

2022

How May Executive Coaches Advance Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Organizations?

Anne McCafferty

Thomas Jefferson University, anne.mccafferty@students.jefferson.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://jdc.jefferson.edu/diss_masters



Part of the [Race and Ethnicity Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

McCafferty, Anne, "How May Executive Coaches Advance Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in Organizations?" (2022). *Full-Text Theses & Dissertations*. 30.

https://jdc.jefferson.edu/diss_masters/30

This Article is brought to you for free and open access by the Jefferson Digital Commons. The Jefferson Digital Commons is a service of Thomas Jefferson University's [Center for Teaching and Learning \(CTL\)](#). The Commons is a showcase for Jefferson books and journals, peer-reviewed scholarly publications, unique historical collections from the University archives, and teaching tools. The Jefferson Digital Commons allows researchers and interested readers anywhere in the world to learn about and keep up to date with Jefferson scholarship. This article has been accepted for inclusion in Full-Text Theses & Dissertations by an authorized administrator of the Jefferson Digital Commons. For more information, please contact: JeffersonDigitalCommons@jefferson.edu.

HOW MAY EXECUTIVE COACHES ADVANCE DIVERSITY,

EQUITY, AND INCLUSION IN ORGANIZATIONS?

By

Anne McCafferty

A dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment
of the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Management
in
Strategic Leadership

at

THOMAS JEFFERSON UNIVERSITY

2022

HOW MAY EXECUTIVE COACHES ADVANCE DIVERSITY,
EQUITY, AND INCLUSION IN ORGANIZATIONS?

Anne McCafferty

Doctoral Dissertation Committee Approval:

DocuSigned by:

John Pourdehnad

B9003FB4C24242E...

John Pourdehnad, PhD, Chairperson

DocuSigned by:

Dominick Volini

446D40C997D24DB...

Dominick Volini, PhD, Internal Reader

DocuSigned by:

Rume Joy Azikiwe-Oyeyemi

D3199690BD7E4F8

Rume Joy Azikiwe-Oyeyemi, D. Mgt, External Reader

Table of Contents

ABSTRACT	7
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS	8
CHAPTER 1	10
INTRODUCTION	10
Background	11
Problem Statement	13
Purpose of the Study	14
Research Questions	14
Theoretical Framework	15
Nature of the Study	16
Definitions	17
Assumptions	18
Scope and Delimitations	18
Limitations	19
Significance	20
Summary	21
CHAPTER 2	23
LITERATURE REVIEW	23
Conceptual Framework	24
Literature Review	29
Executive Coaching	29
History of Executive Coaching	29
Definitions of Executive Coaching	30
Effectiveness of Executive Coaches	32
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Corporate Sector	35
Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Culture Defined	37
The Intersection of Executive Coaching and DEI	43
Summary	47
CHAPTER 3	51
RESEARCH METHOD AND DESIGN	51
Introduction	51
Role of the Researcher	52
Methodology	53
Procedures For Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection	54
Recruitment and Participation	54
Data Collection	55
Surveys	55
Semi-Structured Interviews	57
Data Analysis Plan	59
Open Coding	60
Axial Coding	60
Selective Coding	61
Memo Writing	62
Trustworthiness	62
Credibility	62
Dependability	63
Transferability	64
Confirmability	65

Ethical Procedures	65
Summary	67
CHAPTER FOUR	68
FINDINGS	68
Overview.....	68
Demographics	68
Data Analysis	69
Open Coding	70
Surveys	70
Interviews	71
Axial Coding.....	71
Surveys	71
Interviews	72
Selective Coding	72
Results.....	73
Theme 1: Increased Interest in DEI Must be Coupled with Implementation.....	75
Theme 2: Focus on Building Relationships and Personalizing Trainings.....	77
Theme 3: Integrate DEI with Both Established Values and the Business Plan Going Forward.....	79
Theme 4: Provide Support to People of Color	80
Theme 5: DEI Training Requires an Outside Perspective.....	81
Category 2: Executive Coaches Must Incorporate Diverse Tools and Methods in DEI Trainings	82
Theme 6: Examine Unconscious Bias.....	83
Theme 7: A Variety of Tools and Personalized Trainings are Most Effective	84
Summary	85
CHAPTER 5	86
DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS	86
Introduction.....	86
Interpretation of Findings	86
Strategies for Effective DEI.....	86
Executive Coaches Must Incorporate Diverse Tools and Methods in DEI Trainings	89
Limitations of the Study.....	90
Recommendations.....	90
Implications.....	91
Conclusion	91
REFERENCES	93
Appendix A: Memos	101

List of Tables

Table 1. Demographics of Survey Respondents	69
Table 2. Demographics of Interviewees	69
Table 3. Summary of Themes	74
Table 4. Summary of Themes for Category 1.....	75
Table 5. Summary of Themes for Category 2.....	83

List of Figures

Figure 1. Theory of Generative Interactions	26
Figure 2. Concept Map	73

ABSTRACT

Following the increased domestic focus on systemic racism throughout the United States due to various events in 2020, there has been a strong shift towards organizations focusing on how to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) initiatives. The purpose of the current study was to address the how coaches may ameliorate the lack of focus on DEI initiatives within the corporate world. The overarching research question for this study was, How may executive coaches advance the development of diversity, equity, and inclusion in organizations? I utilized the theory of generative interactions to support the current research as well as a qualitative grounded theory methodology utilizing an online survey and semi-structured interviews as instruments to collect data. Sixteen participants completed surveys, and four participants completed semi-structured interviews. Two categories, strategies for effective DEI and the need to incorporate diverse tools and methods in trainings, emerged from the data, including seven total themes. The five themes under theme 1 were as follows: (a) increased interest in DEI must be coupled with implementation, (b) focus on building relationships and personalizing trainings, (c) integrate DEI with both established values and the business plan going forward, (d) provide support to People of Color, and (e) DEI training requires an outside perspective. The themes under theme 2 included the following: (a) examine unconscious bias and (b) a variety of tools and personalized trainings are most effective. The resultant theory was that executive coaches can advance the development of DEI in organizations by sharing strategies for effective DEI and incorporating diverse tools and trainings into DEI education through drawing on unique teachings and perspectives. I recommend that future researchers address the effectiveness of DEI initiatives over time, the concern of unconscious bias, and the interaction between corporate value structures and DEI.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people start the story of a successful journey by saying, “No one believed in me, but I proved them wrong.” My success story is... Many people believed in me, and I proved them right!

I would like to acknowledge those people who pushed me forward. My eighth-grade teacher, Sister Mary Norberta, who decided my academic path for high school by placing me in advanced courses and two languages the first year. I went to see her to complain upon receiving my roster and she responded to my annoyance with, “You are just lazy, you can do it.” One of those language classes was Latin. I struggled in the class and hated Latin, yet that luck of being in Sister Christine’s class came to fruition 3 years later, as the guidance counselor for the school, Sister Christine, called me to her office to discuss why I was choosing a 2-year business school instead of a 4-year academic college program (side note: Archbishop Ryan’s class had north of 560 girls). She challenged me to dream bigger and said I was too smart to waste my talents. I was a lost teenager who did not really care, but I took her advice and went on to receive my BA. Later in life, a boyfriend encouraged me to go back for my MBA. He drove me to the GMATs and practiced the study guides with me. I was terrified, but did it, and received my MBA in 1995.

These academic achievements allowed for me to excel in my career, created financial stability for me, and drove me to always want more. I later finished an HR Certification at Wharton School of Business and next dreamed of this amazing Doctoral journey at Thomas Jefferson.

I would like to thank Sister Mary Norberta, Sister Christine, my friend, and my parents for always backing my decisions and saying you will be great. At Thomas Jefferson University, I would like to thank Dr. Larry Starr, who encouraged me to start this journey and provided a great foundation of learning. My committee, Dr. John Pourdehnad, Dr. Dominic

Volini, and one of my most admired classmates, Dr. Rume Joy Azikiwe-Oyeyemi, who championed this dissertation. Also, Professor Leslie Dinauer whom, without her instruction, I would never have been able to put one dissertation foot in front of the other!

Lastly, I thank my mom, my siblings and friends for their love and support. My sweet little boy Sammy (my dog) for all the hours Mommy was away from him. And finally, my two angels, my brother Johnny and, most specially, my dearly departed father who wanted this for me so bad and is not able to be here to see me achieve this great accomplishment. His constant encouragement of “Who’s better than our Anne” rings in my ears eternally. I did it
Pops: Dr. Anne McCafferty!

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

The year 2020 brought many challenges to organizations worldwide, including the COVID-19 pandemic and civil unrest due to racial inequality. These challenges, which continue today, create new and uncharted problems for CEOs regarding organizations' culture, policies, and workplace procedures. Because of my extensive background in human resources leadership, I pondered how organizations would deal with these challenges. Racial inequity is certainly not new, but for some, the George Floyd murder forced them to see the stark reality of the injustice and prejudice that was still alive in 2020. The current research focused on one of the challenges that surfaced in the year 2020, which is ongoing racial inequity; therefore, I based this research on the observation of a renewed and fierce outcry for diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in every workplace.

