

# More Process, Less Insight?

SURVEY REPORT: TRENDS IN EXECUTIVE COACH SELECTION

**YES**

**NO**

**MAYBE**



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## Summary of Findings

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Coach selection is a make-or-break part of any organisation's investment in executive coaching. There are fundamental tensions between an organisation's purchase of a professional service such as executive coaching from a commercial market and the individuality of the coach-coachee relationship. The nature of this trusting, confidential relationship between coach and coachee makes selection especially challenging and successful outcomes difficult to predict.

This survey examines how coach selection has changed and how it could be improved. It holds up a mirror to changes that are occurring in coach selection as the executive coaching market matures.

Based on the input of 40 major buying organisations and nearly 300 experienced executive coaches, the survey reveals that:

- ✓ Although buyers have a much better understanding of their objectives for using coaching, and of coaching in general, their understanding is still limited—as seen by the ways they buy coaching. Originally intended as customised development for individual executives, coaching is at risk of becoming the 'fast food' of development.
- ✓ Buyers talk of wanting to find coaches that collectively offer variety and a range of options for their executives' different needs—a set of 'Swiss Army knives'. But coaches experience the selection processes buying organisations use as misguided, with a narrow focus on seeking standard, risk-free, one-dimensional 'tools'.
- ✓ Coaches support buying organisations using more consistent and rigorous approaches to coach selection. However, they also indicate that buyers' efforts to achieve greater consistency and rigour have led to a detrimental focus on safety and homogeneity in the set of coaches selected by organisations.
- ✓ Buying organisations are losing opportunities in selection processes to strengthen their brands and build coaches' interest in working with them. The involvement and knowledge of buyers, and the selection processes they use, inform coaches' perceptions of buying organisations—favourably and unfavourably.
- ✓ Selection has become a niche in the market as organisations outsource activities to new external parties and existing players that have added selection, such as assessment centres, to their USPs (unique selling point). Among some coaches, there is real concern about the: credibility of these entities; distance they place between coaches and buyers; and risk that buyers' knowledge of their organisations is lost in the outsourcing of steps in coaching to external parties.

- ✓ In the face of conventional wisdom that coaching has no barriers to entry, the survey confirms that a clear set of 'filters' has evolved in selection. These filters consider 'hygiene' factors, such as qualifications, and factors more relevant to coach effectiveness, such as experience, track record and references.
- ✓ Personal referrals and recommendations are still widely used by buyers and coaches. In effect, they are a proxy for the evaluation of coaching engagements. They will likely continue to dominate selection decisions as indicators on which buyers will rely. After all, most buyers know whether they will ask a coach back into their organisations.
- ✓ Qualification and accreditation schemes are losing ground among buyers as indicators of the quality of coaches. Of scant interest to coachees, the maze of these schemes still confounds buyers and coaches. Buyers and coaches—the stakeholders of the intermediaries promoting these schemes— would like their needs to have priority over the competition among these organisations for market pre-eminence.
- ✓ The survey results are awash with comments from buyers and coaches on the need for greater transparency from everyone in the market—about conflicts of interest, experience, programmes, and capabilities. It is ironic that a market built around a 1:1 relationship that depends so heavily on openness is in danger of falling short of a principle so often expressed in the many training programmes, mission statements and codes of ethics available in the market.

With thanks to the buyers and coaches who gave their time and input, the Research Team invites you to take a closer look at their views, and to contribute to this important discussion.

Carol Braddick  
Study Lead

## Introduction

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This survey set out to:

- understand the current state of coach selection;
- identify the pros and cons of different approaches to coach selection based on the experience of buyers and coaches;
- highlight any differences between buyers' and coaches' views; and
- stimulate discussion within the coaching community on methods of coach selection that meet the needs of both buyers and coaches.

Moreover, we sought to explore the role of qualifications, accreditations, and experience in buyers' selection decisions. After all, coaches invest so much time and other resources in these.

In their comments, survey respondents offered a rich set of perceptions of developments in both the coaching market and coach selection in the UK. They confirmed the relevance of this focus on selection in comments such as those below, which are labeled as (B) for buyers and (C) for coaches.

*The range of coach training and accreditation options means many coaches have different backgrounds and certifications. Therefore organizations need a clear and consistent idea of what they want from their external coaches. (B)*

*How coaching gets bought – it seems very broken. HR processes succeed in killing provision of the service. (C)*

*Coach selection has become an activity divorced from coach effectiveness. (C)*

*Coaches should give organisations feedback about their selection processes; this is why I chose to complete this survey. (C)*

## Research Team

**Carol Braddick** coaches senior leaders and their teams in large global organisations. Based in the UK and Arizona, her practice is supported by a global network of experienced executive coaches and consultants.

Carol also partners with organisations to sharpen their approach to coaching and gain more value from investments in coaching. A member of the ICF's Special Interest Group in Research, she develops practical applications of coaching research for organisations that buy coaching services.

In leading this study, she drew on her previous research on the executive coaching market such as a study completed for Financial Times Knowledge. She was also on the research team for the "High Impact Executive Coaching" study sponsored by Executive Development Associates which led to the publication of *Executive Coaching for Results*

(Barrett-Koehler: 2007). Carol contributed to the CIPD's guide *Coaching and buying coaching services* and co-authored their HR tool kit, *Managing External Coaches*.

Her background in coaching includes studies with Fielding's Evidence Based Coaching program, Regents College School of Psychotherapy and Counselling Psychology, Management Futures, Lore International and Oxford Brookes University. Prior to establishing Graham Braddick Partnership, Carol worked with Hewitt and Towers Perrin in the US and Latin America specialising in talent and organisational development.

After working in business for nearly 30 years, **David Backinsell** has practiced as an independent executive coach and mentor for more than ten years. While working for YSC Limited he contributed to the development of that firm's executive coaching practice and helped build a global coach network, during the course of which he interviewed and recruited many coaches. He was also responsible for coach selection for many clients, at all levels, in a variety of organisations. David's coaching style reflects his original training by Eric Parsloe, and is informed by work with both Michael Carroll and the late Susan Skiffington.

## Acknowledgements

Great thanks go to **Adrian Spurrrell**, Synapse Solutions, for his insights on the coaching market and many contributions to this study. Adrian has over 15 years experience working with consultancies such as ASK Europe plc and PKF. In these roles, he selected and managed large teams of Associate Coaches and Consultants. His experience in the public and private sectors includes work with senior teams and Boards; assessment and development centres; and oversight of large scale coaching and management development programmes. He has a certificate in Executive Coaching from Strathclyde University.

We are also grateful to all those who assisted in this survey, particularly:

- Members of buying organisations and executive coaches for their interest in this issue, input on the topic and time given to completing the survey;
- Dr. Tatiana Bachkirova, CPsychol, Oxford Brookes University for guidance on the survey and qualitative research;
- Dr. Mary Wayne Bush, former Director of Research for The Foundation of Coaching for guidance on the survey and enthusiastic support of practitioner research;
- Clare Jones of Cisco Systems for her data analysis expertise;
- Dr. Eyal Pavell of Co-Counsel Limited for guidance on the questionnaire and analysis of responses; and
- The many colleagues in the coaching community and the professional organisations, namely AC UK, APECS, BPS Special Group in Coaching Psychology, EMCC, and ICF for assistance in distributing information about the survey.

## Guide to this Report

To get the most from this report and find the sections of greatest interest to you, use the hyperlinks in the column 'Section of this Report' to access the content described in the 'What You Get From It' column:

Section of this Report	What You Get From It
<a href="#">The Selection Process: Who, What and How?</a>	An understanding of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– how buyers and coaches meet in the market;</li> <li>– what is considered during selection; and</li> <li>– the effectiveness of different methods of selection.</li> </ul>
<a href="#">Post-Selection: Opportunities for Buying Organisations and Coaches</a>	Insights on providing feedback to coaches and how selection impacts coaches' perceptions of buying organisations.
<a href="#">Changes in Coach Selection: Improvements or Setbacks?</a>	A summary of the key positive and negative changes as seen by buyers and coaches in the past three years.
<a href="#">Market Developments in Coach Selection: Assessment Centres and External Parties</a>	A closer look at two market developments impacting buying organisations and coaches: assessment centres and external parties.
<a href="#">Is Coach Selection Becoming More or Less Effective?</a>	The trend in coach selection—as seen by coaches.
<a href="#">Top Issues Facing Coaching: How Much Does Selection Matter?</a>	How buyers and coaches see the top issues in coaching, and their thoughts on these rankings.
<a href="#">Buyers and Coaches Offer Recommendations for Improvements</a>	Buyers' and coaches' views on how to improve coach selection.
<a href="#">Implications for the Market</a>	Knock-on effects, predictions and implications for the coaching market.
<a href="#">Our Closing Views</a>	Thoughts on a way forward.
<a href="#">Appendices:</a> Buyer and Coach Comments  Profiles of Survey Respondents  Research Methodology  References	Direct access to respondents' views via their quotes.  A summary of who is 'speaking' through this survey.  Explanation of how the survey was conducted.  Sources consulted.

## The Selection Process: Who, What and How?

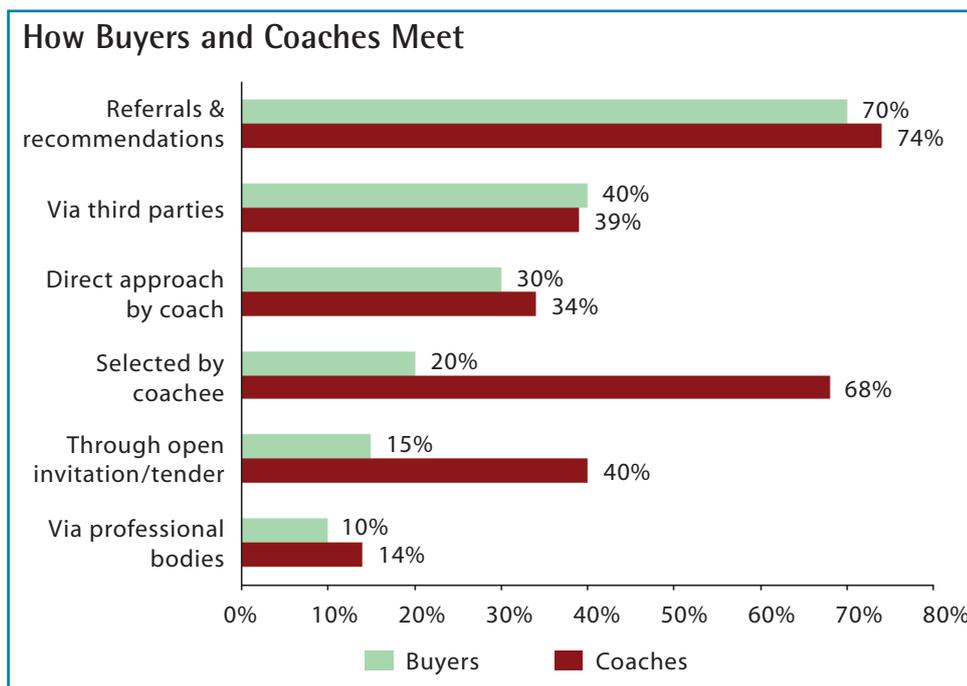
This section of the survey explored three elements of coach selection:

- **who** finds whom in the coaching market;
- **what** buyers and coaches believe is important to know about the background of a coach; and
- **how** to build this knowledge about a coach.

### Who Finds Whom: How Buyers and Coaches Meet

As shown below, when sourcing executive coaches:

- a clear majority (70%) of buyers use referrals, recommendations and the set of coaches already known to them;
- some 40% of buyers also reported using external organisations to identify potential coaches based on agreed criteria; and
- only 30% of buyers reported that coaches and/or supplier organisations approached them directly.



Mirroring buyers' responses, the majority of coaches (74%) indicated that they were referred or recommended directly to buying organisations. Over two thirds of coaches indicated that they were referred or recommended directly to a coachee; in contrast, only 20% of buyers reported these direct referrals.

In general, 40% of coaches also connect with buyers via:

- placement on an internal list of known and approved coaches;
- presentation by external partners of buying organisations; or
- through response to an invitation from a buying organisation to express interest in coaching at that organisation.

Of some surprise—considering the conventional wisdom that buyers are overrun with proactive coaches chasing them—was the small portion of coach respondents who reported approaching organisations directly. Only one third of coach respondents claimed to use this approach during the past three years.

## What is Important to Know about a Coach?

Buyers and coaches offered their views on **what** should be considered when selecting executive coaches.

### Buyers' Views

Buyers prioritised **what** factors they consider in coach selection by choosing from the list below. They assigned the most weight to recommendation or referral, business experience, and coaching model and approach:

Importance to Buyers in Selection	Essential	Of Benefit	Not Considered
Recommendation/referral from trusted source	53%	45%	3%
Business experience (other than running own coaching business)	53%	38%	10%
Coaching model and approach	48%	40%	13%
Supervision by a qualified Supervisor	40%	35%	25%
Track record of continuous professional development	35%	45%	20%
Coaching qualification from particular school or programme	33%	55%	13%
Accreditation by a school or professional body	33%	53%	15%
Membership of a professional body	26%	51%	23%
Personal knowledge of coach	25%	55%	20%
Contributions to the coaching field, e.g. conference presentations, research, etc.	5%	53%	43%

Given an opportunity to expand on these priorities by providing **qualitative input via open-ended comments on what** is important to know about a coach, **buyers** focused on:

- track record and experience (51% of comments);
- coaching model (16% of comments); and
- business experience (10% of comments).

