. Executive coaches can help to improve interpersonal skills | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. Executive coaches can help to improve self awareness | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. Executive coaches can help to change behaviour | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. Investment in coaching can increase sales revenue | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. Executive coaching can have a positive impact on performance | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. It is too hard to find a suitable coach | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. Executive coaches are too expensive | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. I don't have enough time to spend with a coach | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. I don't trust executive coaches | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. It is difficult to assess coaching outcomes | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 21. Leadership skills are important to my organisation | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 22. We have sufficient and appropriate leadership skills and tools | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 23. Effective communication is important to my organisation | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 24. We have sufficient and appropriate communication skills & tools | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 25. Effective time management is an important skill in my job | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 26. We have sufficient and appropriate time management tools | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 27. Personal development is important in our organisation | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 28. We have sufficient and appropriate personal development tools | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 29. Strategic planning is important in our organisation | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 30. We have sufficient and appropriate strategic planning support | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

31. What areas would you like to see included in a training programme? Please rank the list below where 1 is most important, 2 is second most important and 3 is third most important.

- Leadership ()
- Strategic Planning ()
- Communication ()
- Personal Development ()
- Time Management ()
- Other _____ ()

32. What are the most important characteristics of a training programme? Please rank the list below where 1 is most important, 2 is second most important and 3 is third most important.

- easy access to training material ()
- access and exposure to industrial cases ()
- problem based learning and exercises ()
- engaging with fellow participants ()
- best practice tools and checklists ()

33. Any other comments or observations?

Many thanks for your help.

4.3 Regional Report Template

1. Profile of the region

The following issues should be included in this heading:

- Introduction
 - Location of the region/country and main characteristics
 - Demographic aspects
 - Industrial and technological infrastructure
- Economic Analysis
- Social & Cultural Aspects
 - Education
- Political Legal issues
 - Subsidies
 - Taxes

2. Profile of Small to Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs)

The following issues need to be included in this heading:

- Number of SMEs in the region/country
- General description of small enterprises, i.e. characteristics of the companies, e.g. family based, traditional organizational structures, implementation of ICT
- Contribution to the economy and society
- Trends
- Generic challenges facing SMES

3. Preliminary Findings

Please provide here some details about executive coaching in your country/region as well as some preliminary conclusions based upon this report and the field work conducted up to date.

5 TEST TOOLS

The Executive Coaching Survey was piloted and tested via an open workshop to ensure that (a) it was easy to understand; (b) it covered all the correct relevant material; and finally (c) it was applicable to the specific target audience. On receipt of some feedback the scorecard was amended and altered according to the comments received from the workshop participants. It is important to note that during this process every effort was made to keep the final draft of the scorecard short and concise but as rich as possible without losing the ability to capture the maximum amount of critical data. The scorecard was also tested and validated by several researchers at the National University of Ireland, Galway. Table 4 provides a list of the criteria for this assessment.

Table 4: Validation Criteria

| Criteria | Description |
|--|---|
| Effective | Does the methodology work? Does it solve the problems, or produce the products, for which it is intended? |
| Efficient | Are all the tasks and activities prescribed by the methodology strictly necessary? Are all legitimate short cuts exploited? Is there any repetitive or redundant effort? |
| Universally applicable Comprehensive | Does the methodology work in any organization size or culture, or does it assume a particular organization or management style? If there are any restrictions on the range of situations that the methodology can handle, are these restrictions well understood? |
| Reliable Accurate | What risks are involved in using the methodology? How are the risks minimized? |
| Stable Robust Flexible Evolving | Is the methodology tolerant of minor errors and alterations? Does the methodology allow for human imperfection? Does the methodology contain a self-preservation mechanism, to maintain its relevance within the organization? Is the methodology capable of incremental change, to cope with new ideas or technological opportunities? Is the methodology capable of incorporating improvements learned from experience? |
| Simple and easy to learn and use Acceptable to participants | Is the methodology targeted at a well-defined population? Is the methodology based on a coherent set of concepts and techniques? Are all the concepts and techniques strictly necessary? Is it easy to motivate people to adhere to the methodology? |
| Well supported | To what extent are relevant tools, skills and services currently available to support this methodology? |

The validation of the survey and the positive feedback received has indicated that the Executive Coaching Survey is a useful and effective tool for gathering the critical information needed in the project.