Diversity, equity, and inclusion are often treated as buzzwords or, to some employees, the annual harassment training they take each year for compliance. After the death of George Floyd, an unarmed black man who died during a police arrest that was found to be criminally conducted, the importance of understanding racism and bias became paramount. Immediately following this tragic event and the civil unrest that ensued, CEOs came to collective action, forming the group CEO ACTION FOR DIVERSITY & INCLUSION (see ceoaction.com). This group is the largest CEO-driven business commitment to advance diversity and inclusion in the workplace.

The mission of this alliance of CEOs is to create world-class diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplaces, which led me to question how organizations will rise to this challenge and assess, strategize, and execute DEI practices. The hiring of Chief Diversity Officers (CDOs) became a trend for many large companies, and every HR networking group I belonged to held sessions discussing DEI awareness. Not all companies can afford to add a

CDO, so DEI often would fall on the HR team to create and drive initiatives. As an HR leader, the thought of how I would begin to evaluate my organization's DEI practices and potential needs created a problem. In my previous experience, when the organization needed help with productivity issues or customer-focus strategies, the CEO would hire a consulting firm. When the CEO needed guidance with his/her leadership or team dynamics they would bring in an executive coach. The question of whether CEOs would employ consultants or executive coaches to help with the DEI practices of their organization led to this research.

Taylor (2019) discussed the three most important pillars of every CEO's focus: culture, people, and numbers. Taylor explained that a properly focused CEO concentrates on those three pillars and nothing else. That focus can be challenging, as CEOs are pulled from every side. Taylor suggested that an executive coach can help a CEO focus on what is important. A DEI workplace describes an organization's culture; therefore, I researched the demand for executive coaches or consultants in the DEI space and how they may help in advancing DEI in organizations.

Lukaszewski (1988) inferred that most people close to a CEO, or other senior leaders, might be intimidated to confront those leaders on behaviors that require coaching. By turning outward to an executive coach or consultant, executives can benefit from someone outside the company who can ask questions, provide advice, or give counsel. Because DEI is a sensitive subject matter, it can be difficult for organizations to ask questions about DEI with their employees or make assumptions. It may also be difficult for the CEO or senior leaders to identify the opportunities the organization may have in DEI practices. In this paper, I discuss the question of whether an external professional who specializes in DEI practice makes a difference to an organization's success in that space. I also include data to support the conclusion.

Background

Following the increased domestic focus on systemic racism throughout the United States due to various events in 2020, there has been a stronger shift towards organizations focusing on how to advance DEI initiatives. Many organizations feel the pressure from employees, customers, investors, and suppliers to focus on DEI. According to Cutter and Weber (2020), Chief Diversity Officers (CDOs) are currently sought after in the United States. They quote a 2019 study by Russell Reynolds, a leading executive search firm, stating, “roughly half of S&P 500 companies, employ a CDO and of that number 63% were hired in the last three years.” DEI-related jobs, according to the Society for Human Resources Management, have risen by 55% as of June 2020 (Maurer, 2020).

Frodsham (2020) stated that leaders should seek coaches with the experience and credibility to guide the exploration, awareness, and action planning of creating a DEI culture that will make a substantial difference. Frodsham also suggested that for the coach to be successful, they need to be able to ask questions and help reflect on the answers to the leaders’ assumptions, feelings, and beliefs on issues of race, gender, sexual orientation, and fairness. Frodsham explained the process of the coach and leader relationship in depth as it pertains to discussing DEI in the organization, illustrating my earlier stated opinion that external coaches are able to have more transparent and honest conversations than an internal coach. Frodsham explained that the focus of DEI coaching is to make the DEI imperative personal and actionable. Exploring the leaders’ core beliefs and assumptions regarding DEI in the organization is a brave task for an internal coach to pursue, especially with a CEO.

Clohesy et al. (2019) conducted research on the leverage effective consulting has on advancing DEI in philanthropy. The researchers described consulting partners as emerging as “servant leaders” in the DEI field. They stated their belief that consultants can interpret organizational aspirations and culture, customize DEI learning and action challenges, and then translate the learning into action plans and methodologies for others to adapt or follow.

The researchers articulated how some organizations and leaders are confused by the terminology and definitions of the DEI language while others intuitively accept the ideas and move forward with DEI initiatives. According to Clohesy et al. (2019), DEI consultants are becoming more prevalent in philanthropy and in the broader social sector.

The purpose of the current study was to analyze how executive coaches can help to advance DEI initiatives within organizations. Kampa-Kokesch (2001) researched the history of executive coaching, reporting that Tobias (1996) stated that the term “executive coaching” came into the business world in the late 1980s and was used because the term “coaching” sounded less threatening than other types of intervention descriptors. They also reported that Judge and Cowell (1997) stated the widespread adoption of executive coaching began around 1990 by consulting firms. High failure rates of executives in corporate America, around 50%, facilitated the need. Executive coaching, therefore, emerged in the 1990s as an intervention geared to specifically change the behavior of middle and senior-level managers. (Hogan et al., 1994)

According to Kampa-Kokesch (2001), after 1995, there was an increase in publications about executive coaching and the Professional and Personal Coaches Association. According to ICF, in 1995, professional coach Thomas Leonard started the International Coach Federation (ICF) as a nonprofit organization for fellow coaches to support each other and grow the profession. By May of 1996, there were more than 60 ICF Chapters worldwide. In 2020, the ICF celebrated its 25th anniversary year and includes six organizations under its umbrella. ICF is the largest organization of professionally trained coaches in the world, with membership in 140 countries.

Problem Statement

Throughout the spring and summer of 2020, systemic racism and inequality have been brought into sharper focus across the United States and, arguably, the world. Following this

civil unrest, CEOs formed the group CEO Action For Diversity & Inclusion, the largest CEO-driven business commitment to the advancement of diversity and inclusion in the workplace. According to Cutter and Weber (2020), CDOs are currently sought after in the United States. This highlights the shift towards recognizing the importance of diversity initiatives within many organizations. Researchers have suggested that by turning outward to an executive coach or consultant, executives can benefit from someone outside the company who can ask questions, provide advice, or give counsel (Lukaszewski, 1988). As DEI is a sensitive topic, executive coaches can help shift the focus of organizations towards DEI initiatives. I aimed to address the problem of a lack of focus on DEI initiatives within the corporate world by analyzing how executive coaches are able to advance the development of DEI within corporate organizations.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the current study was to address the how coaches may ameliorate the lack of focus on DEI initiatives within the corporate world. To achieve this, I analyzed the role executive coaches may play in advancing DEI initiatives within organizations. Specifically, I aimed to provide an analysis of the role executive coaches can play, as current literature has yet to analyze the rapid shift in demand for the assistance of executive coaches in DEI coaching. By seeking opinions and feedback from executive coaches, I measured how executive coaches can advance DEI and whether there is an increased demand for their services. I utilized classic grounded theory to analyze the prediction and explanation of behavioral processes regarding executive coaches and their role in advancing DEI initiatives within organizations.

Research Questions

There is a business imperative for organizations to provide a diverse, equitable, and inclusive workplace. CEOs and senior leaders are seeking resources to help guide this

important initiative. Before they invest in an executive coach as a resource, leaders want to know what role an executive coach will play within their business. The following research question guided the current study:

RQ: How may executive coaches advance the development of diversity, equity, and inclusion in organizations?

Theoretical Framework

I utilized the theory of generative interactions to support the current research.

Bernstein et al. (2020) utilized this theory to explain the transition from diversity to inclusion.

According to Bernstein et al.,

The Theory of Generative Interactions suggests that in order to facilitate inclusion, multiple types of exclusionary dynamics (self-segregation, communication apprehension, and stereotyping and stigmatizing) must be overcome through adaptive cognitive processing and skill development, and engagement in positive interactions must occur in order to facilitate inclusion that is created and sustained by contextually relevant sets of organizational practices.

Specifically, the theory of generative interactions can be utilized to analyze organizational practices that produce results through diverse interactions, which lead to positive inclusion and equity outcomes. Steps such as mixing diverse groups frequently over protracted time periods and enabling differing groups to have equal standing and insider status in contributing to success are examples of interactions that are generative in that they help to challenge the guiding principles of organizational culture and encourage people to reconsider elements taken for granted (Bernstein et al., 2020).

The theory of generative interactions has been utilized to analyze organizational practices which produce results based on diverse interactions, leading to inclusion and equity (Bernstein et al., 2020). In addition, the theory of generative interactions also suggests

specifications for positive interactions called adaptive contact, interaction frequency, and interaction quality, leading to more positive outcomes (Bernstein et al., 2020). This theory provides insight into specifications and organizational practices through which DEI practices can be advanced within an organization. As established by Bernstein et al., part of the challenge in addressing DEI issues is deeply rooted in previous negative behaviors and prejudices. It can be difficult for organizations to ask questions about DEI with their employees or make assumptions, as DEI is a sensitive subject. It may also be difficult for the CEO or senior leaders to identify the opportunities the organization may have in DEI practices. This theoretical framework helped to provide a blueprint for the way in which executive coaches can help CEOs to recognize any issues relating to DEI and the specific steps which can be taken to advance DEI within organizations.

The extent to which executive coaches can help develop diversity initiatives within organizations is yet to have been fully analyzed. The underlying logic for designing and conducting this study is to determine how executive coaches view their ability to advance generative interactions within an organization to advance DEI initiatives. The theory of generative interactions is directly related to the purpose of the current study, as it is used to analyze how specific practices can lead to an increase in positive DEI initiatives within an organization.