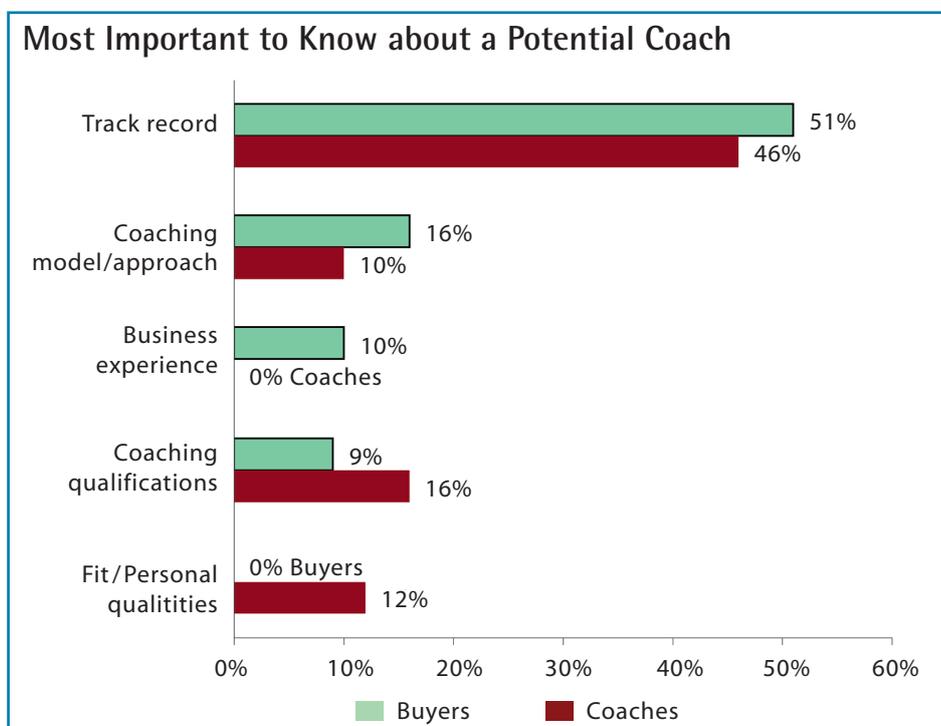
Other elements of a coach's background, such as qualifications and supervision, were cited in less than 10% of buyers' qualitative comments.

## Coaches' Views

When asked **what** is most important for buyers to know about a potential coach, coaches emphasised similar factors as buyers, and noted others:

- track record and experience (46% of comments);
- coaching qualifications (16% of comments);
- fit and personal qualities (12% of comments); and
- coaching model (10% of comments).

Other elements such as business experience and supervision were included in less than 10% of coaches' comments. The chart below summarises this input from buyers and coaches.



## Observations

Buyers and coaches both endorsed the high importance of a coach's track record and experience in selection decisions. They elaborated on track record and experience by referring, for example, to: typical level of coachee; sector experience; and results achieved. For buyers in particular, we believe recommendations and referrals provide a reliable means of verifying these important aspects of a coach's history, hence the 53% of buyers rating recommendations/referrals as essential factors in their selection decisions.

Two differences also emerged between buyers and coaches in their views on what they consider important in a potential coach:

- business experience and coaching model, which are of higher interest to buyers; and
- qualifications and personal qualities, which are of higher interest to coaches.

The higher interest among buyers in a coach's business experience and coaching model may be a function of the buyer's concern with the credibility of the coach in subsequent matching meetings with executives in the buyer's organisation. After all, buyers put their own credibility on the line with coachees, their internal clients, when referring coaches to executives. They may also be anticipating that, as shown in previous research, executives value business experience and have little interest in coaching qualifications (Underhill, et al, 2007).

Buyers may have somewhat less interest in coaching qualifications for reasons such as:

- the difficulty of distinguishing among the different certificates, accreditation schemes and diplomas in the market; and
- understanding a coach's model may give them more insight into how a coach works and assist buyers in matching a coach to a coachee.

Indeed, buyers have given higher priority to a coach's model (essential for 48%) than to a coaching qualification, accreditation or membership of a professional body. This suggests that buyers are highly interested in how a coach works with coachees, and getting a clear picture of this during selection. While the coach's model will surely be influenced by qualifications or accreditations achieved these apparently are hygiene factors for buyers.

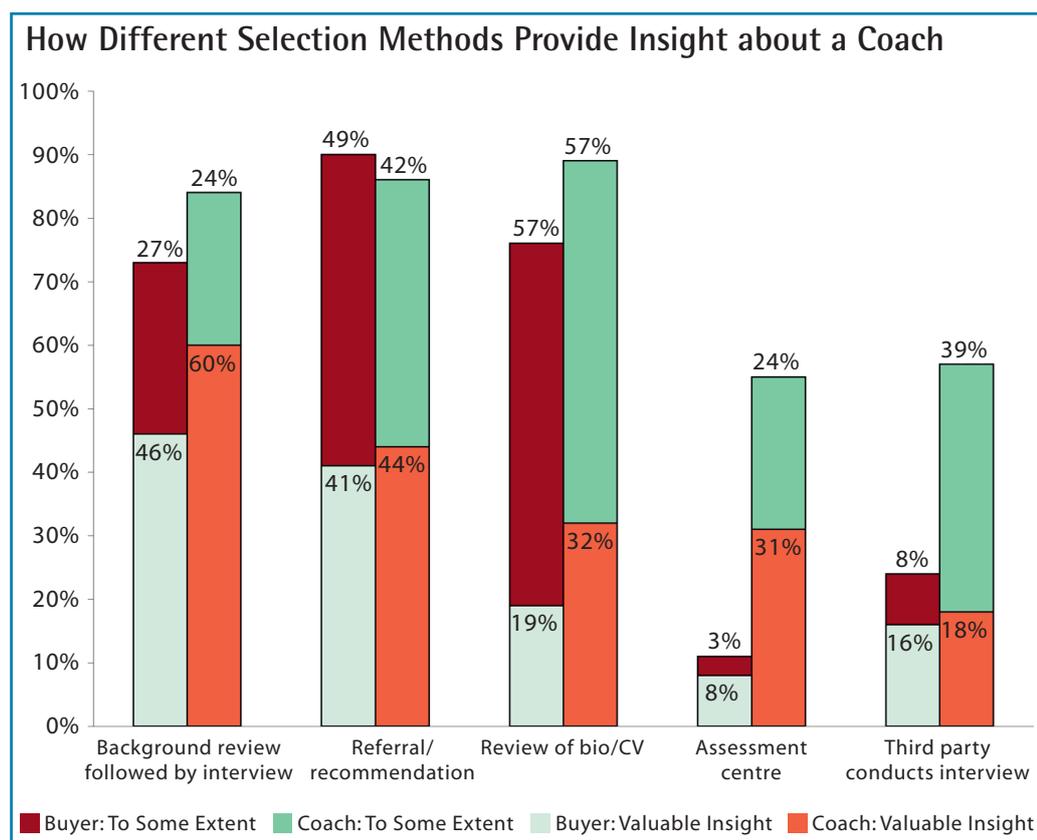
Based on this buyer input, the coaches who can define their model clearly in terms that are relevant to buyers are more likely to be successful in selection. Buyers' priorities in selection also suggest that those seeking to enter executive coaching directly from one of the helping professions may be considered ill-prepared because of their lack of business experience.

Within this survey sample, it also appears that supervision is valued by some buyers (40% rating it as essential) yet irrelevant for others (25% excluding supervision from their selection criteria). Further on in the survey, buyers also gave input on supervision, rating it relatively high among a list of top issues in coaching.

As in most open-ended questions in the survey, coaches gave more in-depth comments than buyers when describing what is important to know about a coach. For example, as noted above, coaches commented to a much greater extent than did buyers on 'fit' and personal qualities of the coach, citing, among others: 'honesty'; 'self awareness'; 'authenticity'; 'presence'; 'resilience'; and 'integrity'.

## How to Gain Insight into a Coach

Commenting on **how** to gain insight into a coach during selection, buyers and coaches expressed similar views. **Buyers and coaches both** strongly believe that references, referrals and in-person interviews are the most effective means of learning more about a coach for selection purposes. Coaches rated assessment centres more favourably than did buyers as shown below:



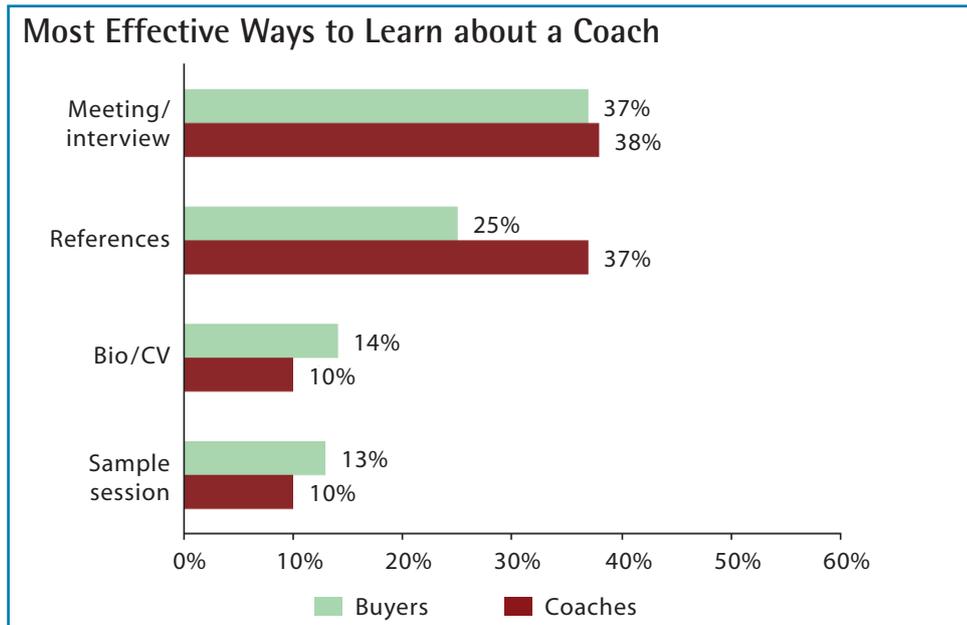
Given the opportunity, in **open commentary**, to consider **how** best to learn what is important to know about coaches, **buyers** indicated the following approaches:

- interview (37% mentioning);
- references (25% mentioning);
- review of CV (14% mentioning); and
- sample session/initial pilot engagement (13% mentioning).

And coaches cited these methods:

- interview (38% mentioning);
- references (37% mentioning);
- review of CV (10% mentioning); and
- sample coaching session (10% mentioning).

Other approaches, such as assessment centres, were mentioned by fewer than five percent of respondents. The chart below summarises the input provided by buyers and coaches in open commentary on methods of learning about a coach:



In discussing interactions with buyers during the selection process, a small number of coaches used language such as the following to describe their preferred approach to the meeting of buyer and coach: 'discuss as adults'; 'a coaching conversation'; 'a dialogue'; 'listen deeply to the answers'; 'unstructured discussion'; and 'direct questions'. A few others referred to the importance of the buyer and coach building a strong relationship.

In a few instances, buyers also referred to the importance of a longer term relationship between buyer and coach:

“*Most importantly, use **direct interaction and experience with the coaches themselves.***

*Get to know them over time.*”

## Observations

### Selection as a Starting Point

While selection is clearly an important first step, both parties also benefit from frequent and personal interaction post-selection. This suggests that buyers and coaches should create more opportunities to build their relationships over time post-selection. It is also important for buyers to share the knowledge gained about a coach through this post-selection contact within their organisations among colleagues involved in managing coaching such as HR Business Partners and other members of the HR, Talent or Learning & Development teams.

### Getting a Close-Up of the Coach

Sample sessions, endorsed by a small portion of buyers and coaches, may offer greater insight of how the coach works with coachees. Some coaches offered this as an option in their open-ended comments; they appear ready to partner with buyers on this step during selection.

From their qualitative comments, coaches appear to prefer a 1:1 session with one of the following: the buyer; the intended coachee; an employee representative of the organisation's coachees; or a volunteer with a genuine interest in a 1:1 session.

Buyers have suggested a practical step: a test engagement. Described in simple terms by buyers as 'try them out', this suggestion appears to indicate an understanding of the limits of any selection process and acceptance of direct experience as a valuable means to build meaningful knowledge of the coach. Based on their comments throughout the survey, it appears most coaches would be open to partnering with buyers on pilot engagements.