6 CONCLUSION

In this uncertain and turbulent economic period, it is necessary to provide managers, administrators and executives of European SMEs with useful and effective management tools. A company's need to continuously improve and grow is a strong motivating factor for the use of Executive Coaches. The U-COACH project aims to provide managers of European SMEs with the appropriate skills and competences through Executive Coaching. This document sets out the methodological framework to help with this process. A survey was developed based on a literature review. The survey was then tested to ensure that it was accurate, relevant and easy to follow. It is hoped that all the partners in the U-COACH project will use this survey in their regions to assess the understanding and perception of Executive Coaching in European SMEs, the perceived benefits and the barriers that impede it. From this analysis we hope to gain an accurate representation of the training needs of European SME's so that specific support structures can be developed and disseminated.

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APPENDIX A RESEARCH TOOLS

Cover letter

Dear xxx,

We are currently working on a European project in the area of executive coaching for SMEs.

Executive Coaching is a process that helps managers to become more self-aware and to develop specific competencies or problem solving skills.

The role of the executive coach is to create a confidential and safe environment for a manager to improve, grow and optimise their performance.

The goal of our project is to better understand the attitude towards executive coaching in small firms in Europe. We hope to assess the perceived benefits of executive coaching, identify the barriers to using executive coaches and to determine whether there is a need for training programmes in the area.

I would be most grateful if you would help us with our research.

In order to gather some relevant data we would be grateful if you would complete a short survey. This survey should take roughly 10 minutes to complete.

Many thanks for your help and support,

The U-COACH Team

Executive Coaching Survey

| Please circle the extent to which you agree or disagree with these statements where 1 represents strongly agree and 5 represents strongly disagree | | | | | |
|--|-------|---|---|---|---|
| Statement | Score | | | | |
| 1. Our company is interested in continuous improvement | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 2. I am familiar with the term executive coaching | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 3. I have worked with an executive coach before | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 4. Strategic planning is an important part of my job | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 5. I have adequate tools to help me develop effective strategies | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 6. Executive coaches can help to challenge existing thinking | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 7. Executive coaches can help to identify weaknesses | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 8. Executive coaches can provide me with timely feedback | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 9. Executive coaches can help to develop goals and action plans | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 10. Executive coaches can help to develop skills and competencies | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 11. Executive coaches can help to improve interpersonal skills | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 12. Executive coaches can help to improve self awareness | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 13. Executive coaches can help to change behaviour | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 14. Investment in coaching can increase sales revenue | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 15. Executive coaching can have a positive impact on performance | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 16. It is too hard to find a suitable coach | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 17. Executive coaches are too expensive | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 18. I don't have enough time to spend with a coach | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 19. I don't trust executive coaches | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 20. It is difficult to assess coaching outcomes | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 21. Leadership skills are important to my organisation | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 22. We have sufficient and appropriate leadership skills and tools | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 23. Effective communication is important to my organisation | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 24. We have sufficient and appropriate communication skills & tools | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 25. Effective time management is an important skill in my job | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 26. We have sufficient and appropriate time management tools | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 27. Personal development is important in our organisation | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 28. We have sufficient and appropriate personal development tools | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 29. Strategic planning is important in our organisation | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |
| 30. We have sufficient and appropriate strategic planning support | 1 | 2 | 3 | 4 | 5 |

31. What areas would you like to see included in a training programme? Please rank the list below where 1 is most important, 2 is second most important and 3 is third most important.

- Leadership ()
- Strategic Planning ()
- Communication ()
- Personal Development ()
- Time Management ()
- Other _____ ()

32. What are the most important characteristics of a training programme? Please rank the list below where 1 is most important, 2 is second most important and 3 is third most important.

- easy access to training material ()
- access and exposure to industrial cases ()
- problem based learning and exercises ()
- engaging with fellow participants ()
- best practice tools and checklists ()

33. Any other comments or observations?

Many thanks for your help.

Regional Report Template

1. Profile of the region

The following issues should be included in this heading:

- Introduction
 - Location of the region/country and main characteristics
 - Demographic aspects
 - Industrial and technological infrastructure
- Economic Analysis
- Social & Cultural Aspects
 - Education
- Political Legal issues
 - Subsidies
 - Taxes

2. Profile of Small to Medium Sized Enterprises (SMEs)

The following issues need to be included in this heading:

- Number of SMEs in the region/country
- General description of small enterprises, i.e. characteristics of the companies, e.g. family based, traditional organizational structures, implementation of ICT
- Contribution to the economy and society
- Trends
- Generic challenges facing SMES

3. Preliminary Findings

Please provide here some details about executive coaching in your country/region as well as some preliminary conclusions based upon this report and the field work conducted up to date.