Nature of the Study

For the current study, I utilized a qualitative grounded theory methodology. According to Glaser (1992), classic grounded theory is a rigorous method of discovery that enables prediction and explanation of behavioral processes. Glaser also discussed how this method was originally developed in the field of sociology but has been found to offer all disciplines readily understandable, relevant, and useful perspectives on behavior (Glaser, 1992). A classic grounded theory is also described as emergent. The concepts and theory

emerge from the readings of raw data to derive concepts, themes, or a model through interpretations made from the raw data by the researcher (Thomas, 2006).

I utilized the grounded theory methodology in the current study because, as described by Nathaniel (2021), the grounded theory provides a “substantiated explanation of some facet of the social world depicted through connected concepts that create a tentative hypothesis, which further interweaves to form a theory.” Further, “a grounded theorist approaches data gathering with a curiosity and openness” (Nathaniel, 2021). This methodology allowed me to come to the best conclusion to the research question by obtaining the opinions and experience of practitioners. This may not be an exact science, but I was able to produce and explore a strong theory at the end of the data analysis process.

Definitions

. There are a number of important terms which are regularly referenced throughout the current study. These are the terms upon which the current study is based. Definitions of these critical terms are as follows.

Diversity- diversity refers to the similarities and differences among individuals accounting for all aspects of their personality and individual identity. Some examples are age, disability, ethnicity, family status, sex, gender, race, religion, and sexual orientation.

Executive Coaching- A helping relationship formed between a client who has managerial authority and responsibility in an organization and the coach (Kilburg, 2000).

Equality- equity in the workplace refers to fair treatment in access, opportunity, and advancement for all individuals.

Inclusion- Inclusion describes the extent to which each person in the organization feels welcomed, respected, supported, and valued as a team member. SHRM quoted Verna Myers, who stated, “Diversity is being invited to the party. Inclusion is being asked to dance.”

Assumptions

An assumption is a self-evident truth. During the course of this qualitative study, I made some assumptions. It was assumed that all interview and survey participants were not deceptive with their interview answers, and that the participants answered questions honestly and to the best of their ability. The participants solicited to take part in the study were selected from the FCC (Forbes Coaches Council) to ensure that each participant had the level of experience necessary to answer the questions related to the role executive coaches can play in advancing DEI initiatives within organizations. Therefore, I assumed that participants would answer all questions honestly and to the best of their ability, as they have experience in the field pertaining to the questions being asked and also have executive coaching experience.

Scope and Delimitations

Delimitations are decisions or choices made by the researcher to establish the limits of the study, which may affect the quality of the research conducted and presented. One delimitation of the current study is that I utilized a sample size with a maximum of 40 executive coach responses to the initial survey. In addition, I conducted semi-structured interviews with 4 executive coaches. I expected that a sample size of at least 20 respondents for the relevant surveys and semi-structured interviews would be sufficient to achieve data saturation. Data saturation is the point at which increasing the sample size further no longer results in new information or insights in the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Data saturation becomes apparent when information that participants share during interviews is repetitive in relation to previous interviews. Although I expected that the stated sample size would be sufficient to achieve data saturation, this sample size may still limit the generalizability of findings.

A second delimitation of the current study was that I limited data collection to executive coaches alone. This was an important decision for the current study, as the scope of

the current study was limited to the opinions and experiences of executive coaches. In delimiting the focus to executive coaches alone, however, I was not able to obtain the views and opinions of organizations in relation to the positive role executive coaches can play in advancing DEI initiatives. Future research could expand upon the delimitations of the current study by analyzing the views of organizations regarding how executive coaches have helped in improving DEI initiatives.

Limitations

During the research process, there are various limitations, which are outside factors different from delimitations above and which constrain the extend and generalizability of the research results. One of the limitations of the current study is the diverse range of participants who took part in this study. I collected raw data for this study from executive coaches who have a range of diverse expertise and demographics and come from various geographic locations. It was possible that this array of participants would lead to multiple theories and that it would take significant information gathering to create a grounded theory. The purpose of the grounded theory methodology is to develop one theory grounded in the data. Therefore, time was the greatest limitation for the current study, as the potential diversity of the responses may make it difficult to efficiently develop one grounded theory during the data analysis process.

Another limitation of the current study was unknown factors which could influence the data collected. There may be unknown factors regarding the participants' experiences and responses to the survey and interviews. Unknown factors could potentially lead to biased individual responses to the survey. Potential unknown biases may result in the development of a final grounded theory which is not devoid of biases.

Significance

Throughout the spring and summer of 2020, systemic racism and inequality became a stronger focus across the United States and, arguably, the world. While much of the discussion has centered on cases of police brutality against black individuals and other people of color, every industry and most leaders sought to discover how their organization, business, or leadership embraced the diversity of talent, the equitable treatment of all, and inclusiveness, which is referred to in this dissertation as DEI culture.

A recent webinar by Hunt Scanlon Media grounded this topic for me and further drove me to pursue this research journey. A guest speaker of this webinar, Sharawn Connors Tipton, Chief Diversity and Inclusion Officer for Micron Technology and an African American female executive, spoke of a similar incident of police brutality which occurred in 1991 to Rodney King, an unarmed black male who was brutally beaten by three white police officers in Los Angeles, California. She remembered the civil unrest and protests at that time as well but said there was a strong message in society that incidents of police brutality and civil unrest were not to be brought into the workplace. Even her father explained to her, “You do not talk about that at work.” Tipton remarked that, today, there is a demand to speak about it at work. She explained that the change in the demand for DEI focus in the workplace, in her experience, is being driven by the employees in her organization. Tipton lastly expressed how prior to George Floyd’s death, she needed to ask for time to discuss DEI initiatives and push her agenda; now, she explained the demand for her expertise and consultation for DEI strategies is significant.

Not all organizations have the budget to invest in a CDO. The CEO may also find that the current HR department may be capable of assessing the current DEI gaps and needs but may not be skilled in building a strategy that enhances the future state DEI culture. In these

situations, an external coach or consultant may be the answer to give the CEO or CHRO the help they need.

Summary

Throughout the spring and summer of 2020, systemic racism and inequality became a stronger focus across the United States and, arguably, the world. Following this civil unrest CEOs formed the group CEO Action For Diversity & Inclusion, the largest CEO-driven business commitment to the advancement of diversity and inclusion in the workplace. According to Cutter and Weber (2020), CDOs are currently sought after in the United States, highlighting the shift towards recognizing the importance of diversity initiatives within many organizations. Researchers have suggested that by turning outward to an executive coach or consultant, executives can benefit from someone outside the company who can ask questions, provide advice, or give counsel (Lukaszewski, 1988).

The purpose of the current study was to analyze how executive coaches can help to advance DEI initiatives within organizations. In the study, I explored a variety of ways in which executive coaches believe they can help to advance the development of DEI within organizations. I utilized a qualitative grounded theory as the chosen methodology, which allowed me to come to the best conclusion to the research question by obtaining the opinions and experience of practitioners. This may not be an exact science, but I was able to produce and explore a strong theory at the end of the data analysis process.

In Chapter 2, I discuss the review of prior relevant literature. The purpose of the literature review is to provide an analysis of prior literature and situate the current study within the context of existing literature. I discuss existing literature on the effectiveness of executive coaches to provide insight into how executive coaches can positively influence the outcomes within an organization. The importance of DEI culture and the intersection of

executive coaching and DEI culture is also analyzed to demonstrate how executive coaches can possibly help to advance DEI initiatives within organizations.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

This research centers on DEI initiatives implemented in the corporate sector, with a focus on the role of executive coaching. Prior literature has suggested that by turning outward to an executive coach or consultant, executives can benefit from someone outside the company who can ask questions, provide advice, or give counsel (Lukaszewski, 1988). The problem at the center of this research, however, is that there remains a lack of focus on DEI initiatives within the corporate world. To address this issue, the purpose of the current study was to understand how using executive coaches may address the lack of focus on DEI initiatives within the corporate world.

A review of existing literature relevant to the topic of this study is presented in this chapter. Sources for this review of existing research included books, research papers, dissertations, peer-reviewed journal articles, and business journals. The following keywords and phrases were used to find relevant research to include in this review: *executive coaching*, *history of executive coaching*, *definitions of executive coaching*, *effectiveness of executive coaches*, *DEI*, *DEI in the corporate sector*, *DEI culture*, *DEI definition*, and *the intersection of executive coaching and DEI*. The majority of publications in this review were written within the past 5 years to ensure they were relevant to the current research problem related to executive coaching and DEI; however, the intersect of both subjects is under-researched.

The conceptual framework is discussed in the first section of this chapter. Executive coaching is discussed thereafter, including subsections that address the history of executive coaching and definitions of executive coaching effectiveness of executive coaches. DEI are discussed thereafter in the context of the corporate sector, including a subsection that provides definitions of DEI culture. Finally, I discuss the intersection of executive coaching and DEI. I conclude the chapter with a summary.