## Post-Selection: Opportunities for Buying Organisations and Coaches

This section includes a summary of:

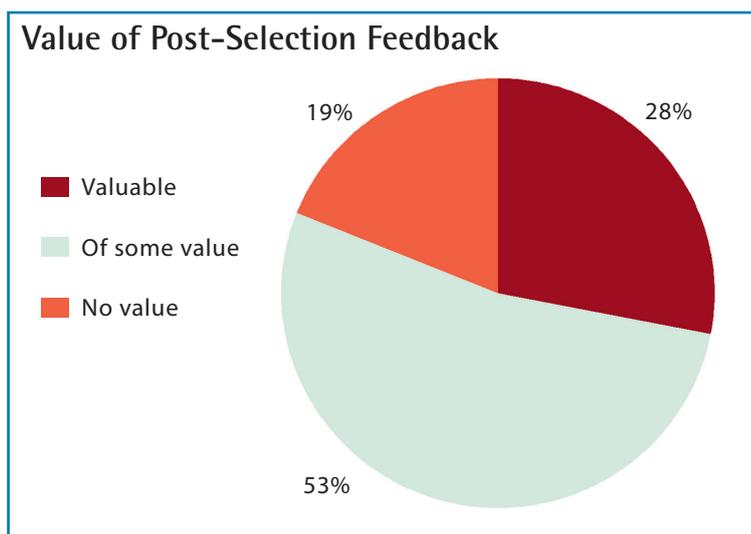
- how frequently feedback is provided to coaches post-selection;
- how valuable coaches find this post-selection feedback; and
- the impact of selection processes on coaches' perceptions of buying organisations.

### Feedback Post-Selection

Buyers and coaches have similar views on how frequently buyers give feedback, and coaches get feedback, after a selection process:

Frequency Feedback is Given Post-Selection	BUYERS	COACHES	Frequency Feedback is Received Post-Selection
Never Give Feedback	9%	15%	Never Get Feedback
Sometimes Give Feedback	54%	54%	Sometimes Get Feedback
Always Give Feedback	37%	31%	Always Get Feedback

As the chart below shows, only 28% of coaches find the feedback they receive post-selection 'valuable'. For just over half of coaches, the feedback is of 'some value'. A small proportion of the coach respondents, 19%, find the post-selection feedback offered of 'no value'.



The type of feedback coaches would find valuable, based on their qualitative responses, includes:

- buyer's rationale for the selection decision (54% of comments), including input on such factors as:

- overall impressions and perceptions of the coach;
- fit with coachee, organisation and/or specifications of coaching programme;
- development areas for coach, e.g. areas of improvement that would enhance all coaching and probability of securing work at the buying organisation;
- why or why not chosen;
- rationale expressed specifically relative to selection criteria; and
- comparison with other coaches;

■ feedback about the coach, e.g. perceptions of style (24% of comments); and

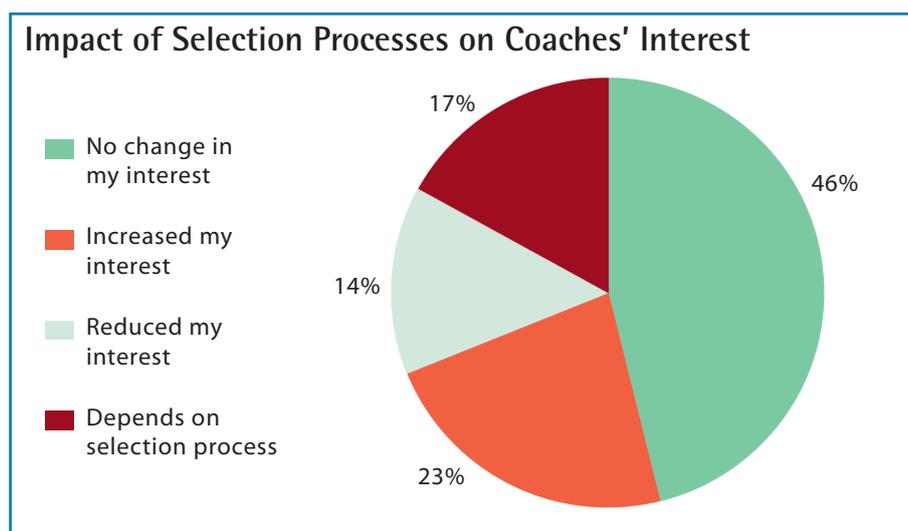
■ criteria used for selection (13% of comments).

In other comments (9% of comments), coaches focused on the quality of the feedback, expressing wishes for feedback that is 'honest', 'genuine', 'specific', 'constructive', and indicative of the 'real reason for the decision'.

## Impact of Selection Processes

Coaches were asked how their experience of selection processes have impacted their interest in working with buying organisations.

As shown below, for nearly half of coaches (46%), their experience of the selection process does not appear to influence their interest in working with the organisation running the selection. For other coaches, the experience of the selection process increased their interest in 23% of cases, and reduced their interest in 14% of cases.



For the remaining 17% of coaches, the selection process can have both positive and negative effects on a coach's perceptions of the organisation and the coaching opportunity as shown in their comments:

*It **very much depends** on the methods used by the selecting organisation and how they come across during the process. I believe that it is very much a **two-way process** where the coach is assessing the organisation as much as the other way around.*

*My interest has been **reduced when** there is an onerous selection process mediated by a third party coaching organisation. My interest has been **increased when** there is a meaningful engagement with the buyer.*

*Varied, some raise interest and others reduce it. In general though, evidence of a **thought through process raises my interest.***

Where selection has a negative impact, it appears that it may do so more frequently for the more experienced coaches:

- more experienced coaches reported a decrease in interest more frequently (19% of cases) than lesser experienced coaches (five or fewer years of practice; 7% of cases); and
- lesser experienced coaches reported a higher incidence (31% of cases) of an increase in interest in working with the organisations than did more experienced coaches (17% of cases).

## Observations

Coaches' responses indicate that the selection process can indeed have a payoff beyond the expected objectives of identifying high quality coaches. Their input suggests that buyers can, through their selection processes, positively impact the engagement of coaches with their organisations. In contrast, they can also alienate coaches and damage the brand of the buying organisation.

Interestingly, one coach respondent took a pragmatic view of post-selection feedback, specifically that coaches should not expect developmental feedback from a process that is intended to support the buying organisation's decision making. Developmental feedback for coaches may well be unmanageable or inappropriate for buying organisations to provide.

Nonetheless, coaches clearly prefer that buyers manage this stage of the selection process more carefully—even if the feedback is limited to communication of the outcome of the selection process. Based on this input from coaches, buyers may wish to rethink the type of feedback they offer coaches post-selection. The 'Our Closing Views' section of this report includes suggestions on useful steps to consider post-selection.

Although based on a small sample, the difference between the reactions of less and more experienced coaches to selection processes suggests that the latter may be more choosy about the organisations they work with.

## Changes in Coach Selection: Improvements or Setbacks?

Having painted a picture of what is currently happening, buyers and coaches gave their views on: what has changed in the past three years in coach selection; and the causes of these changes. Buyers were asked to comment on changes in the broader market, rather than refer to their particular organisations.

### Buyers' Views

The only significant **positive change** reported by most buyers is 'greater rigour', with nearly one third commenting on this directly or indirectly:

*Have seen a move to **more rigorous** selection and less reliance solely on recommendation and CV.*

*Deeper understanding of and belief in the massive impact which coaches can have on individual and collective leadership performance helping to put **greater rigour** in the buying/selection process.*

The **drivers of positive changes** in selection reflected both a need to manage costs and build the value added (26% of comments). Buyers also noted greater awareness of coaching in most organisations (26% of comments) as well as greater efforts on the part of buying organisations to improve selection (26% of comments):

*Coaching is recognised as a **valuable intervention** but we need to ensure it meets the business requirement as well.*

*The range of coach training in the industry has led to the need for diligent coach assessment processes. This change to investing more time in the coach assessment process reflects that **organisations are thinking more seriously about coaching.***

*Cost control, seeking better results, linking coaching with other strategic initiatives.*

A small set of buyers, 16% of those responding to this question, noted that they had not seen any positive changes.

The most common theme within buyers' responses (47% of comments) on **negative changes and causes of these** was the supply side of coaching, e.g. high volume of variable quality, and lack of confidence in accreditations:

*Anyone can get ICF or EMCC if they have the money to fund it.*

*Not enough clarity on accreditation and regulation. Lots of people think they can coach – few can.*

A few buyers also noted that 'process' had gone too far:

*Becoming **more of a sales process and a business** rather than being about the individual and their development.*

*Possibly **over engineering things** and maybe putting good coaches off from applying.*

In describing negative changes, a few buyers also expressed concerns about how effectively coaching is managed—or perhaps unmanageable—within organisations:

***Buyers don't understand** what coaching is all about.*

*Only negative changes are when **coaching has been devolved** to the business **without a strong framework**.*

***External coaches going around** the central process.*

## Coaches' Views – Changes Observed

Coaches offered a richer view of recent changes and trends than did buyers. A number of different themes emerged in their perceptions of changes and drivers of these changes as summarised below.

The **positive changes**, according to coaches, are:

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*Appendix 1 includes more detailed information on the most salient themes noted by coaches.*

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Positive Changes Noted by Coaches	
Change	Dimensions of the Change
Higher <b>awareness</b> and <b>understanding</b> of coaching among buyers, executives and the market in general	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– understanding of different types of coaching, and differences between training, coaching and mentoring;</li> <li>– more able to recognise good coaching and good coaches;</li> <li>– learning from mistakes and bad experiences;</li> <li>– HR shifts from suspicious gatekeepers to expert buyers;</li> <li>– more aware of benefits and limitations of coaching;</li> <li>– more openness to the value of coaching; and</li> <li>– greater focus on developmental or transformational coaching; less use of remedial coaching.</li> </ul>
Greater <b>rigour</b> in selection and awareness of <b>importance</b> of selection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– use of an approach or formal process for selection versus relying heavily or entirely on word of mouth;</li> <li>– higher standards applied in more carefully thought-out processes; and</li> <li>– greater investment by organisations in selection phase of coaching.</li> </ul>
Greater <b>awareness of specific elements</b> of coaches' backgrounds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– higher appreciation of and attention given to a range of specific elements of a coach's background such as coaching model, supervision, track record of results, and qualifications.</li> </ul>

In just over 15% of cases, coaches indicated that they had not seen any positive changes.

On the negative side, coaches identified the following as either negative changes in selection or, less frequently, an aspect of selection that still needed further development:

Negative Changes and Points Noted by Coaches	
Change / Point	Dimensions of the Change
Heavy focus on <b>process, cost reduction and procurement</b> procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– over-engineered 'tick box' exercises that focus on factors considered irrelevant or of lesser importance to high quality coaching, e.g. overemphasis on accreditation and qualifications relative to track record of results and depth of experience;</li> <li>– commoditisation of coaching;</li> <li>– homogenisation, 'dumbing down', and narrowing of range of coach styles in order to eliminate risk;</li> <li>– heavy time demand on coaches to prepare documentation that overlooks the qualitative or distinctive aspects of their USPs;</li> <li>– Procurement-led tenders that demonstrate no understanding of coaching and focus on criteria and evidence considered irrelevant to potential for success in a coaching relationship; and</li> <li>– accrediting bodies putting too much emphasis on qualifications over experience.</li> </ul>
<b>Buyer awareness</b> of coaching	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– despite improvements, buyers still need to sharpen understanding of coaching and clarify objectives for coaching; and</li> <li>– new approaches to selection being used by buyers who have limited understanding of coaching.</li> </ul>
<b>Supply-related</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– tsunami of low quality entrants; and</li> <li>– buyer shift to larger providers.</li> </ul>
<b>External parties and intermediaries</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– external parties, e.g. coach brokers, inserting a layer between coaches and buyers;</li> <li>– external parties, e.g. consultants, using 'pseudo-academic' selection processes considered poorly designed and unsuitable for coaching; and</li> <li>– fragmented set of standards across the different professional organisations; competition among intermediaries.</li> </ul>

A smaller set of coaches, 10% of cases, responded that they did not see any negative changes.

## Coaches' Views – Causes of Changes

Coaches identified an intricate set of interrelationships among the changes they observed and the drivers of these changes. As would be expected in a dynamic system such as the commercial market for executive coaching, some drivers of change were considered to have both positive and negative effects. And some changes were considered positive developments by some coaches, yet seen as negative moves by others.

The table below offers a summary of the **most commonly expressed themes in coaches' views** on the dynamics of the changes they have observed in the market in the past three years.

