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**The effectiveness of business coaching:
An empirical analysis of the factors that contribute to successful
outcomes**

**Thesis submitted by
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Bachelor of Business (Hons 1st Class), JCU
in November, 2007**

**For the degree of Doctor of Philosophy
In the School of Business
James Cook University**

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STATEMENT ON THE CONTRIBUTION OF OTHERS

I recognise James Cook University for providing a PhD scholarship which provided financial support throughout my degree. I also recognise that the university provided grants to attend conferences and workshops that aided in the progress and completion of the PhD thesis.

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I recognise the contribution of the Catholic Education Office – Townsville and Townsville Enterprise with regard to the conduct of my research.

I recognise the JCU Ethics Committee for ensuring that all research conducted for this PhD thesis met ethical standards and received approval.

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DECLARATION ON ETHICS

The research presented and reported in this thesis was conducted within the guidelines for research ethics outlined in the *National Statement on Ethics Conduct in Research Involving Human* (1999), the *Joint NHMRC/AVCC Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice* (1997), the *James Cook University Policy on Experimentation Ethics, Standard Practices and Guidelines* (2001), and the *James Cook University Statement and Guidelines on Research Practice* (2001). The proposed research methodology received clearance from the James Cook University Experimentation Ethics Review Committee (H 1912, H 2354).

Anna Blackman

Date

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ABSTRACT

Many companies make substantial investments in a variety of development programs for executives (R Fulmer, Gibbs, & Goldsmith, 2000). These programs are seen as a source of competitive advantage for the organisation. One particular type of executive development is coaching. Coaching aims to help executives improve their own performance and consequently the performance of the overall organisation (Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001; Kilburg, 1996b). While there have been many articles written about what coaching is, and how to coach, little critical empirical research has been published (Brotman, Liberi, & Wasylyshyn, 1998; Grant & Cavanagh, 2004; Kilburg, 1996a, 1997, 2001; Lowman, 2005; Orenstein, 2002; Sherman & Freas, 2004) about how effective or beneficial the coaching process is to the individual or the organisation they work for (Sue-Chan & Latham, 2004), or into the processes involved in coaching. A few authors have conducted empirical studies but the majority are still mainly marketing claims coming from the coaching industry itself (Grant & Zackon, 2004) leaving the practice of coaching as an “unregulated, poorly defined area” (Brotman, Liberi, & Wasylyshyn, 1998, p. 41).

Despite this lack of critical research, business coaching is a growing field. This thesis seeks to address this lack of research by conducting systematic and critical research into the business coaching process with a particular focus on participant or coachee perspectives on its effectiveness. As much of the

previous research is focused on claims made by coaching companies, it was important to have research on the experiences of coachees and to gain their perspectives on what is critical in making the coaching process effective.

Due to the lack of critical analysis of business coaching, the overall aim of this thesis was to develop and empirically examine a conceptual model of business coaching. This model was built from existing research and theory referred to in the business coaching literature, theory and research in related areas from psychology. In order to determine what factors needed to be included in this model two studies were designed to test the coaching model.

The first study analysed participant perspectives on the factors that make coaching effective and identified further variables that should be included in any explanatory framework for the coaching process. The findings in the first study focused on the main components involved in the coaching process: the coach, the coachee, the organisation and the coaching process. A number of variables within these core elements were measured in a questionnaire designed by the researcher using both open and closed ended questions to determine their importance in the coaching process. The specific aims for Study 1 were to:

- assess the relative importance of the components and factors listed in the preliminary model, to perceived coaching effectiveness
- to identify factors to include in a revised model of coaching effectiveness

Three key themes emerged from this first study, they included; the importance of coach experience and technical expertise, the idea that key processes change in significance in different phases of coaching and the need for greater attention to coachee goals. These three themes were therefore carried forward into the next study.

A second study included a workshop and series of individual coaching sessions which were designed to compare one-on-one coaching with workshops. The workshops were conducted with two different industry groups, namely the tourism sector and the education sector. The tourism sector has paid little attention to career development or leadership skills (Blackman et al., 2004; Moscardo, 2005). The education sector, by way of contrast has clear career pathways and a history of leadership training and development. In addition the researcher wanted to explore further the relative importance of general coaching skills (Berglas, 2002; Eggers & Clark, 2000; Evers, Browers, & Tomic, 2006; Smither, London, Flautt, Vargas, & Kucine, 2003; VanFleet, 1999; Wasylyshyn, 2003) versus industry specific coaching skills as this was a feature noted by respondents in the first study.

There is very little empirical research into the field of business coaching, especially into its effectiveness (Sue-Chan & Latham, 2004). This research provided empirical evidence into the effectiveness of business coaching. It has confirmed the critical importance of the three main components of coaching; the

coach, the coachee and the coaching process. It also provides empirical evidence to suggest that coaching is effective and that the respondents felt that coaching was helpful and effective in assisting them achieving their goals. When analysing the results to the first study where participants nominated features they felt were important for a coach to have, they listed communicating clearly, being organised, maintaining confidentiality and having industry experience. However, after the second study and as the analysis became more in-depth it was revealed that these variables were not the factors that made a significant contribution to the effectiveness of the coaching process. Rather it was the degree of similarity between coach and coachee, coachee commitment to the process and a focus on goals.

The results of the second study showed that coaching does not necessarily have to be one-on-one in order for it to be beneficial, with the participants of this research project reporting similar benefits from the workshops (Kets de Vries, 2005) as from the one-on-one sessions (Bacon & Spear, 2003; Hall, Otazo, & Hollenback, 1999; McCauley & Hezlett, 2001; Orenstein, 2002). The key themes in this study suggested that it is not the delivery mode (workshop or one-on-one) of coaching that is important, it is the content (e.g. goal setting) of the sessions and the need for there to be a good match between the coach and coachee (similarity - in terms of similar values, goals and personality were again important).

This research has implications for the coaching practice field as there is now empirical research into coaching's effectiveness. A conceptual model of coaching has also been developed incorporating the literature on coaching and theories related to coaching. This model has integrated useful theory and research from literature from persuasive communication, counselling psychology and coaching related areas. The new model provides coaches with information on the different types of pathways that a coachee can take depending on where their motivations lie and how much experience they have. There are also different variables of importance for the coaching process, the coach and the organisation depending on what stage the coachee is at in the coaching process. This model will hopefully stimulate further empirical research into this area. This research also provides an agenda for further research. Additional research into the areas that were found to be of vital importance for the coaching process to be effective can now be further investigated.

A number of sections from the thesis have already been through the peer review process and are either published or currently going through the process of being published. The researcher has also published in other publications and has commercialized parts of the research in coaching programs. The following section lists each of the publications.

Refereed Journals/Book Chapters

Blackman, A. (2007). Coaching: Predicting perceived effectiveness. *The Journal of Consulting Psychology: Research and Practice* submitted and accepted with changes 2007 (in press).

Blackman, A. (2007). Perspectives on leadership coaching for regional tourism managers and entrepreneurs. In G. Moscardo (Ed.). *Building Community Capacity for Tourism Development*. Wallingford: CAB International (in press).

Blackman, A. (2006). Factors that contribute to the effectiveness of business coaching: The coachees perspective. *Business Review, Cambridge*, 5: 98 - 104

Other publications/commercialisation

Blackman, A. (2007). Core elements coaching model. Poster presented at the International Coaching Federation Conference, Melbourne, 2-5 October, 2007.

Blackman, A. (2006). Coaching program. Disability Resources Office, James Cook University, Townsville, Australia.

Blackman, A. (2005). Coaching – fad or here to stay. *Training Australia Magazine*, 5(4), 14-15.

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