Conceptual Framework

This study is rooted in the concepts and principles associated with the theory of generative interactions. Bernstein et al. (2020) developed the theory of generative interactions to explain the process through which organizations transition from diversity to inclusion. The theory was influenced by multiple disciplines, including social psychology, communication, sociology, and organizational studies. Principles of the theory of generative interactions suggest,

That in order to facilitate inclusion, multiple types of exclusionary dynamics (self-segregation, communication apprehension, and stereotyping and stigmatizing) must be overcome through adaptive cognitive processing and skill development, and engagement in positive interactions must occur in order to facilitate inclusion that is created and sustained by contextually relevant sets of organizational practices.

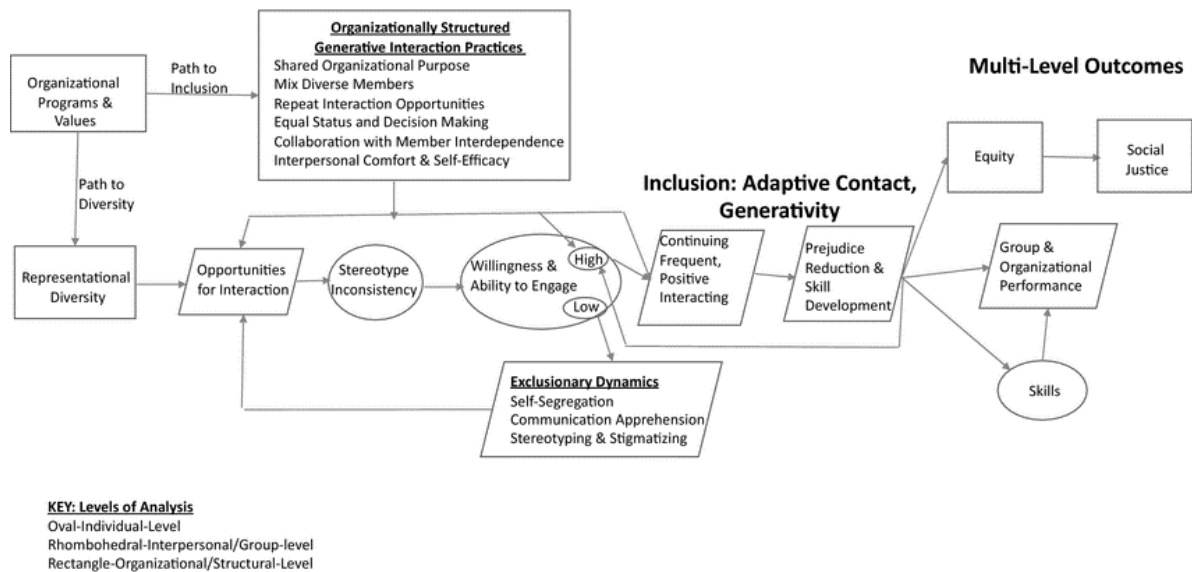
(Bernstein et al., 2020, p. 395)

The theory of generative interactions is a highly relevant framework used to guide the analysis of organizational practices that contribute to positive inclusion and equity outcomes through diverse interactions (Bernstein et al., 2020). The theory of generative interactions may be particularly relevant to DEI in current research and practice, as researchers have recently suggested that narratives and cultures of color-blindness are notable barriers to DEI progress in the corporate sector (Kraus et al., 2022; Roche & Passmore, 2021). The principles of the theory of generative interaction support the DEI research findings of Kraus et al. and Roche and Passmore, who emphasized that race neutrality and a lack of acknowledgment of DEI issues and weaknesses serve to detract from DEI progress. Rather, the principles of the theory of generative interaction suggest that targeted and strategic paths from diversity to inclusion require the implementation of specific structural changes and practices.

Further, unlike many existing theories and models used to guide DEI practices, Bernstein et al. (2020) provided specific evidence-based practices and approaches that leaders of organizations can use to actively contribute to DEI and foster DEI culture. Specific organizational practices that were determined to facilitate generative interactions included sharing a meaningful organizational purpose; protracted interaction and mingling of diverse members; fostering insider status and equal standing among diverse members; and fostering an environment that encourages interpersonal comfort, collaborative independence, and self-efficacy. From this perspective, the concept of interactions as generative refers to how interactions can contribute to beneficial lines of inquiry, shape organizational culture and associated assumptions, and reform understanding of how organizations function. Bernstein et al. concluded that structured, generative interactions are a direct means of contributing to ethical value creation that addresses all members and stakeholders of organizations. Figure 1 depicts relationships between the aforementioned factors that contribute to desirable outcomes at the individual, interpersonal, and structural levels.

Figure 1

Theory of Generative Interactions



Note. The theory of generative interactions model describes how organizations can contribute to positive multilevel outcomes through generative interactions and avoiding exclusionary dynamics (Bernstein et al., 2020).

The theory of generative interactions has been utilized in many contexts to analyze organizational practices and the process through which diverse interactions contribute to inclusion and equity (Bernstein et al., 2020). Additionally, the theory of generative interactions also suggests that mediating factors including adaptive contact, interaction frequency, and interaction quality, mediating the extent to which positive outcomes are achieved as a result of generative interactions (Bernstein et al., 2020). The theory of generative interactions also provides insight into specific strategies and organizational practices that can be used to advance DEI in organizational settings. As Bernstein et al. emphasized in their research on DEI, part of the challenge in addressing DEI issues is rooted in the deep and nebulous implications of negative behaviors and prejudices, which can be difficult to identify. Despite the centrality of communication for DEI practices and outcomes, it can be a difficult subject for organizations to discuss directly with employees. Further, it can also be difficult for CEOs and other senior leaders of organizations to employ self-

awareness and awareness of their organization to identify opportunities to improve DEI practices throughout the organization (El-Amin, 2022).

Though the theory of generative interactions was developed recently, concepts and principles derived from the theory have informed a limited number of recent studies and publications that center on the promotion of one or more facets of DEI in organizations (El-Amin, 2022; O’Keefe et al., 2020; Shorty, 2021). El-Amin’s research involved the use of a theory of generative interactions framework to develop strategies to improve organizational commitment to DEI. Specifically, El-Amin positioned the theory of generative interactions as an appropriate theoretical approach for leaders of organizations who are interested in improving their knowledge and awareness of the nature and influence of barriers that affect diverse employees to benefit organizational performance. El-Amin’s research was rooted in the “Big 8” diverse identity categories, which specifically addresses the role of ability, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, age, race, gender, and socioeconomic status/class as markers of diversity. The author emphasized that a theory of generative interactions framework is also useful for helping organizational leaders to understand how and why “the persistent lack of recruitment, promotion, and retention of diverse employees is due to systemic, structural, organizational, institutional, cultural, and societal obstacles” (El-Amin, 2022, p. 2). El-Amin concluded that in order for generative interactions to contribute to measurable organizational outcomes and key process indicators, obstacles that disproportionately influence diverse employees must be identified and eliminated. CDOs were specifically referenced as the most appropriate leaders for this role.

Concepts associated with the theory of generative interactions also informed the systematic review of quantitative and qualitative research instruments used to measure inclusion in organizational settings in the study by O’Keefe et al. (2020). The authors noted the increased value of instruments to measure inclusion due to enhanced emphasis on

workplace diversity in research and practice. Their systematic review of existing research instruments revealed eight instruments that were used in 15 studies, as well as one evaluation framework and two evaluation models. Common themes among the research instruments that were identified included promoting inclusion at the organizational level, recognizing value and uniqueness, equal treatment among/towards supervisors and peers, empowerment, and belongingness. O’Keefe et al. demonstrated support for the development of “a new scientific process to support organizational efforts to reconfigure existing talent assets to navigate culturally-fluid business landscapes comprised of an increasingly diverse American workforce” (p. 49), as the validity and reliability of some of the research instruments they identified were unclear.

A proposed theoretical framework developed by Shorty (2021) positioned the theory of generative interactions, critical race theory, and contact theory as a comprehensive theoretical perspective that could inform efforts to reduce racial bias in organizational settings. The researcher noted the need for a new framework for use in organizational settings based on the lack of tools available to leaders of organizations seeking to address White privilege and eliminate racism in professional environments. The researcher used an exploratory qualitative methodology to develop a theoretical framework based on interview data collected from 14 Teach for America (TFA) alumni. The researcher found that four constructs were identified in participants’ responses based on the concepts of critical race theory and in/out-group experiences: accept, action, acknowledge, and activation. These four constructs were determined to be critical aspects of reducing racial bias, prejudice, and stereotyping in the workplace. The researcher concluded by identifying the resulting framework as antiracist critical contact theory (ACCT). Shorty demonstrated how constructs and principles associated with the theory of generative interactions can inform the development of new theories to holistically guide DEI practices and efforts in organizations.

I conducted this research to gain insight into how executive coaches can help to advance the development of DEI within organizations. By determining how executive coaches view their ability to advance interactions within an organization to advance DEI initiatives, progress may be made towards establishing DEI best practices in specific organizational contexts. The theory of generative interactions is directly related to the purpose of the current study, as the theory centers on understanding how specific practices can contribute to DEI initiatives and progress towards goals within an organization. Further, this theoretical framework provided a broad overview to inform my assumptions regarding how executive coaches can help CEOs to recognize opportunities for DEI growth, issues relating to DEI, and specific steps and strategies that can be taken to advance DEI within organizations. In the current study, the specific principles, pathways, and practices named in the theory of generative interactions informed the development of an emerging theory to describe how organizational leaders and executive coaches can increase DEI focus in corporate organizations.