Market Factor	Generally Negative Impact	Mixed Impact	Generally Positive Impact
<b>Buyer:</b> higher awareness and understanding of what they are buying		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Much progress, but still uneven;</li> <li>– Adoption of more structured selection processes is ahead of buyer knowledge of coaching and clarity of objectives for coaching</li> </ul>	Endorsed throughout survey
<b>Buyer:</b> higher focus on managing costs; impact of recession	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Negative impact goes further than reducing fees or limiting use of coaching;</li> <li>– Quality of coaches put at risk to lower costs;</li> <li>– Commoditisation of coaching;</li> <li>– Even fewer resources in organisations to manage coaching effectively, including selection</li> </ul>		
<b>Buyer:</b> higher focus on demonstrating value of coaching, greater scrutiny of investment	Where buyer has low internal influence and/or low confidence in selection, negative outcomes such as excessively risk averse selection and homogenisation of coaching pool		Where buyer has better understanding of coaching and internal influence, has led to more insightful selection and useful emphasis on experience and track record
<b>Buyer:</b> centralised, Procurement-led purchase of external services applied to coaching	Processes that place undue emphasis on inputs (e.g. qualifications, steps of structured coaching programme) and overlook depth of experience, competence and results	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Favours larger suppliers with greater resources to manage large, cumbersome tenders;</li> <li>– Puts coaching in hands of larger suppliers who may not select, develop or oversee their coaches as carefully as buyers would like</li> </ul>	
<b>Plethora of intermediaries</b> in coaching market, e.g. accreditation and professional bodies	Competition among professional bodies, accrediting organisations and training and academic programmes confusing buyers and coaches and reducing attention to their needs	Range of views expressed both pro and con regulation	
Entry of <b>external parties</b> to assist buyers with selection	Perceived as commercial opportunists without requisite underpinning of experience and knowledge of coaching; approaches considered poor fit with coaching		
<b>Acceptance of coaching</b>	Ongoing challenge of demonstrating RoI or assessing effectiveness in practical, affordable ways considered barrier to further development as a well-regarded professional service		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Greater availability and depth of resources on coaching via publications and conferences</li> <li>– Increased acceptance of coaching as valuable development option</li> </ul>
<b>Supply:</b> high number and low quality of entrants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– Damages perceptions of coaching;</li> <li>– Makes buyers even more risk averse, leading to fear-based purchasing and scrutiny of coaching</li> </ul>	Accreditations and qualifications intended to help, but are still too confusing for buyers and coaches and are being overused in selection	Has also led buyers to raise their standards and become more savvy
<b>Supply:</b> oversupply	In conjunction with price squeeze and buyer budget cuts, increased competition has possibly led to supply side overstating qualifications; improvements needed in transparency		Has enabled buyers to be more selective

## Observations

It is striking that the changes observed by coaches, and the claimed causes of these, are largely negative. As many survey participants noted, the coaching market has been heavily affected by a significant increase of supply, reconfiguration of the supply side and a major economic downturn.

Despite the negative tone of these concerns about the market, coaches have expressed strong support for buying organisations taking a more focused and rigorous approach to coach selection.

## Market Developments in Coach Selection: Assessment Centres and External Parties \_\_\_\_\_

Based on respondents' comments on changes in coach selection, there are two market developments to explore in more depth, namely the use of:

- assessment centres to assess and select external executive coaches; and
- external parties that assist buyers with coach selection.

In some cases these developments are blended, e.g. an external party assisting a buying organisation with the design and/or running of a coach assessment centre.

### Assessment Centres: An Improvement in Coach Selection?

To date there have been a few recent high-profile centres such as those run by: the NHS, HSBC and Asda. As assessment centres require significant investment from both buyers and coaches, this survey offered a timely opportunity to ask respondents about their experiences and perceptions of assessment centres, and to report as fully as possible their views.

#### Buyers' Views

Among the set of 40 buyers participating in the survey, the use of assessment centres is very limited. Only three buyers reported having done so, and these organisations plan to continue with assessment centres. Six buyers (15%) reported that they are considering assessment centres for coach selection.

Given the small base of current users of assessment centres, it is difficult to gain a picture of their views on how the different activities of an assessment centre give buyers insight into a coach. When asked about the value of different activities of assessment centres, two of the three organisational users of assessment centres reported that the sample coaching session and reflections on the assessment process provided valuable insight into potential coaches.

Buyers' responses to open-ended questions on assessment centres provide a much fuller picture of their views as the table below shows:

	Assessment Centre User - Buyer	No Assessment Centre Experience - Buyer
Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- consistency; and</li> <li>- opportunity for coach to demonstrate skills and style.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- firsthand experience of coach;</li> <li>- efficiency; and</li> <li>- consistency.</li> </ul>
Concerns	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- the likelihood that the centre would identify a set of coaches that was overly similar in style;</li> <li>- whether the centre afforded them an opportunity to see the coach at his or her best; and</li> <li>- the likelihood that coaches might decline to make such a large investment of time.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 'beauty parade' approach;</li> <li>- artificial environment;</li> <li>- time and cost burden to buyer and coach for uncertain return; and</li> <li>- complexity for the buyer.</li> </ul>

## Coaches' Views

One quarter of coach respondents reported having participated in a coach assessment centre; nearly one third of these said they have been selected in all instances and a further 56% selected in some instances.

In evaluating methods of selection (see 'The Selection Process: Who, What and How?'), 31% of coaches rated assessment centres as providing 'valuable insight' into the coach. Nearly one quarter rated assessment centres as providing 'insight to some extent' into the coach.

When asked about the effectiveness of specific activities in an assessment centre process, coaches with relevant experience indicated the degree to which the following steps provided insight to them as coaches:

- 54% of coaches reported the sample coaching session as providing 'valuable' insight;
- other assessment centre activities were cited as providing insight 'to some extent':
  - competency-based interview (71% of coaches);
  - discussion about their coaching model (68% of coaches); and
  - reflections on the assessment process (55% of coaches).

Through an analysis of all coach text comments specifically referencing assessment centres, a set of concerns becomes clear from nearly 15% of coaches as shown below:

### Coaches' Concerns about Assessment Centres

- low credibility of assessors;
- commercial opportunism of entities and individuals considered to have self-appointed as experts in coach selection;
- invalid assessment methods: contrived exercises such as observed coaching sessions of short length; use of actors in coaching sessions; unclear selection criteria; and failure to meet best practice guidelines in assessment processes;
- undue focus on one model of coaching;
- the possibility of a 'good or bad performance' on the day of the assessment centre; and
- excessive time investment.

In a few instances, coaches indicated they would decline to participate in an assessment centre and encourage other coaches to decline.

On the other hand, a few coaches cited the use of assessment centres as a positive development in selection and recommended this approach to buyers.

## Observations

### Polarisation among Coaches?

A substantial portion of coaches rated assessment centres as providing insight into coaches that is 'valuable' or 'valuable to some extent'. These ratings may be confirmation that coaches find in-depth interviews—a common step in assessment centres—highly effective in providing buyers with insights into coaches.

On the other hand, the qualitative input from coaches on assessment centres (see Appendix 2) suggests that a vocal minority of coaches are extremely sceptical and negative about such centres. At this stage in the use of assessment centres, based on this survey, it appears that this approach to selection may polarise views among coaches. If this is the case, buyers may need to consider their communication of future plans to use assessment centres to the coaches they wish to attract.

### Too Much Consistency?

Buyers understandably value consistency in their selection processes, e.g. selectors using the same criteria and evaluating evidence in similar ways. However, based on both buyer and coach comments, assessment centres are perceived to put too great a focus on consistency of the model and style of coaches. Adopted by buyers to identify a set of coaches that meet a common quality standard, assessment centres are instead perceived as crowding out the range of choice in style and approach that will be needed to match coaches to coachees.

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*Appendix 2 includes a sample of quotes on assessment centres that provides a closer look at the range of issues noted by buyers and coaches, and the relative mix of positive and negative comments within their input.*

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## Too Impersonal for Coaches?

Buyers apparently view assessment centres as potentially offering an advantage in efficiency and consistency of the selection process. This perspective of buyers may highlight one key mismatch between coaches' and buyers' needs in selection: coaches appear to be looking for a process that is much more high-touch than buyers find feasible.

Coaches may be in favour of a more high-touch approach, we believe, because it offers greater insight into the 'who the coach is', i.e. attributes such as resilience. A deeper understanding of the individual in terms of these attributes would assist buyers in making more informed selection decisions, and, at future points, making better matches with individual coachees.

Coaches' responses have also tended to be lengthier and more personalised than those of buyers. It may be that coaches—who must be skilled in relationship building—strongly prefer high-touch interactions from the outset. Or, in MBTI terms, selection is perhaps becoming too 'STJ' for many coaches.

## The Familiar Advantage of Outsourcing?

A well run selection process in which knowledgeable buyers and end users (i.e. coachees) use a consistent approach and have similar selection objectives may well be as effective as an assessment centre run by external parties. But the former—a comprehensive in-house approach— may simply be out of reach at this stage for many organisations.

The difficulties of buyers undertaking an in-house approach is perhaps a sign that the buyer's 'capital' has been spent on gaining sponsorship for coaching, leaving little appetite among management to contribute to the design and implementation of related activities. The investment in external assistance with an assessment centre may provide just enough 'incremental traction' and visibility to regain the attention of sponsors. It may also enhance the internal profile of coaching.

## Still Early Days of Use of Assessment Centres

Based on the small sample size of users of assessment centres and the variability of approaches to evaluation of coaching engagements in many buying organisations, it is premature to compare the track records of assessment centres and other selection methods on outcomes such as:

- identifying coaches:
  - of higher quality;
  - who are successful in shorter engagements, thus cutting costs for buying organisations; or
  - who demonstrate greater success once engaged than coaches sourced through other methods; and

- advancing coaching within an organisation, e.g. by building line involvement or awareness of coaching.

As organisations take different approaches to coach selection, it will be valuable for the market to understand more about the relative merits of these, based on the views of buyers, coaches and coachees.

## External Parties in Coach Selection

The survey asked buyers and coaches to make recommendations to suppliers of coaching services on ways such suppliers could assist buyers in making high quality coach selection decisions. In making these recommendations, respondents referred to a wide range of suppliers and services in the market. Based on their input, and our knowledge of the coaching market, the following types of entities appear to impact coach selection and buying organisations' management of coaching:

### Supply of Coaches

- **coach brokers:** generally vendors that build 'pools' of affiliated freelance coaches, i.e. 'Associates', and offer/support matching of coaches to coachees; and
- **large providers:** generally entities that have added coaching to their USPs, building on their history in assessment, executive search, training, or leadership development. These providers generally also use Associates.

### Coaching-Related Services

- **assessment centre consultants:** design and/or run coach assessment centres as discussed in the previous section;
- **consultants:** provide services such as: advising organisations on issues in selection; interviewing or co-interviewing (along with a buyer) coaches on behalf of the buying organisation; assisting a buying organisation with managing its 'pool' of external coaches, e.g. supporting information sessions with coaches that include updates on the organisation and coaching programme or collecting feedback from coaches about the buying organisation.

In describing how entities such as those listed above could assist buyers in making high quality selection decisions, buyers and coaches expressed strong views on the need for these external parties to define their USPs more clearly and demonstrate their value-add in the areas listed below:

## Third Parties: Areas for Improvement

- building an in-depth understanding of the buying organisation and its coaching needs;
- attracting, assessing and selecting coaches of the appropriate quality and experience to meet these needs of buyers;
- presenting their Associates to buyers—with much more personal insight than can be conveyed by a standard coach profile;
- continuously monitoring and upgrading their Associates;
- evaluating the results achieved by their Associates as measured by a process agreed with the buying organisation;
- educating their clients in buying organisations on best and new practices among buying organisations; and
- transparency of business model, e.g. the degree to which the external party has a strong relationship with a particular school of coach training that influences the external party's recommendations to the buying organisation (input from coaches).

The following quotes indicate the range of concerns and views among buyers and coaches about this set of players in the coaching market:

## Buyers' Views

*They need to understand that **organisational fit is sometimes more important** than an ideal coach on paper / by experience and organisations should have the ability to challenge recommendations and decline if necessary some coach suggestions.*

***Good if they would offer experience and advice** from other coach assessment processes and share best practice guidelines.*

***Educate us on how coaches are trained and accredited.***

*Understand the **needs of the coachee** rather than assume there's a one-process-fits-all.*

*Have a **detailed knowledge about coaches'** experience and expertise – and lots of referrals.*

***Get out of the marketplace.** These supplier organisations are an unnecessary layer in the market.*

## Coaches' Views

*I am also seeing a trend where more experienced and better informed HR and L&D managers are taking more control and ownership for selecting their coaches in order to get coaches who are in tune with the culture and challenges of their organisation. They have come to realise that an **outsourced consultant is much less likely to get this right.***

*It is getting increasingly difficult to work as a sole trader, although I have been established for over 12 years. Organisations appear to want to reduce the number of relationships they have with coaches so are outsourcing that to larger consultancies. The irony is that, **the consultancies then subcontract the work to associates** (who are sole traders) at a reduced rate than they would do if working direct for the buying organisation. The only beneficiaries are the consultancies who are taking a significant cut.*

*At times a third party is used to interview coaches especially in the UK. These third parties have their own coaches and are **biased toward their own coaches** no matter how successful you may have been in the past.*

*They should build a relationship **not flog a commodity.***

*Not keen on this approach as often smacks of **pile 'em high, sell 'em cheap** – lowest common denominator approach. Avoid this kind of approach unless I know the supplier very well.*

*They should explore ways to **present their coaches** rather than just providing CVs.*



## Observations

In this survey, both buyers and coaches challenged external parties to improve in many areas. In particular they expressed doubts about how well external parties knew the strengths and styles of the coaches they promote to their clients in buying organisations.

Clearly, this layer between buying organisations and the market supply of coaches—many of whom are solo practitioners—provides buyers with an easier way to contract for external services. However, it also features trade-offs, e.g. less personal knowledge of individual coaches.

In addition, external parties—large and small—that present their Associate coaches to buying organisations often work with the same freelance coaches. Many buyers and coaches have had the experience of 'same coach, different badge', i.e. multiple entities presenting the same coach to a buying organisation, often at different rates. This adds complexity for buyers in a market they already find confusing.

## Is Coach Selection Becoming More or Less Effective?

On the basis that coaches have greater direct experience with a broader range of selection processes than do buyers, only coaches were invited to indicate whether coach selection is moving in the direction of greater or lesser effectiveness.

Less than half of coach respondents (46%) said the selection of coaches was becoming more effective. A surprising 38% of coach respondents reported that they have seen no change in effectiveness. This is despite changes confirmed throughout the survey such as: use of more formal and rigorous processes; higher buyer understanding of coaching; use of external parties and assessment centres; and greater focus on selection itself.