Literature Review

Executive Coaching

The notion of executive coaching is explored in this section in various organizational contexts. The history of executive coaching is briefly outlined in the first subsection. Definitions of executive coaching are provided thereafter, followed by a subsection in which I explore the effectiveness of executive coaches.

History of Executive Coaching

Regarding the origin of executive coaching services, Kampa-Kokesch (2001) researched the history of executive coaching and reported that the term “executive coaching” was first introduced into the business sector in the late 1980s because the term “coaching” sounded less threatening than other types of intervention descriptors. They also reported that

Judge and Cowell (1997) stated the widespread adoption of executive coaching began around 1990 by consulting firms. The high failure rate of executives in corporate America, around 50%, facilitated the need, and executive coaching emerged in the 1990s as an intervention geared to specifically change the behavior of middle and senior-level managers (Hogan et al., 1994).

According to Kampa-Kokesch (2001), after 1995, there was an increase in publications about executive coaching and the Professional and Personal Coaches Association. According to the ICF, in 1995, professional coach Thomas Leonard started the ICF as a nonprofit organization for fellow coaches to support each other and grow the profession. By May of 1996, there were more than 60 ICF Chapters worldwide. In 2020, the ICF celebrated its 25th anniversary year and has six organizations under its umbrella. The ICF is the largest organization of professionally trained coaches in the world, with membership in 140 countries.

Definitions of Executive Coaching

Researchers have presented many different descriptions of what executive coaches, as a practice, provide their clients. Kilburg (2000) described executive coaching as a “helping relationship formed between a client who has managerial authority and responsibility in an organization and the coach” (p. 67). Kilburg also described executive coaches as consultants who use a wide variety of behavioral techniques and methods to help the client achieve a mutually identified set of goals. These goals are set to improve their professional performance and personal satisfaction and, consequently, to improve the effectiveness of the client’s organization within a formally defined coaching agreement (Athanasopoulou & Dopson, 2018; Boysen-Rotelli, 2021; Skinner, 2020; Trevillion, 2018; Van Oosten et al., 2019).

Executive coaching has also been described as a person-centered, action-learning on-the-job approach, aligned with corporate settings that emphasize continual learning and development. The executive coach usually provides feedback about how that leader is perceived by others (Joo et al., 2012). Thus, executive coaching can also be defined as a leadership development tool that facilitates leading organizational change and a process for the coach (leader) to engage the client (follower) in developing their potential in the desired field of practice within an organizational context (MacIntyre, 2020). Professional organizations, such as the ICF, also provide and update definitions of executive coaching in line with emerging professional practices and standards. The ICF currently defines executive coaching as, “partnering with clients in a thought-provoking and creative process that inspires them to maximize their personal and professional potential.”

A commonality among these definitions is that they characterize successful, or effective, iterations of executive coaching, an issue that Hanley (2019) identified as a contributing factor to a general lack of contextually relevant research and definitional clarity surrounding executive coaching. Hanley used a descriptive phenomenological approach to produce an operational definition of executive coaching that aligned with the philosophical origin of the term. The researcher analyzed recordings of three conversations between executive coaches and clients. Final themes identified within the coaching conversations included teleology and conation, coach-client relationality, sensemaking, emotions, narrative identity, habit, and values. Hanley developed the following definition of executive coaching:

An integrated learning and development process connected to performance in the workplace. It is enacted in a dialogic relationship of high challenge and high support to which clients bring their whole selves in order to achieve self-identified goals or purposes. It is an experiential, reflexive sensemaking activity that generates personal awareness and insight while supporting behavioral change in the will to voluntary

action that is oriented to the ‘good,’ the best that is available and is ethical at the personal, relational, and organizational levels of the workplace and beyond. (p. 4)

Broadly speaking, executive coaching is described largely as a means of contributing to professional improvement and favorable organizational outcomes (Hanley, 2019; MacIntyre, 2020). Thus, the foundation and essence of executive coaching necessitate a masterful understanding of how organizational factors contribute to positive or negative multilevel outcomes in organizational settings. In the following subsection, I address the effectiveness of executive coaches.

Effectiveness of Executive Coaches

Bozer et al. (2014) studied the academic background and credibility in executive coaching effectiveness, which supports the importance of coaching being undertaken by a credible source to increase the effectiveness of the coaching. By credible, the researchers concluded that a background in psychology was associated with perceived coaching effectiveness, and that anecdotal evidence supports those external coaches were superior to internal coaches, but warranted further investigation. Bozer et al. also reported limited empirical research on specific coaching characteristics in coaching success.

In addition to credibility, whether in reference to experience or education, Nash (2018) reported that the relationship between a coach and client is critical to a successful outcome. Nash explained the coach and client should realize a common mental image of a desirable future state that provides a basis for action, common strategic developmental goals, and desired outcomes as part of their initial discussions. This will then provide the coach and client with a common roadmap to be used to guide future coaching sessions and ensure desired goals and outcomes are met. Nash further stated that these strategic, tactical, and operational steps will establish an effective shared vision from the start of the relationship and contribute to the overall perceived positive quality and effectiveness of the coaching.

In their research on the outcomes of executive coaching, Lewis-Duarte and Bligh (2012) stated that although executive coaches are hired primarily as agents of influence, limited research has examined how coaches successfully influence behavioral change in their clients. Despite this research gap, researchers (e.g., Gan et al., 2021) have emphasized the importance of evaluating executive coaching effectiveness to understand the extent to which executive coaching contributes to enhanced organizational outcomes in practice. Gan et al. used an objective-driven model to guide the development and administration of 320 questionnaires to executive coaches in Malaysia. The researchers found that coaching effectiveness was significantly predicted by client characteristics, organizational support, and the quality of client-coach relationships. These findings highlight factors that contribute to effective executive coaching that results in the achievement of desired organizational outcomes.

Like Gan et al. (2021), Clift's (2019) and Seiler's (2019) research focus and findings emphasized how factors specific to both coaches and clients can shape organizational outcomes as a measure of coaching effectiveness. Clift's study emphasized that not all executive coaching contexts or relationships between coaches and clients are ideal; rather, executive coaches are often expected to succeed in their professional roles despite unfavorable conditions, practices, or leadership in the organization they are helping. Accordingly, Clift's research specifically focused on developing an emerging theory to describe the process of pursuing executive coaching effectiveness while working with a client who displays toxic leadership. The researcher used a grounded theory approach to interview executive leaders who had previously coached leaders they perceived as toxic. The resulting theory that Clift developed centered on the following concepts as elements involved in the process of coaching toxic leaders in a way that encourages favorable organizational outcomes:

a) understanding the organizational culture and toxic leader behaviors through the use of tools, (b) helping the leader see the negative perceptions and outcomes of their behavior, (c) use of questioning techniques and energy to reduce pushback and gain acknowledgment of behaviors, (d) develop personal and social competence, (e) set goals, create a plan for improvement, and practice skills, and (f) evaluate the results and celebrate success and growth. (p. 119)

Seiler's research specifically emphasized the role of client feedback as a key tool that influences executive coaches' strategies and decisions. While executive coaches' unique professional skills and knowledge significantly influence the extent to which they are able to provide beneficial coaching, in the absence of actionable feedback, executive coaches may lack the tools and resources to progress towards organizational goals. Further, while exchanges and relationships between clients and coaches provide a foundation that shapes the likelihood of favorable coaching outcomes, differences in knowledge and professional experiences between clients and coaches can prevent executive coaches from using formative feedback to enhance coaching outcomes (Gan et al., 2021; Seiler, 2019).

As Seiler (2019) noted, executive coaches may assume that clients lack the knowledge needed to provide helpful or meaningful feedback, while clients may assume executive coaches lack a deep understanding of their organizational goals and values. To address this issue, Seiler used mixed research methods to develop a survey instrument designed to gather behavioral feedback from clients that can be used by executive coaches to refine their coaching practices and decisions. The resulting survey provided evidence of the utility of developing formal research instruments to gather feedback from executive coaching clients, strengthen shared knowledge and understanding between clients and coaches, and increase the likelihood of favorable coaching outcomes.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in the Corporate Sector

The focus on DEI in the corporate sector has significantly increased in recent years, in both research and practice (Bay, 2022; Herman, 2021; Maurer, 2020; Resnick & Fuller, 2021; Sherman et al., 2021). DEI is a topic that is constantly developing and changing operationally in response to an evolving context (Rakesh & Chandran, 2021). Notable events in recent years that have shaped the context of DEI and increased focus on DEI in the corporate sector include social activism surrounding recorded instances that exemplify systemic racism, political discourse positioning diversity efforts as a partisan issue, and the COVID-19 pandemic (Cutter & Weber, 2020; Guynn, 2020). Such events have the power to shape the extent to which DEI is prioritized in the corporate sector and the focus of DEI initiatives.

The COVID-19 pandemic, in particular, concerns many experts who recognize the potential limitations to DEI progress associated with shifting many in-person operations to online work environments (Cutter & Weber, 2020). Likewise, some prominent political narratives that gained traction in 2020 in the United States positioned DEI initiatives as “un-American” and “divisive,” despite growing evidence of the benefits of DEI initiatives within corporations for multiple stakeholders (Guynn, 2020). This political backlash occurred just as research on the positive influence of DEI initiatives on organizational outcomes gained traction, further propelling concerns among DEI experts that progress would stall. Executive orders, such as the Executive Order on Combatting Race and Sex Stereotyping that was issued September 22, 2020, by the Trump administration promoted the notion that the United States has progressed past the need for corporate focus on DEI, and that acknowledging issues related to racism, sexism, and other forms of discrimination is inherently “false,” “pernicious,” and a means of “scapegoating” majority demographics (Guynn, 2020). This anti-DEI critique reflects a larger argument in academic spheres surrounding the effects of teaching critical race theory and other theoretical paradigms that involve critical analysis and

deconstruction of systemic discrimination and inequality (Guynn, 2020). These executive orders and assertions, which position DEI efforts as inherently favoring and benefitting one marginalized demographic at the expense of another demographic group, directly conflict with growing research evidence that enhancing DEI focus at the corporate level is beneficial for both marginalized and nonmarginalized members of corporate organizations (Cutter & Weber, 2020; Maurer, 2020).

Corporate data pertaining to factors such as company finance and hiring decisions provide evidence of the increased focus on DEI in the corporate sector (Gill et al., 2018; Joshi, 2022; Karakhan et al., 2021; Maurer, 2020; Skiles et al., 2020; Sorensen et al., 2021). As Cutter and Weber (2020) reported, CDOs are being hired at increasing rates in organizations across the United States. More specifically, as stated earlier, Cutter and Weber reported that “roughly half of S&P 500 companies, employ a CDO and of that number 63% were hired in the last three years” (p. 31). Broadly speaking, multiple roles related to DEI have risen by 55% as of June 2020, according to the Society for Human Resources Management (Maurer, 2020).

In addition to DEI initiatives, policies have a prominent influence on the extent to which DEI is effectively prioritized and improved in the corporate sector (Baum, 2021; Cutter & Weber, 2020). At times, however, the diction of DEI laws and policies can reflect different realities for marginalized individuals in corporate organizations than was intended when a law or policy was written. A notable example provided by Baum to describe this issue is the Civil Rights Act of 1964, which explicitly made it illegal to intentionally avoid hiring marginalized individuals or discriminating against marginalized individuals in the workplace based on aspects of identity including race, sex, and religion. In the corporate sector, the Civil Rights Act addressed the DEI element of diversity; however, in practice, numerous legal challenges after the Act were implemented indicated both a lack of compliance and

highlighted the legal complications associated with proving discrimination. As Baum emphasized, DEI policies can function similarly within corporate organizations because the diction, enforcement, and prioritization of DEI policies in corporate organizations determine how such policies shape the experiences of diverse members.

While an increased emphasis on DEI among corporate organizations is evident, some researchers (e.g., Smith et al., 2021) have emphasized that business schools need to prepare students to succeed in DEI-focused organizations upon graduating. Smith et al. indicated a significant lack of DEI-focused case studies conducted among students seeking business degrees. More specifically, the researchers found that “published case studies used in business schools globally primarily include White male protagonists and do not incorporate key topics related to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI)” (p. 63). There was significant evidence of a strong focus on the roles of White male leaders in the success of corporate organizations as well as a corresponding lack of focus on the contributions and leadership efficacy of people of color, particularly women of color, in the corporate sector. In a business school environment where students are learning about how to succeed in the corporate sector, the lack of diversity and DEI focus among case studies used as teaching tools can reinforce harmful narratives and norms that detract from DEI initiatives. Smith et al. concluded by emphasizing the need for new corporate case studies that can be used as tools to prepare business students to succeed in corporate organizations that are increasingly committed to DEI. Despite the growth of DEI as a corporate focus, there remains a lack of clarity surrounding operational definitions of DEI. In the following subsection, I provide clarity surrounding how elements of DEI are defined in corporate contexts.

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Culture Defined

While DEI practices and strategies can vary considerably in the corporate sector, there is a relative consensus surrounding the meaning associated with each element of DEI. The

three elements of DEI are diversity, equity, and inclusion (Dillard-Wright & Gazaway, 2021). Diversity refers to similarities and differences among individuals accounting for all aspects of their personality and individual identity. Some examples are age, disability, and sexual orientation. In the current study, diversity among members of corporate organizations is understood in accordance with the “Big 8” categories of diverse identity: ability, ethnicity, sexual orientation, religion, age, race, gender, and socioeconomic status/class (El-Amin, 2022).

The diversity element of DEI addresses the imperative that no member of an organization should experience disparate treatment, stereotyping, or disparate impact based on facets of their identity (Baum, 2021; El-Amin, 2022). As Baum explained, explicitly banning employment discrimination based on facets of identity does not implicitly ensure that marginalized individuals will be included by other members of the organization or have an equitable employment experience. Baum noted the following in regard to the importance of equity and inclusion as elements of DEI that bolster the push towards increased diversity in the corporate sector:

If we stop here, with the above law and theories of law in place, a person of color may be hired for a position and not be exposed to any adverse actions by the employer. But that same person of color may not be treated equitably or experience inclusion in workplace groups in the same way as their similarly situated colleagues experience equity and inclusion. The expanded DE&I arena is necessary to holistically address systemic racist and sexist behaviors and implicit biases that have become commonplace in the work environment in order to remedy toxic cultures in the workplace. (p. 13)

Equity in the workplace refers to fair treatment in access, opportunity, and advancement for all individuals. The equity element of DEI specifically addresses eliminating

bias, prejudice, and other obstacles that prevent members of an organization from having equitable experiences. Unlike the concept of equality, which would involve providing every person with identical prospects and resources, the concept of equity involves acknowledgment that sometimes individuals need different prospects or resources to have an equal likelihood of success (Dillard-Wright & Gazaway, 2021). Thus, the definition of equity as an element of DEI involves the acknowledgment of diversity, diverse experiences, and the context that shapes disparate outcomes in corporate workplaces. Giving examples of the role of equity in corporate organization, Baum (2021) emphasized that only 3.2% of senior leadership roles in Fortune 500 companies were filled by Black people in 2019, and a significant pay gap still informs the experiences of people of color, particularly women of color, in the corporate sector. Thus, the equity element of DEI involves addressing the influence of factors that contribute to members having significantly different experiences and trajectories within corporate organizations based on facets of their identities.

Lastly, inclusion describes the extent to which each person in the organization feels welcomed, respected, supported, and valued as a team member. Giving concrete examples of the concept, Baum (2021) defined inclusion in corporate contexts as, “The extent to which individuals can access information and resources, are involved in work groups, have the ability to influence decision-making processes, and can contribute fully and effectively to an organization” (p. 14). While the diversity element of DEI addresses the importance and benefits of diverse workforces, the inclusion element addresses the importance of *how* diverse workforces are regarded and valued (Dillard-Wright & Gazaway, 2021).

Organizations that implicitly or explicitly encourage in-groups and out-groups among diverse members may be diverse in theory but lack inclusion, which can prevent diverse voices from being heard and contributing meaningfully to organizational goals.

Welcher (2019) suggested that DEI is a common acronym used across almost all sectors to represent the work of an organization related to DEI. Welcher further stated that as the nation's workforce becomes more diverse, organizations are faced with the challenge of creating environments where all employees can do their best work, paying close attention to not creating additional disadvantages for those who are already members of marginalized communities and identities. It is important to note, however, that while DEI is a common acronym among corporate leaders, executive coaches, researchers, and some other individuals in relevant professional roles, employees, and other individuals whose professional role does not involve an active commitment to DEI may form perceptions, definitions, or assumptions about DEI that do not align with the goals of evidence-based DEI initiatives (Will & Hamilton, 2021). Namely, Will and Hamilton emphasized recent poll data that suggests a strong word association between the elements of DEI and political correctness. While the foci of DEI and political correctness may appear superficially similar based on similarities surrounding the enforcement of principles "of tolerance, morality, and equality" (Will & Hamilton, 2021, p. 2), the researchers emphasized that false equivalence between the definitions of DEI and adjacent terms, such as political correctness, can prevent true progress towards desired organizational outcomes. Specifically, Will and Hamilton asserted that negative perceptions of political correctness, defined as "a moderating of potentially harmful speech, behaviors or policies, toward more socially acceptable expressions that are less likely to cause offence, or result in law infringements" (p. 2) center on the conceptual basis of compliance and censorship. Thus, when individuals synonymize political correctness and DEI, they reduce the potential of DEI initiatives from changing DEI at the organizational, systemic, or cultural level to decreasing unfavorable behavior out of fear of punishment or disapproval.

In line with definitions of elements of DEI identified in this section, DEI culture describes an organizational culture with leaders who embrace and promote DEI as described above. Organizational culture encompasses the defining characteristics and norms that guide how an organization operates (Weissmann et al., 2019). Organizational culture is expressed through policies, mission statements, priorities, company communications, and other facets of how organizations operate that are at the discretion of company leaders. Organizational culture can also be shaped and oriented towards a DEI focus through leaders' management and leadership strategies. Schuyler et al. (2021) specifically recommended a leadership focus on humanistic management and generative mindfulness as strategies for propelling DEI cultures in organizational settings. Further, the author suggested incorporating a focus on DEI culture at all levels of management from the student to expert level. Based on interviews conducted with leadership researchers and consultants, Schuyler et al. came to the following conclusion:

By moving beyond a limited instrumental understanding of mindfulness practice to a generative mindfulness that incorporates a recognition of the rich nature of the human mind, awareness of cultural practices, and deeply rooted ethical foundations, managers can create organizational cultures that honor the sacred in every human being.