In addition, many coaches applied significant caveats and conditions to their ratings. Over one third of coach respondents added comments on their effectiveness ratings expressing concerns such as those summarised below. The table below includes a sample of verbatim comments from coaches and is organised by rating of change in effectiveness of selection.

### A Closer Look at Coaches' Views

Change in Effectiveness of Coach Selection		
Less Effective 16%	No Change 38%	More Effective 46%
<p><i>Emphasis on a model rather than a practical skill.</i></p> <p><i>Because the best people are not getting to meet the clients due to restrictive tendering practices.</i></p> <p><i>Cost and process driven, as opposed to coachee focused.</i></p> <p><i>It is being diluted by people who think they can make a quick buck</i></p> <p><i>Organisations do not really understand what they want coaching to deliver, therefore not clear what they need to assess.</i></p> <p><i>I accept there is a need for some control – the previous system of completely unregulated coachee selects coach/buddy wasn't right either. What has developed however doesn't work at all.</i></p>	<p><i>I think buyers may be trying to systematise something that could better be done using more 'human' means.</i></p> <p><i>I say 'no change' because it may be positive or negative depending on the context.</i></p> <p><i>Old and new ways both have advantages and disadvantages.</i></p> <p><i>Too early to tell.</i></p> <p><i>Slight positive changes which are not yet commonplace.</i></p>	<p><i>Difficult to answer – I think the process has improved as only trained and supervised coaches are being used. I'm just not sure if the better coaches are seen from paperwork and interviews.</i></p> <p><i>Buyers are much more cautious and searching; this I applaud.</i></p> <p><i>Overall selection is becoming more effective – but is in danger of becoming less effective.</i></p> <p><i>More effective, yes, but also more formulaic, which isn't necessarily a good thing.</i></p> <p><i>The awareness of what coaching can do and how powerful it can be is adding a greater level of care to the process.</i></p> <p><i>On balance probably more effective but it is a slow process.</i></p> <p><i>It is being taken more seriously, but there is still a wide variety of approaches.</i></p>

## Observations

On balance, selection has become more effective in some ways. Both buyers and coaches consider selection important, and both support more thoughtful, rigorous approaches. However, many also believe the direction and scope of changes has already limited the effectiveness of both selection and coaching.

For this and other questions in the survey, many respondents gave an 'it depends' response:

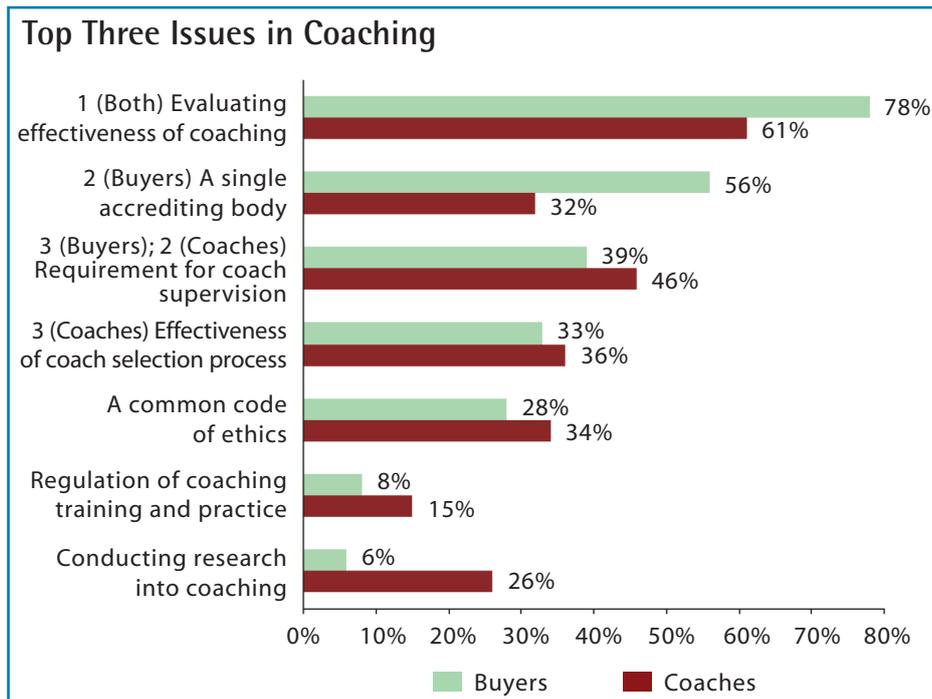
*Where an intelligent coaching buyer is leading the process, it is becoming more effective. Where selection is abdicated and done purely on tender documentation it is getting less effective.*

This quote identifies a key variable in the effectiveness of selection—the buyer, and his or her understanding and ownership of coaching. It also highlights the importance of building an understanding among others—Procurement, line management, external parties and consultants—of what the organisation is trying to buy and for what purposes.

## Top Issues Facing Coaching: How Much Does Selection Matter?

While the survey has focused most closely on selection of coaches we also sought to understand top issues in coaching as seen by buyers and coaches. This section of the survey also provided insight into how selection ranks relative to other issues in coaching.

Respondents prioritised the **top three issues** facing coaching today as follows:



## Observations

### Evaluation

Not surprisingly, 78% of buyers said that evaluating the effectiveness of coaching is the most pressing issue facing coaching. Some 61% of coaches hold the same view.

In contrast, coach selection, for buyers and coaches alike, is ranked as we expected: 'middle of the pack'. We believe selection would have an even lower ranking if more progress were made on evaluation.

If evaluation were a more common practice, buyers would have more useful reference points during selection for assessing a coach's potential to have a beneficial impact. The final section of this report, 'Our Closing Views', explores this point further.

## Accrediting Body

Given, as one coach described it, the 'proliferation' of accreditation schemes, it is easy to see why a single accrediting body is a top issue for buyers. If a single and highly regarded body offered a well-respected, robust accreditation process, this aspect of coach selection would likely be easier for buyers.

In addition to the issues noted above, 22% of coaches selected 'other issues' as their response choice for this question. Within this set of responses, the majority of coaches focused on accreditation and the role of intermediaries. A subset of their comments follows:

*A top issue is for there to be less looking inwards at “the coaching profession” and more looking outwards at the buyer’s evolving needs. This involves accepting that the profession is now mature and established (i.e. move beyond self-consciousness/self obsession).*

*If there were to be a single accrediting body it should have a clear remit and principles rather than just another quango full of mediocre people.*

*The emerging tendency to an association-led accreditation bureaucracy, which provides no quality assurances or guarantees and which limits the scope of coaching and is not in the ultimate interests of the clients (coachees/buyers).*

## Supervision

There may be several explanations for the nearly 40% of buyer respondents ranking coach supervision within the top three issues in coaching. In their rankings of what is most important to consider in selection, buyers, in the same proportion, rated supervision as essential.

In the context of coach selection, buyers may have concerns such as:

- understanding what amount and type of supervision to include in their coach selection criteria;
- how to 'interview' a coach about supervision;
- the purpose of supervision in executive coaching—quality inspection or a positive investment in CPD?;
- managing boundaries of confidentiality; or
- educating their executives on supervision (as coaches should inform coachees of their use of supervision).

## Code of Ethics and Regulation

Buyers' ratings on the need for a single accrediting body (noted above), a common code of ethics and, to a much lesser extent, regulation of coach training perhaps reflect dissatisfaction among buyers with the supply side of executive coaching. This could be seen as a notice to training, professional and accrediting organisations to collaborate more and listen to their stakeholders—a recommendation made by many coaches and buyers in other sections of the survey.

## Research

Coaches, with no surprise, rated research as a higher priority than buyers did. Research informs a coach's model and practice. On the other hand, research may be less valued by buyers because much of it does not make its way to them in practical terms that they can apply easily in their organisations.

## Buyers and Coaches Offer Recommendations for Improvements

Can we improve the way buyers select coaches? Definitely, according to both buyers and coaches.

Their recommendations, summarised below, include many calls by buyers and coaches for similar solutions.

Improvements Recommended by Both Buyers and Coaches	
<b>Buyers</b> should:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– better <b>clarify their objectives</b> for coaching and base selection criteria and processes on these objectives; and</li> <li>– <b>upgrade their knowledge</b> of coaching—through study and/or direct experience working with a coach.</li> </ul>
<b>Coaches</b> should:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– provide a <b>more complete picture</b> of their areas of expertise, model and its application, and experience and track record in coaching; and</li> <li>– <b>be more honest and transparent</b> in describing the scope of their experience, potential fit with specific engagements and an organisation, and outcomes achieved (including less successful cases).</li> </ul>
<b>Suppliers</b> of coaching should:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– <b>be more clear and transparent</b> about their USPs and how they add value, provide more in-depth information on each coach and how they select, train, develop, evaluate, and monitor their coaches; and</li> <li>– take a more proactive approach to <b>educating buyers</b> on coaching, drawing on their experience across organisations.</li> </ul>
<b>Intermediaries</b> should:	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>– focus more on <b>working together on behalf of stakeholders</b>, and working towards greater alignment of standards that are linked to organisations' needs. (Views on working together covered a wide range from one professional body to better alignment among existing bodies.);</li> <li>– <b>communicate more proactively, clearly</b> and openly about programmes and schemes in ways that are relevant to buyers faced with selection decisions;</li> <li>– <b>collaborate more</b>, compete less—on all matters, including standards; and</li> <li>– offer relevant, <b>practical education and tools</b> for buyers.</li> </ul>

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*Appendix 3 includes a more detailed listing of the changes they advocate and the relative degree of support for these.*

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In addition, coaches and buyers recommended other important ways to improve coach selection:

	Recommended by BUYERS	Recommended by COACHES
<b>Buyers</b> should:	– <b>continuously improve</b> their approaches to selection.	– take a more rigorous, <b>qualitative and personal</b> approach to getting to know coaches during selection and once engaged; and – use <b>sample coaching sessions</b> during the selection process (rarely described as including observers).
<b>Coaches</b> should:	No further recommendations.	– <b>invest more</b> in building relationships with buyers and <b>assisting them with selection</b> and other aspects of coaching.
<b>Suppliers of coaching</b> should:	– build <b>stronger relationships</b> with buying organisations	– <b>invest</b> in what are claimed to be elements of their USPs: the quality of their coaches and the breadth of their coaching pool.
<b>Training and accrediting organisations</b> should:	No further recommendations.	– keep a <b>sharp eye on the quality</b> of their programmes, candidates and alumni; – <b>in lieu of recommendations</b> , a noticeable set of coaches expressed <b>negative views</b> , or uncertainty, about the potential value of these organisations in improving coach selection; and – <b>promote</b> their coaches to buyers.

## Observations

### Transparency among Stakeholders

There is a clear message in these recommendations about the need to improve stakeholder management. Players in this market are asking one another to stay closer to their stakeholders' concerns and be clearer about how they add value to those on whose behalf they work.

For example, coaches, noting the negative trend of commoditisation of coaching, would like to be treated by buyers as stakeholders or partners in coaching. And buyers would like training and accreditation organisations to treat them like stakeholders, if not customers.

Within this theme of stakeholder management there are also many calls for greater transparency— among all parties in the market. Buyers, for example, have stated a need for greater transparency from coaches, and coaches' comments reflect requests to fellow coaches to be more transparent than they are currently. Both would like intermediary organisations to be more transparent about their agendas and programmes.

The frequency of comments on the need for greater transparency is intriguing. After all, an effective coaching relationship requires a high degree of transparency between the coach and coachee.

## Trade-off between Greater Rigour and High-Touch?

The more rigorous due diligence recommended by coaches seems at odds with their complaints about onerous coach selection processes. Clearly, coaches are not in favour of buyers requesting more documentation.

Instead, in encouraging rigour, coaches are asking buyers to be more thoughtful with their questions, and more personal in their approaches. If buyers followed their and coaches' recommendations that buyers learn more about coaching, they would be better equipped to be more discerning and challenging in meaningful ways in 1:1 selection discussions.

Rigour and high-touch do not appear to be mutually exclusive. Their compatibility is evident in some coaches' comments about selection processes they considered demanding as well as positive influences on their interest in working with buying organisations.

## Implications for the Market

What are the potential effects of the changes and issues reported by buyers and coaches? In this section we highlight:

- next steps planned by buyers;
- knock-on effects of changes in selection and market trends; and
- a recent—and refreshing—set of predictions about the UK coaching market published during the timeframe of this study.

### Next Steps for Buyers

Half of the 40 buyers in this survey reported that they will continue with their current approaches to selection, with some indicating satisfaction with changes they have already made. The changes planned by other buyers reflect priorities such as:

- greater consistency of both the use of coaching and the selection of coaches through means such as more centralisation, use of a common framework for coaching, and use of a code of practice;
- review of suppliers and identification of preferred suppliers; and
- more rigorous selection.

Among those considering changes, 15% of buyers also reported that they are considering using an assessment centre, as noted earlier in this report.

### Knock-on-Effects

It is unclear whether these potential changes noted above by buying organisations will address the many issues raised by buyers and coaches in this survey. Coaches have made it clear that buyers can achieve far more than the identification of an approved set of coaches through their selection processes.