Researchers, including Rees and McLaughlin (2018) and Weissmann et al. (2019), have positioned organizational culture as an appropriate lens through which to address DEI in corporate environments because the concept of organizational culture supports the notion that leaders' decisions result in changes that are not superficial or without implications. Rather, changes to policies and other elements that define organizational cultures can have meaningful implications for how employees and other stakeholders perceive the corporate identity of their workplace and how it aligns with their needs and values. Accordingly,

Weissmann et al. positioned organizational cultures that prioritize DEI initiatives as key tools for combatting the disproportionate lack of diversity associated with some career fields and professions, such as the significant lack of diversity on the basis of gender, race, and ethnicity in STEM fields.

Despite the increasing acknowledgment of the intersection between organizational culture and DEI efforts, existing research that centers on specific practices and initiatives that contribute to DEI culture is limited (Baum, 2021; Rees & McLaughlin, 2018). In a study that provided a specific example of strategies employed to improve DEI as an outcome of changing organizational culture, Rees and McLaughlin focused on the practices of peer mentorship and peer leadership in the context of an engineering college. The researchers acknowledged the lack of existing studies on specific initiatives and practices that contribute to DEI culture and studied the effects of a program wherein first-year students were matched with upper-level students in the engineering department to gain insight from peer leadership and peer mentorship. Rees and McLaughlin found that organizational culture and college climate improved as a result of the peer mentorship program that enhanced interaction and engagement among diverse members of the engineering program. Further longitudinal research is necessary, however, to determine the extent to which the mentorship program affected long-term perceptions of the organizational culture of the college, or whether the changes in organizational culture had a significant impact on enrollment trends.

Similarly, Baum (2021) sought to identify obstacles that prevent employers from demonstrating a commitment to being an equal opportunity employer and promoting a DEI culture, as well as practices that address these obstacles. Among organizational leaders, Baum emphasized the importance of leaders making decisions from a personal and professional growth mindset. The efficacy of existing diversity training methods was also called into question, leading Baum to call for a reimagining of diversity training as a holistic

opportunity for professional growth and not a compliance obligation. Baum outlined a multitude of strategies and practices for immediate, ongoing, and long-term action towards establishing and maintaining a DEI culture. Steps for immediate action that were identified by the author included conducting a climate survey to gather anonymous feedback about employee trust and morale, performing a voluntary internal pay audit to gauge pay disparities, and adjusting recruitment policies. Steps for ongoing action that were identified by Baum included a 1-month-long onboarding class for providing DEI training when employees are initially hired and conducting group case studies to understand DEI perspectives among members of organizations. Lastly, Baum suggested a step for long-term action that included conducting emotional intelligence training among leaders and employees to enhance the outcomes of their interpersonal interactions in the workplace.

The Intersection of Executive Coaching and DEI

The foci of executive coaching and DEI initiatives intersect in many innovative corporate organizations. Namely, both concepts reflect a desire to improve targeted organizational outcomes through specific practices and strategies. Though the field of study is still relatively new, recent research findings suggest that executive coaching can serve as a direct tool and approach for promoting DEI in the corporate sector (Ferdman et al., 2020; Golbeck, 2021; Roche & Passmore, 2021). Further, both executive coaching and DEI require the commitment and engagement of organizational leaders to respond to feedback and adjust strategies accordingly (Ferdman et al., 2020; Taylor, 2019). Similar to the role of CDOs, Ferdman et al. and Roche and Passmore positioned executive coaches as key sources of support for a global shift to increase focus on DEI and racial justice. Roche and Passmore conducted interviews with senior leaders of executive coaching organizations, training providers, and service providers located in Africa, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, and the United States. Overall, participants' interview responses exemplified a culture of color-

blindness in executive coaching; however, the researchers positioned consciously acknowledging and having values that reflect a commitment to racial equity and justice as prerequisite elements of DEI-focused executive coaching. Roche and Passmore concluded by emphasizing the need to establish and maintain an inclusive culture in the executive coaching industry.

The culture of colorblindness described by Roche and Passmore (2021) among executive coaches also reflects an issue that Kraus et al. (2022) identified as a barrier to realizing organizational commitment to DEI. Kraus et al. emphasized that many organizations lack the commitment in practice to DEI that they promote through company statements and policies. Kraus et al. conducted a systematic review of existing literature and found four key elements associated with the dominant narrative of racial progress in existing DEI research: “Specifically, the narrative (1) envisions organizations as race neutral, (2) creates barriers to complex cross-race discussions about equity, (3) creates momentum for less effective policy change, and (4) reduces urgency around DEI goals” (p. 108). Accordingly, Kraus et al. concluded by calling for organizational leaders to select DEI strategies that involve acknowledging DEI weaknesses and implementing rapid change at the structural level to avoid perpetuating the aforementioned harmful DEI narrative. Evidence of colorblindness and other organizational narratives that detract from purported goals and values in both the executive coaching and DEI literature suggests that the intersection of executive coaching and DEI within corporate organizations can be a site of bolstered progress towards organizational goals or a site where harmful narratives are reinforced to the detriment of organizational progress.

The roles of both executive coaches and company leaders as determinants of the extent of corporate focus on DEI were also emphasized by Ferdman et al. (2020), who wrote about the significance of inclusive leadership as a strategy for transformative change in

workplaces and communities. The authors drew on their own experiences as executive coaches to share evidence-based strategies to contribute to DEI through inclusive leadership. Key foci of the inclusive leadership strategies promoted by Ferdman et al. included diversity management, organization development, leadership development, intergroup relations, and team effectiveness. Ferdman et al. concluded by promoting these strategies not only as means of propelling DEI forward within organizations, but also for enhancing performance, innovation, and social justice in corporate settings.

As Taylor (2019) described, it can be difficult for company leaders to prioritize DEI among numerous tasks and organizational goals, thus necessitating the help of an executive coach. As Taylor emphasized, the three most important pillars of every CEO's focus are culture, people, and numbers. While a properly focused CEO is able to effectively prioritize those three pillars and nothing else, CEOs can become distracted, or their priorities may shift over time. Taylor identified executive coaches as professionals who can help a CEO identify and focus on what will truly sustain their organization. With the knowledge that diverse, equitable, and inclusive workforces inform many organizations' cultures, the demand for executive coaches or consultants in the DEI space and how they may be advancing DEI in organizations is of interest.

While a larger body of existing literature provides broad perspectives on how executive coaches can promote DEI, few researchers have emphasized the role of executive coaches as proponents of DEI in specific industries (e.g., Frodsham, 2020; Golbeck, 2021). Golbeck emphasized the roles of executive leaders and coaches as proponents of DEI in the field of statistics and data science. Within the field of statistics and data science, Goldbeck further emphasized how competencies such as storytelling serve a dual role in establishing effective leadership and reinforcing DEI within organizations. Goldbeck concluded that within an inclusive excellence framework that encompasses workplace culture, climate, and

environment, existing research provides a strong case “for inclusive and humanistic leadership in statistics and data science, where there often remains a dearth of women and members of certain racial communities among the employees” (p. 4). Frodsham similarly stated that leaders should seek coaches with highly relevant experience and credibility to guide the exploration, awareness, and action planning of creating a DEI culture that will make a substantial difference. Further, Frodsham suggested that for an executive coach to be successful, they need to be able to ask questions and gain insight into organizational leaders’ assumptions, feelings, and beliefs on DEI issues.

Frodsham (2020) provided an explanation of the process of building coach-leader relationships that reinforced the notion that external coaches may be able to have more transparent and honest conversations with company leaders than internal coaches, particularly in terms of discussing DEI within the organization. Frodsham emphasized that the focus of DEI coaching is planning and implementing actionable and personal DEI initiatives. Exploring company leaders’ core beliefs and assumptions regarding DEI, however, can be a complicated and ambitious task involving conflicts of interest for internal coaches to pursue with a CEO, as the leader ultimately holds real or perceived influence over the coaches’ professional success (Frodsham, 2020).

Clohesy et al. (2019) lent insight into the influence effective consulting has on advancing DEI among charitable organizations. In the philanthropy sector, Clohesy et al. described consulting partners as serving in a “servant leader” role to advance DEI. Clohesy et al. further asserted that consultants can help leaders advance charitable goals by interpreting organizational aspirations and culture, customizing DEI learning and solutions to challenges, and then interpreting the learning to develop action plans and methodologies for others to adapt and utilize. Overall, Clohesy et al. highlighted how some organizations and leaders are confused by the terminology and definitions associated with DEI, while others intuitively

accept the ideas and make progress towards DEI initiatives organically. According to Clohesy et al., in philanthropy and the broader sector of service organizations acceptance of DEI consultants is growing.

In the current study, I intended to provide an analysis of the role executive coaches can play in shifting corporate focus to DEI, as there remains a significant lack of research that centers on the rapid shift in demand for executive coaching assistance as an approach to DEI progress. By soliciting perspectives and feedback from executive coaches, this research may provide new insight into how executive coaches can advance DEI in diverse corporate environments.