Buyers can also achieve valuable outcomes such as those mentioned in these quotes from coaches:

*I think I have developed **more positive relationships** with organisations when I have gone through a robust procedure.*

*The more rigorous the process the **more likely I am to want to work** for that organisation or to speak positively about them.*

*I value working for an organisation who understands my coaching framework, how effective it can be and how to match me to achieve the best results.*

On the other hand, as the selection of quotes below suggests, well-intentioned changes in selection processes could undermine coach selection and coaching even further. In these quotes, '(B)' refers to a comment from a buyer respondent; '(C)' refers to a comment from a coach respondent. The following are already happening, or likely to happen:

### Less Insight into Coaches:

*More paperwork/ and ill thought through application forms that do not help the coach demonstrate in many instances their skills. (C)*

*Rarely have I felt I have had an opportunity to demonstrate my capability at its best. (C)*

*Coaches are also becoming assessment savvy as there are people selling standardised coach selection processes. (C)*

*It has become too process-driven. You can't assess a good coach through play-acting. (B)*

*It is now possible to attend a course on passing an assessment centre! (C)*

### Paying a Price for 'Short Termism':

*Procurement involved in tenders and negotiations driving down costs, shrinking programmes and diminishing effectiveness. (C)*

*I see too many organisations select on the basis of cost rather than effectiveness or ROI and choosing cheap coaches and later saying coaching is not effective. (C)*

*Increasing pressure of organisations to achieve better value, which equals cheap coaching and therefore jeopardises the quality of coaching. (C)*

### Process Pendulum Swings Too Far:

*A significant barrier to deployment of coaches in an organisation by virtue of costly, slow and inexpert methods of procuring which make a service already seen as costly seem ludicrously expensive since once these selection methods have been run there isn't much take up of coaching...this alienates the organisation particularly the very senior people who would usually be the intended recipients. (C)*

*Becoming more of a sales process and a business rather than being about the individual and their development. (B)*

## The Pitfalls of Outsourcing:

*There is too little input from the organisation who hand off to a third party. (C)*

*One or two coaching organisations doing the selection process for a company limiting the styles and experience used. (C)*

*What would be useful is feedback in selection from someone who knows what they are talking about, i.e. an experienced, knowledgeable, qualified coach. But feedback from a third party so-called 'coaching expert' hired by the organisation, whose knowledge and understanding of coaching is in fact rudimentary, is a complete waste of time. (C)*

## Are Some Coaches Dropping Out?:

*Many coaches are turned off by the rigorous and potentially lengthy process and may choose not to get involved. However this also works as an effective filter too. (B)*

*Trying to remove the way the coach builds rapport from the process means that you could end up with highly qualified coaches who are good at assessment centres but not great at really contacting the client...It means that many excellent coaches may not apply. (C)*

*Possibly over engineering things and maybe putting good coaches off from applying. (B)*

## Predictions for the 2020 UK Coaching Market

Thinking ahead to other knock-on effects, consider some of the tongue-in-cheek predictions made by colleague Phil Hayes of Management Futures for the UK market in 2020:

- MUCC—the Mondo Universal Coaching Conglomerate—will be firmly in charge;
- an entry level coaching qualification requires seven years to complete but there are not enough courses to meet demand as no-one is deemed qualified enough by MUCC to teach them; and
- coaches spend on average six months a year on professional development and three more on proving they are getting it.

Beware—as the proverb advises—many a true word is spoken in jest. The wisdom of Phil's predictions is evident in the comments made by buyers and coaches alike in this survey.

## Our Closing Views

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In closing, this section addresses:

- the challenges in coach selection; and
- recommendations on a way forward.

## The Challenges in Coach Selection

We hope this survey stimulates more discussion of challenges such as:

- the persistence of evaluation as a top issue in coaching, and how this may affect selection; and
- the development of approaches to selection that consider the inevitable tensions between the demands of buying organisations and the nature of executive coaching.

## Evaluation of Coaching and Selection of Coaches

Is it that there is a real lack of confidence in the value of coaching or the quality of coaches? Or is it that both evaluation of coaching and coach selection have become 'divorced' from the effectiveness of coaching?

Neither—we believe it is about the difficulties of selection and evaluation rather than doubts about the added value or quality of coaching.

Some of buyers' concerns about coach selection would likely be addressed if evaluation of coaching were not the conundrum it apparently still is for both buyers and coaches. Buyers might be less apprehensive when buying coaching services if:

- there were a more extensive, user-friendly track record in the coaching literature of the effectiveness of coaching; and
- buyers and coaches implemented practical ways of evaluating coaching engagements more regularly.

With greater information on the effectiveness of coaching, buyers would at least know they are buying 'something that works'. They might also be better prepared to:

- challenge repeated demands within their organisations for proof of ROI;
- accept that the outcomes of a developmental relationship are neither predictable with any degree of certainty, nor measurable using quantitative metrics; and
- discount overheated rhetorical claims about the ubiquity of 'dangerous' coaches that whip up the froth of fear-based buying.

In turn, buyers might rethink their selection processes from a position of higher confidence. In the words of one coach respondent, a top issue in

coaching is *'getting away from a culture of fear and the commoditisation and measurement of coaching'*.

## Developing Approaches that Fit Buying Organisations and Coaching

Executive coaching is at a crossroads. It may commoditise even further, or recover some of the individualised focus it was intended to bring to executive development.

Executive coaching is a practice that can never be contained and controlled (Armstrong, Matthews & McFarlane, 2005). It is both orderly (in that it has structure and boundaries) and disorderly (like any investment in development, it can never be fully contained or measured).

Rather than being seen as a something to control, executive coaching must be seen as providing individuals (coachees) with an opportunity to explore their thoughts and actions, change frames and behaviours, nurture key relationships, and build shared meaning in their organisations. The building of shared meaning (the *raison d'être* of all organisations) cannot be structured or formalised—not in the workplace, not at home, and not in coaching.

The 'quality' of being an effective coach is as irreducible as that of being a good manager; it is principally a function of who the coach is rather than the qualifications and accreditations that have been earned. And all one can say about a coach is that he or she was effective—for a particular coachee(s). It is, as one coach noted a matter of:

*'Fitting together and enabling a successful coaching relationship and is based on factors such as personality, objectives, styles and experience. All of these count but in different proportions on each occasion.'*

Coach selection should focus more on identifying meaningful indicators of success while taking steps to manage inevitable risks. Experience tells us that when a discipline such as executive coaching grows significantly there will always be those who seek to organise and control it at macro levels with systems and regulations and at micro levels by reducing it to simplistic prescriptions. But nothing in this infrastructure points to, let alone guarantees, the effectiveness of any individual coach. Rather, it ignores the needs of a dynamic market and appears to reflect, based on this survey, narrow, self-serving interests.

Instead of exaggerating risks or attempting to remove all risk, we need to find indicators that point to—rather than attempt to measure—the probability of successful outcomes before the coaching relationship forms. Assessment and evaluation can be hard to organise in any context, even when expected outcomes are quantifiable. But when applied to coach selection we believe they become a matter of intuition and judgement, not of process steps and quantitative metrics. This means that there are inherent risks in coach selection—as there are in coaching.

And that buyers need to exercise judgement and be prepared to manage such risks.

## Recommendations

There is a need for greater collaboration and exchange of 'best' practices across the market on such questions as:

### Areas for Collaboration

- buyers' understanding of coaching and their objectives for coaching;
- criteria for the selection process itself, e.g. that it should be valid, affordable and engaging;
- what can be learned about a coach during selection versus what may only become apparent over time through direct experience with a coach;
- what makes for an 'effective' coach, including the set of basic hygiene factors, e.g. a mix of a path of study and relevant experience;
- practical methods for coaches to provide this information without incurring excessive costs or time;
- what buyers need to know about a coach beyond hygiene factors in order to assess potential for effectiveness, i.e. the indicators;
- approaches—selection exercises, cases, activities, or discussions—that give buyers insights into these indicators;
- how buyers can build their knowledge of individual coaches—through direct experience with the coach and/or feedback from coachees—once they are working with coachees in that buyer's organisation;
- a set of post-selection feedback to coaches that is both manageable for buying organisations and useful for coaches;
- preparation of those who will be involved in selection, so their judgements have more credibility;
- how buying organisations can accumulate, store and share insights about a coach with organisational stakeholders in coaching such as HR Business Partners;
- whether external parties—brokers, consultants or large suppliers of coaching—can both come to know the many coaches they work with and convey this qualitative information to buying organisations during selection and/or matching processes; and
- practical approaches to evaluating coaching engagements and using evaluation results to inform future work with coaches and selection processes.

In addition to these suggestions for collaboration, we offer the following recommendations:

### Recommendations – Intermediaries

We endorse the recommendations made by both buyers and coaches to the intermediary organisations. Buyers and coaches have delivered a wake-up call to the organisations that develop and promote certification and accreditation schemes. They have asked them to:

- anticipate and respond to the needs of their stakeholders;
- keep a much sharper eye on the quality of the candidates they accept, pass and accredit; and
- focus externally, and communicate more clearly and openly about their programmes.

## Recommendations – Assessment Centres

We hope this report stimulates more discussion in the coaching community on this important development in coach selection. In particular, we believe the advocates of assessment centres should address the risk identified by coaches and buyers that such centres—intentionally or inadvertently—tend to select an inappropriately narrow range of coaches. In addition to this shortfall, buyers and coaches have identified a number of concerns about assessment centres that should be addressed.

## Recommendations – Buyers

Recognising the limited resources within many buying organisations, we, nonetheless, believe more buyers could consider practical steps such as:

- pilot coaching engagements, as suggested by buyers, in which buyers oversee a coach's first engagement with greater attention as a sponsor;
- building their relationships with individual coaches, with the understanding among all that this is for the purposes of greater knowledge of the coach, not business development;
- sharing their acquired knowledge about coaches more widely and efficiently with colleagues, e.g. HR Business Partners who may want to work with the coach in the future; and
- engaging their coaches in developing approaches to coach selection and managing coaching, and involving them in building a greater understanding of coaching within buying organisations.

We also suggest that buyers continue what they have done admirably thus far—take an 'open source' approach of sharing knowledge, stories and practices among their colleagues in other buying organisations.

## Recommendations – Coaches

For coaches, we endorse the recommendations made throughout the survey of being:

- more proactive in partnering with their stakeholders; *and*
- transparent in these partnerships.

In inviting coaches to join this survey, we hoped this report would stimulate their thinking on how they will participate in—and perhaps also influence—selection processes in buying organisations. In this survey coaches have criticised 'self-appointed experts' in coach selection, assessment centres and the layer that an external party puts between them and buying organisations. It may be that coaches simply resist any further competition or complexity in the crowded coaching market.

Nonetheless, these and other entrants to the market can identify a need among buyers and offer services that buyers cannot—or choose not to—perform internally. As in any market, these players in the market must differentiate their USPs—and deliver.

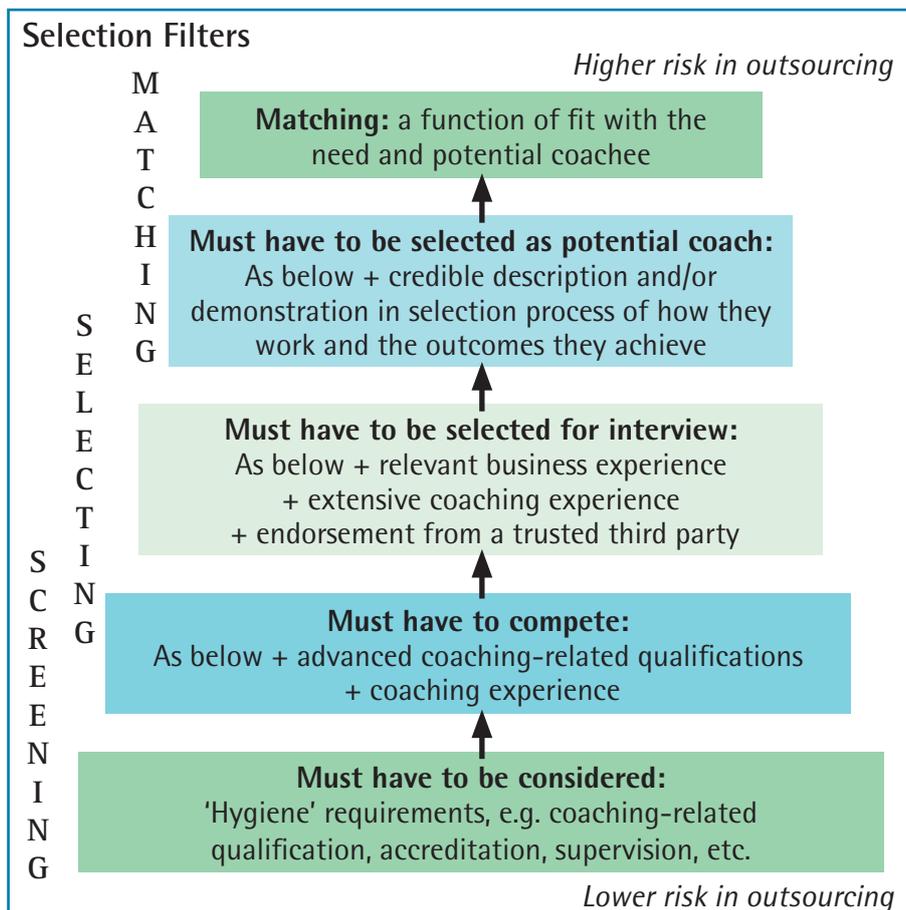
Some coaches have already been proactive in assisting buying organisations by advising on selection and other aspects of coaching. This dual role of coach and adviser may raise difficult issues for some coaches, hence our support of respondents' recommendations for transparency.

## Recommendations – Outsourcing

Buyers should carefully consider the potential tradeoffs in outsourcing steps in selection and in their overall management of coaching.

As discussed earlier, there are inevitable risks in coach selection. There may also be specific risks in outsourcing elements of coach selection. The survey confirms that:

- a knowledgeable **and** involved buyer is a key variable in the effectiveness of coach selection;
- a hierarchy of filters, illustrated below, is influencing coach selection; and
- buying organisations are increasingly turning to external parties for assistance as they seek more manageable ways to apply these filters along the path outlined below.



There are obvious caveats to the path outlined above:

- coach training has been defined so as to include different paths into coaching, e.g. experience as a psychologist; and
- it will always be possible to short-cut this hierarchy, e.g. by the 'right' referral.

Both buyers and coaches have identified potential factors that point to risks in the outsourcing of elements of coach selection:

- both sets of respondents believe that many organisations still need to clarify their purposes for using coaching and criteria for coach selection;
- even if these purposes and criteria were well defined and understood throughout buying organisations, it may be difficult for buyers to transfer this contextual understanding to external parties; and
- neither buyers nor coaches expressed confidence that external parties fully understand the unique backgrounds of the coaches with whom they work.

For the purposes of this discussion, the term 'transfer risk' refers to potential barriers to building and sharing this knowledge of organisational context and coaches between buying organisations and external parties.

At the screening stage as outlined above, when buyers are mostly concerned with verifying hygiene factors such as accreditations, the transfer risk level appears to be relatively low. For example, in a screening process, the coach may provide basic information such as confirmation of accreditations or frequency and method of supervision directly to the buyer or an external party.

On the other hand, later stages such as selection and matching require a higher level of understanding of the organisation's context for coaching as well as detailed knowledge of individual coaches and coachees. As shown in the chart above, transfer risk may increase as external parties become involved in these later stages.

In addition to transfer risk, organisations should consider the impact of the selection process on coaches' perceptions of the buying organisation. Coach selection processes, based on this survey, appear to have the potential to positively impact a coach's engagement with a buying organisation and its executives.

## Appendices

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[Appendix 1: Changes in Coach Selection: Improvements or Setbacks?](#)

[Appendix 2: Buyer and Coach Input on Assessment Centres](#)

[Appendix 3: Buyers and Coaches Offer Recommendations for Improvements](#)

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## Appendix 1: Changes in Coach Selection: Improvements or Setbacks?

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This Appendix presents the main themes in the comments from coaches on positive and negative changes observed in the market and drivers of these developments. Figures in parentheses indicate the prevalence of the theme within the total set of comments made. Statements in italics provide a representative sample of quotes for each theme.

### Positive Changes Noted by Coaches

Higher **awareness** and **understanding** of coaching among buyers, end users and the market in general (30% of comments):

- *HR buyers are moving from suspicious gatekeepers to expert buyers.*
- *More savvy HR and business people doing selection.*
- *Greater level of professionalism from buyers and truly partnering with their coaches.*
- *Greater clarity about how the organisation wishes to use coaching.*

Greater **rigour** in selection and awareness of **importance** of selection (29% of comments):

- *There is more of it (selection) and it's more rigorous.*
- *More thorough and better supervised.*
- *Organisations are, mostly, getting more choosy and asking more questions.*
- *There are more pertinent questions asked.*

Greater **awareness of specific elements** of selection (23% of comments):

- *Clients are generally more aware of the need for coaches to have training and experience and supervision.*
- *Greater emphasis on demonstration and evaluation of results.*
- *Organisations understand and value accreditation, but they are still confused.*

**Not seen positive** changes (16% of comments)

- *It's gone downhill; egos are playing more of a part in the coaching profession at the expense of coaching.*

## Negative Changes Noted by Coaches

Heavy focus on **process, cost reduction and procurement** procedures (41% of comments):

- *Too many buyers treat coaches as commodities and make selection decisions based on price, not added value.*
- *Purchasing departments making initial selection by paper exercise and ruling out experience levels as purchasers have no understanding of the coach's area of expertise.*
- *Pedantic assessment of the wrong factors.*
- *A tendency to go too far in trying to pre-define a universal coach profile that will suit all needs.*
- *Some processes can be overly complex and regimented.*
- *Some organisations are over complicating selection processes to appear rigorous and to protect themselves from challenge from the business.*
- *Can be slightly obsessive, over engineered, narrow minded and play safe.*

**Supply**-related (16% of comments):

- *Too many coaches in the market; variability of quality.*
- *More and more coaches and not always good ones.*
- *Favouring of large organisations over small, independent suppliers.*
- *Choosing large, well known brands.*

**Buyer awareness** of coaching still needing improvement (15% of comments):

- *A lot of buyers still do not understand the different accreditation levels.*
- *Buyers selecting coaches on flawed criteria thus negating the whole process.*
- *Organisations not really understanding what they are doing or what they are trying to achieve.*

**External parties and intermediaries** (14% of comments):

- *Too much effort from the coaching associations going into qualifications rather than experience and effectiveness of the coach.*
- *Selection processes are too often swayed by particular schools of coaching and fads.*
- *Struggle for supremacy of various emerging professional bodies.*

## Appendix 2: Buyer and Coach Input on Assessment Centres

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This Appendix provides a summary of the range of issues noted by buyers and coaches on assessment centres, and the relative mix of positive and negative views within their input. Based on a review of responses to the relevant questions in the survey we indicate, where possible, whether the comment is based on direct experience with assessment centres. The survey did not include questions on the specific assessment centres in which coaches had participated or buyers had implemented.

### Buyers' Positive Input on Assessment Centres

#### Based on Experience with Assessment Centres

- *Gives a consistent approach and a pool of coaches to select.*
- *Coaches have an opportunity to 'bring to life' their CV and application form and demonstrate their coaching ability.*
- *An opportunity to view style that we have found is hugely beneficial when it comes to a 'coach match' process.*

#### No Experience with Assessment Centres

- *Useful to be able to draw data and conclusions from a broader range of assessment tools, to see how effective the coach is in the role of both coach and coachee (through supervision session), valuable to see their coaching style and model in practice.*
- *Firsthand experience of a coach in practice – high confidence in an unbiased assessment of level of proficiency/skill (and whether the style will be a good fit for my company).*
- *Allow us to get through a number of potential candidates at one time.*
- *Efficient and consistent.*
- *It would give you a guaranteed standard.*

### Buyers' Concerns about Assessment Centres

#### Based on Experience with Assessment Centres

- *Can screen out some 'different' types of coaching experience which would benefit the business.*
- *Many coaches are turned off by the rigorous and potentially lengthy process and may choose not to get involved. However this also works as an effective filter too.*

- *Partnering with one particular coaching body to help manage coaching assessments may lead to an image of the organisation's coaching style/approach that isn't necessarily right or useful.*
- *The one 'niggle' is do we see the best of the coach in this situation? As with all assessment centres they can be very intimidating and may provide interference that stops the coach being the best they can be.*

## No Experience with Assessment Centres

- *Too much of a beauty parade.*
- *Could be seen as burdensome for the coach and for really good coaches that may turn them off the opportunity.*
- *Difficulty of assessing in an artificial environment, creates barriers to collaboration potentially.*
- *Time consuming for an uncertain outcome.*
- *A bit too 'cookie cutter'.*
- *Adds another level of complexity. Would have to ensure the centre is up to par and knows/understands our needs.*
- *Cost; time-consuming. Don't provide a good ROI.*

## Coaches' Positive Input on Assessment Centres

### Based on Experience with Assessment Centres

- *There is no doubt that a well run assessment centre can provide insight.*
- *There are times that experience of coaching and supervision as well as sound and demonstrable commercial and leadership experience matter rather than just a Masters Degree in Coaching. Coaching Panels and assessment centres aid this weeding out process in my experience.*

### Assessment Centre Experience Unclear

- *A well run selection centre providing focused feedback on my coaching approach can inspire me to want to work with that client and the converse can also be true.*

## Coaches' Concerns about Assessment Centres

### Based on Experience with Assessment Centres

- *I'm not sure they measure what they should be measuring.*
- *In my experience coach assessment centres rarely follow BPS best practice guidelines on fair selection, tend to take a one size fits all approach, and are often conducted by assessors with less experience than the coach.*
- *Assessment centres seem to look for coaching that fits a predetermined model. Ok for performance coaching; not much use for anything a bit deeper.*
- *Assessment centres are a great way to dumb down coaching to its lowest common denominator.*
- *It is now possible to attend a course on passing an assessment centre!*
- *An assessment centre cannot do more than measure knowledge of process – it is too artificial.*
- *Development/assessment centres just give a baseline in the absence of any standards that the buying organisation is looking for.*

### No Experience with Assessment Centres

- *I have no faith that the current assessment processes of which I am aware are much other than cost driven and are rarely designed to understand the subtleties of coaching at its best.*
- *Where a coach has been through rigorous accreditation process by experts I am unconvinced that client assessment centres for coaches add any value.*
- *I would not trust an assessment centre to adequately screen coaches. Don't believe the knowledge is there to accurately select outstanding coaches from that process.*
- *Assessment centres, like exams, rarely enable people to do their best work, and only favour those who are good at assessment centres or exams.*
- *Assessment centres may be good but I would not participate in such a selection process unless paid to do so, due to the high level of investment. For this reason, I do not think it is a good selection process as it would 'weed out' the coaches whose time is most in demand.*
- *Regarding Assessment Centres – basically, who assesses the assessors? Are they all self appointed – those whom I know are!*

## Appendix 3: Buyers and Coaches Offer Recommendations for Improvements

This Appendix includes a more detailed listing of the solutions and comments offered by buyers and coaches. The percent figures indicate the prevalence of endorsements relative to the total set of comments received. The sample of italicised quotes provides views representative of the corresponding set of recommendations.

### Recommendations for Buyers

#### Buyers' Recommendations

- Be clearer about objectives of coaching, selection criteria, outcomes expected from specific programmes, and means of evaluating these (38% of comments);
- Focus on the quality of your selection process (26% of comments); and
- Continue to invest in your own education on coaching (10% of comments).
- *Have staff who know what they are talking about. Ideally have been coached and do coach.*
- *Have clearly defined and quantified selection criteria and be as open as possible about these. Be clear upfront about the selection process. Commit the appropriate time and resources to sharing knowledge and understanding of their organisation with the potential coach so that both parties can make an informed decision.*

#### Coaches' Recommendations

- Conduct a more thorough and qualitative due diligence on coaches, e.g. go beyond asking whether coach uses supervision to discussing how the coach uses supervision (30% of comments);
- Be more clear on objectives of coaching; use selection processes that are aligned with these; in support of this, continue to invest in own education on coaching, including taking up coaching or coach training and learning about the accreditation options (25% of comments);
- Improve selection processes by preparing selectors, involving line managers (other than in chemistry sessions to choose own coach), and seeking expertise in the market on selection (17% of comments); and
- Spend more time getting to know a wider range of coaches and coachees during selection and once engaged; stay close to coaching engagements, particularly during a coach's first assignment (14% of comments).

- *Understand the difference between a one weekend training programme and a proper diploma.*
- *Take a tight brief on what kind of coach(es) they require and interview coach(es) against this brief.*
- *Verify: supervision, references, membership of reputable professional organisation.*
- *Set up a clear and transparent process stating required competencies.*
- *Deal with coaches direct and build up a relationship with them.*
- *Invest more time meeting with prospective coaches*
- *Be clear about the purpose of coaching – that should impact selection.*
- *Understand what coaching is about from own experiences not just from books, articles or reports.*

## Recommendations for Coaches

### Buyers' Recommendations

- *Be more explicit and clear about results achieved with coachees, areas of expertise, model and its application, approach to evaluating success (52% of comments); and*
- *Be more honest about strengths and weaknesses as a coach, true limits of experience, including examples of less successful cases, and potential fit with the organisation and the work at hand (26% of comments).*
- *Be clear about their area of expertise. Like all consultants they do themselves a disservice when trying to be all things to all people.*
- *Be honest about what they can and cannot do.*
- *Provide detailed case studies – both positive and negative.*
- *Full transparency of capability to complete a particular coaching assignment. Don't go to an ear doctor if your knee hurts!*

### Coaches' Recommendations

- *Be more transparent about their USPs by explaining more clearly and openly what they will/can and will not/cannot do; how their model and style will add value (38% of comments);*
- *Provide more comprehensive information that is up to date, clearly presented and open for inspection (30% of comments); and*
- *Invest in relationships with buyers by assisting them with selection issues, engaging in their selection processes and advising on other aspects of coaching (15% of comments).*
- *Frame their approaches and track records in terms that the buyer can relate to.*
- *Ensure you are crystal clear about your core coaching principles and can articulate them clearly as well as demonstrate them.*

- *Total transparency in pitch.*
- *Be prepared.*
- *Inform their thinking about applications of coaching and process options.*
- *Don't go round the system, work with HR and procurement to help them make their process work.*

## Recommendations for Providers of Coaching Services

### Buyers' Recommendations

- Be clearer about their USPs and how they add value to the buyer: via more in-depth information on each coach; choice of coaches; how they select, train and develop their coaches; best practices; and expert advice (78% of comments); and
- Build a relationship by keeping in touch, knowing our business, our executives' needs (17% of comments).
- *Provide neutral advice and support.*
- *Educate your buyers on how coaches are trained and supported.*
- *Understand that organisational fit is sometimes more important than ideal coach on paper.*

### Coaches' Recommendations

- Be more proactive in partnering with buyers and educating them about coaching (27% of comments);
- Keep a high focus on quality of coaches including their results (19% of comments);
- Be more transparent about their offer (17% of comments);
- Offer a wide range of coaches (13% of comments); and
- Provide more qualitative, individualised information on coaches (12% of comments).
- *Help them to develop selection processes and be as impartial as possible in doing this.*
- *Know their coaches well, understand how to best match coaches to specific needs, not just provide a generic recommendation.*
- *Find the best coaches and check their track records.*
- *Make their own quality assessment criteria public.*

## Recommendations for Training and Accrediting Organisations

### Buyers' Recommendations

- Work together towards greater alignment of standards that are linked to what organisations need (43% of comments);
- Provide education and tools for buyers (21% of comments);
- Explain current schemes clearly so buyer can understand what each designation means in terms of a coach's competence (11% of comments); and
- Unsure of potential contribution or unfamiliar with organisations (11% of comments).
- *Clearly communicate the qualifications they provide and what level of competency and experience can be expected of a coach who has attained such qualifications.*
- *Make sure their accreditation process is robust.*
- *Ensure the accreditation process reflects what businesses need.*
- *Get their act together and cooperate rather than compete with one another.*

### Coaches' Recommendations

- Provide more education for buyers on coaching (21% of comments);
- Increase the quality standards of their training and accreditation schemes (17% of comments);
- Negative view or uncertain on the potential value of these organisations (13% of comments);
- Be more transparent about their programmes (13% of comments);
- Do more to address the issue of standards in coaching (12% of comments);
- Collaborate more with one another and with buyers (11% of comments); and
- Proactively recommend their coaches (10% of comments).
- *Work together and stop proliferating accreditation and credentialing systems, which undermines the profession and which I believe is driven by commercial or ego-based motives.*
- *Provide guidance to organisations.*
- *Nothing, each organisation seeks to make its certification primary, so all their input is suspect.*
- *Improve the accuracy and validity of their assessments.*
- *Clarify the whole training and accreditation area – it's a muddle at the moment.*
- *Be clear about the process of accreditation and assessment to achieve the accreditation.*

## Appendix 4: Profiles of Survey Respondents

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### Buyer Respondents

A total of 40 buyers of executive coaching services completed the survey questionnaire, of which 82.5% came from the private sector; 7.5% and 10%, respectively, came from the central/local government and not-for-profit sectors. When asked to define their roles, 33% of respondents mentioned Learning and Development, 25% mentioned HR and 15% mentioned Talent.

A significant majority of respondents (85%) are based in the UK, with almost half of these operating in Europe. The sample of buyers is involved in all or most aspects of the buying and use of executive coaching. Some 70% manage coaching services primarily through common frameworks; half of the buyer sample indicated that they also take a centralised approach to managing external executive coaching.

A majority (60%) of buying organisations have used executive coaching services for more than five years, while 28% have used such services for three to five years.

Use of coaching is widespread rather than confined to larger organisations, with 35% of buyers coming from organisations with more than 10,000 employees, 30% from organisations with 1,000–5,000 employees and 25% with fewer than 1,000 employees. Across all organisations, executive coaching is an investment targeted at the more senior level employees.

### Coach Respondents

With nearly 300 coaches providing details of their years of experience in coaching (defined as coaching for 40% or more of their time), our sample leans towards more experienced coaches:

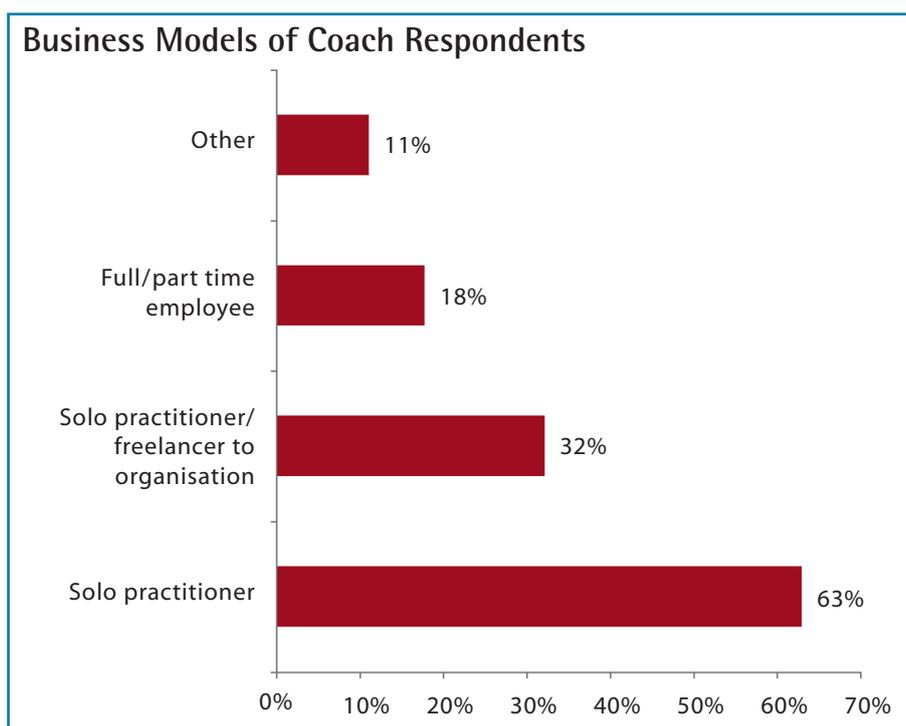
- At the high end of experience, nearly 40% with greater than eight years of practice;
- At the early end of experience, nearly 25% with less than three years of practice; and
- Nearly 20% with, respectively, either three to five years or six to eight years experience.

This enabled consideration of responses for selected questions according to years of experience:

- More experienced coaches reported having more qualifications:
  - A higher portion of the coaches with more than eight years experience hold a formal qualification in psychology, psychotherapy or counselling (49% of coaches with 8+ years vs. 39% of coaches with fewer than eight years experience);

- Coaches with six to eight years experience and those with more than eight years experience have a higher rate of accreditation with recognised coaching organisations (nearly 70% of this subset of coach respondents) than coaches with five or fewer years of experience (48%). (NB: recognised coaching organisation could include a not-for-profit professional body and/or a for-profit coaching organisation which trains and accredits coaches in a specific methodology).

The chart below summarises the business models in which coach respondents operate:



As shown above, two thirds of coach respondents are solo practitioners. One third of the total set of coaches, including those who are solo practitioners, work as freelance Associates with larger organisations. A much smaller group, 18% of all coach respondents work as full-time employees of an organisation other than their own businesses.

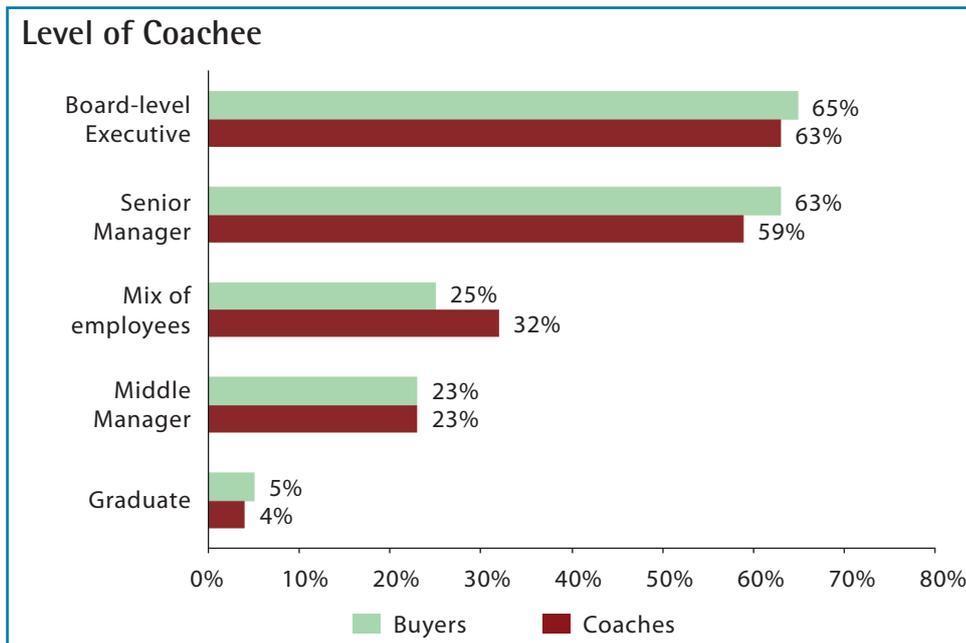
Four out of five coaches work principally in the UK, of which 20% also work in Europe. Fewer than 5% of the respondents work only in the USA.

A majority of coaches (58%) have an undergraduate degree or higher academic qualification. Some 70% have a coaching qualification, while 40% have a qualification in psychology or counselling.

And 60% have some form of coaching accreditation. Many coach respondents enjoy one or more memberships in professional organisations.

Although 71% of respondents work in the private sector, coaching practice is mostly spread across all sectors; only 23% of respondents said they work exclusively in the private sector.

As with buyers, coaches confirmed that their work is predominantly a senior executive level intervention as shown below:



Buyers reported using coaches that operate via different business models. For example, some 60% of buyers said they work with coaches employed full- or part-time with an organisation other than a business entity owned by the coach.

To a slightly lesser extent, buyers also work with coaches who are affiliated on a freelance basis with an organisation that provides executive coaching services (55% of buyers) and with solo practitioners (50% of buyers).

## Appendix 5: Research Methodology

The survey, conducted among buyers of coaching services and practising coaches, used on-line (Survey Monkey) structured questionnaires (one for buyers, one for coaches) with both forced response and open-ended questions. The survey questionnaires are provided to recipients of this report as separate documents.

Target respondents included:

- Buyers: from organisations currently buying external executive coaching services, and in roles overseeing coaching such as: Head of Talent, Head of Learning & Development, and HR Director; and
- Executive coaches: practising as a coach, primarily in the UK, for more than 40% of their time (working full- or part-time).

Invitations to participate in the survey were made through: the survey sponsors' professional networks; and coaching organisations including AC UK, APECS, EMCC, ICF and the Special Group in Coaching Psychology of the BPS. The online survey was open for participation during March and April 2010.

A total of 40 buyers and 291 coaches responded to the questionnaires (see Appendix 4). In both surveys, we observed an occasional decline in the completion rate of questions as the survey progressed. Responses have been reported as a percentage of total responses completed per question for forced choice questions.

Although the coach sample was self-selecting, it is large enough to minimise bias. As noted in the summary of Respondent Profiles, participating coaches are well distributed across a spectrum of experience, ranging from relatively new entrants (three or fewer years) to very experienced coaches (eight years or more).

We presume there are some direct buyer-supplier relationships within the survey sample group, although we did not target these relationships in promoting the survey. Such relationships were not visible from the respondent data.

For the purposes of focusing on the selection of external coaches and attracting a set of experienced coaches to the survey, we have intentionally avoided further definitions of parameters of coaching such as: type of coaching (e.g. developmental or behavioural); type of engagements (e.g. length, structure, process); or organisational context of coaching (e.g. high potential programme). This approach allowed a deeper focus on the changes and issues in coach selection.

The survey questionnaires used the following terms:

- 'Buying organisation': the organisation which employs the coachee, e.g. ABC Bank;
- 'Buyer': the member(s) of HR, Talent Management or other team within the buying organisation that oversee coaching, e.g. Head of L&D at ABC Bank, Head of Trading Desk at ABC Bank; and
- 'Client/end user': the coachee who works for the buying organisation.

The survey questionnaire referred to selection as the initial step taken by the buying organisation to source, identify and qualify potential coaches. We requested that respondents avoid references to matching of coaches to specific coachees. Where open-ended text comments obviously referred to matching of a specific coach to a specific coachee, instead of the preceding selection by the buying organisation, we have limited the use of such comments in our analysis.

For the purposes of defining different entities in the coaching market, we have distinguished among the following:

- Intermediaries: professional organisations in the field of coaching and organisations that offer qualification and accreditation schemes; typically membership and not-for-profit organisations;
- External parties: generally for-profit organisations that provide services to buying organisations such as: consultancy; coach broker services; and design and management of coach selection processes including but not limited to assessment centres; and
- Suppliers or providers: entities offering coaching to buying organisations.

In working with open-ended responses a coding process was used consistent with the approach described by Robson (Robson, 2002). Initial themes were identified based on a review of the set of comments obtained for each question. Responses were coded into these themes with notation of the sub-themes and the continuum of sub-themes. The number and definition of themes was elaborated to account for the range of content observed in the full set of responses, and the coding modified to reflect this.

As many participants, particularly coaches, made multiple points in a single open-ended response, their responses were split into comments containing each discrete point. The prevalence of themes and sub-themes has been noted as a percentage of total comments received.

Questions on the survey may be directed to [survey@carolbraddick.com](mailto:survey@carolbraddick.com)

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