Summary

In summation, I intended to lend insight into DEI initiatives implemented in the corporate sector, as well as the role of executive coaching. Existing research suggests that by turning outward to an executive coach or consultant, executives can increase the momentum of their progress towards organizational goals and initiatives (Lukaszewski, 1988). Despite this evidence, there remains a lack of research focus on DEI initiatives within the corporate sector in the United States. To address this issue, I aimed to address how coaches may ameliorate the lack of focus on DEI initiatives within the corporate world.

This research was informed by the concepts and principles associated with the theory of generative interactions, which explains the process through which organizations transition from diversity to inclusion. The theory of generative interactions is a useful framework that a growing number of researchers have used to guide the analysis of organizational practices that contribute to facets of diversity, equity, and inclusion. Further, the theory of generative interaction principles also provides specifications for markers of positive generative interactions— including adaptive contact, interaction frequency, and interaction quality— that further contribute to positive organizational outcomes. The development of the theory of

generative interactions was relatively recent; however, a limited number of recent studies and publications have been informed by concepts and principles derived from the theory, particularly in the context of research on the promotion of one or more facets of DEI in organizations. The theory of generative interactions involves constructs and principles that can guide the development of new theories to holistically inform DEI practices and efforts in organizations. Aspects of the theory of generative interactions that are directly related to the purpose of the current study may guide a new understanding of how specific practices can enhance DEI initiatives and progress within an organization.

Executive coaching was first referenced as a concept in the business sector in the late 1980s. The term “executive coaching” was used because coaching was perceived as less threatening than other terms that describe professional consulting roles. Though many different descriptions of what executive coaches provide their clients within practice are evident in existing literature, executive coaching is generally understood as a person-centered, action-learning on-the-job role that is specific to corporate settings and emphasizes continual learning and development. Further, while many definitions of executive coaching exist, most characterize successful or effective iterations of executive coaching. Executive coaching is broadly understood as a role that centers on contributing to professional improvement and favorable organizational outcomes. Both coach and client-related factors can shape organizational outcomes as a measure of coaching effectiveness. Many factors are critical success factors that can increase the effectiveness of executive coaching, including whether coaching is undertaken by a credible source, feedback given to executive coaches, and the nature of coach-client relationships. Executive coaches are hired primarily as agents of influence; however, there remains a significant lack of conclusive research pertaining to how coaches successfully influence behavioral change in their clients.

Corporate focus on DEI has grown steadily in recent years, in both research and practice. This growth is evident in corporate data pertaining to company finance, hiring decisions, and other metrics that provide evidence of the increased focus on DEI in the corporate sector. There remains a lack of clarity, however, surrounding operational definitions of DEI despite the growth of DEI as a corporate focus.

Concerning definitions of the three central elements of DEI, diversity refers to similarities and differences pertaining to demographics and identity characteristics among individuals. Equity describes fair treatment in access, opportunity, and advancement in the workplace. Lastly, inclusion refers to the extent to which each member of an organization feels that their presence and contributions are welcomed, respected, supported, and valued. When considering these elements of DEI as descriptors of an ideal organizational culture, DEI culture is characterized by leaders who embrace and promote DEI as described above.

The goals of executive coaching and DEI frequently intersect in the context of innovative corporate organizations, as both concepts involve strategic progress to improve targeted organizational outcomes. Similar to the role of CDOs, executive coaches are key leaders in promoting a global shift to increase focus on DEI and racial justice. Despite growing evidence of how executive coaches can promote DEI in existing literature, there remains a lack of research emphasis on the role of executive coaches as proponents of DEI in specific industries.

This review of existing literature contributed to the development of the following research question:

RQ: How can executive coaches advance the development of diversity, equity, and inclusion in organizations?

I selected a qualitative grounded theory methodology to guide the current study. In grounded theory research, the reading and interpretation of raw data inform the development

of concepts, themes, models, and theories. In the current study, the grounded theory methodology was used to guide the process of developing and providing a “substantiated explanation of some facet of the social world depicted through connected concepts that create a tentative hypothesis, which further interweaves to form a theory.” In the case of this research, concepts and theories that emerge from the readings of raw data pertained to the role of executive coaches in advancing DEI in corporate organizations. Gathering the relevant perspectives and responses of executive coaches through this study may inform new knowledge pertaining to how executive coaches can advance DEI and whether there is an increased demand for their services. Additional details about the methodology selected to guide this study are provided in Chapter 3.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHOD AND DESIGN

Introduction

The purpose of the current study was to address how coaches may ameliorate the lack of focus on DEI initiatives within the corporate world. I achieved this by analyzing the role which can be played by executive coaches regarding the advancement of DEI initiatives within the organizations. In Chapter 3, I outline the research methodology that I adopted to conduct the current study. This includes the methodology implanted in the study, procedures for recruitment, participation, data collection, instrumentation, and the data analysis plan. Finally, I discuss ethical considerations that were considered prior to the beginning of the research process and the ethical procedures that were conducted to ensure that the current study was conducted ethically.

I aimed to answer the following research question: How may executive coaches advance the development of diversity, equity, and inclusion in organizations? To answer this research question, I utilized a qualitative grounded theory research methodology. The purpose of qualitative research was to “examine and interpret data in order to elicit meaning, gain understanding, and develop empirical knowledge” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). More specifically, a classic grounded theory study is described as “a general research methodology linked with data collection that uses a systematically applied set of methods to generate an inductive theory about a substantive area” (Glaser, 1992). The grounded theory research methodology was utilized in the current study to collect, analyze, sort, and derive a theory from the surveys of practicing executive coaches to extrapolate their opinions of the role executive coaches may play in advancing DEI in organizations. Grounded theory was utilized because, unlike other qualitative research methodologies, at the conclusion of the study, a

theory emerged from the data. The type of theory derived is substantive in nature, which allows for specificity rather than generality (Merriam, 2009).

Role of the Researcher

The role of the researcher was imperative to the current study. My role was to develop relevant and applicable questions, study existing data and literature, conduct participant interviews, code interview results to discover and analyze patterns within participant responses, succinctly deliver cumulative findings, and to discuss any areas of future research. With respect to the current study, I directly developed a theory grounded in the research.

It is also critical that the researcher recognizes any of their personal biases which could directly impact the results of the study. As an HR leader, I have a direct connection to understanding and potentially evaluating my organization's DEI practices and whether there are any problems. Therefore, this represents a direct connection to between me as the researcher and the purpose of the current study. As the researcher, it was important for me to not bring any of my own personal biases or ideas to the data collection and analysis process. The purpose of this study was to focus on how executive coaches believe they can advance DEI initiatives within an organization. Because of this, it was important that, as the researcher, I evaluated these responses in an unbiased fashion and did not impose any of my own ideas, as an HR leader, on the results.

To avoid bias throughout the research process, a semi-structured interview format was utilized. During these interviews, I asked participants the same questions, and their responses were utilized to broaden remaining questions during the interview process. Throughout the interview process, I also wrote memos. This allowed me to remain neutral while allowing the findings within the data to speak for itself.

Methodology

The participant selection logic utilized in this study was convenience sampling. This sampling strategy allows researchers to select participants based on their availability and willingness to take part in the study (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). This sampling strategy was selected because it ensured that all participants were willing and able to take part prior to the study whilst also ensuring that participants met the criteria established by the researcher. Of the participants who were willing and available to take part in the study, only those who fit the criteria were able to take part in the current study.

Willing participants met the criteria if they were a member of the Forbes Coaches Council (FCC) and are also based in the United States. I was granted access to the FCC directory. The executive coach search was narrowed down to coaches in the United States so that the data would include the opinions and experiences of domestic executive coaches only. This was essential to the research because the background to the current study suggests that the demand for executive coaching in the DEI space is driven by the George Floyd murder and ensuing civil unrest in the United States. One could argue that this incident and the civil unrest in the United States sparked protests and a new focus on DEI across the world; however, for this research, the focus was on executive coaches in the United States only. Finally, the participants who were selected for this study were only included if they had executive coaching expertise as current coaches or consultants. Many consulting firms are blending coaching skills into their practices with excellent results so the titles of DEI coach or DEI consultant might be the same (Bennett & Martin, 2001). Therefore, the population from which participants were selected was current executive coaches or consultants who are an ICF member and reside in the United States.

The first survey was sent out to a total of 50 participants, with 15 being selected as the sample size for the first survey. In this step, themes were first coded and analyzed. At least 15

surveys needed to be analyzed in order to achieve data saturation. Data saturation is the point at which increasing the sample size further no longer results in new information or insights in the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Data saturation becomes apparent when information that participants share during interviews is repetitive in relation to previous interviews. It is important to sample enough participants to fully answer the research questions but using too large of a sample can result in a large volume of redundant data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Determining an appropriate sample size in qualitative studies requires judgment and is not an exact process; however, Mason (2010) reported that samples of 20 to 30 participants typically suffice to yield data saturation in qualitative studies. It was expected that the minimum sample size of 20 for the current study should be sufficient to achieve data saturation. Sixteen participants ended up responding to the surveys, and four interviewees.

Procedures For Recruitment, Participation, and Data Collection

Recruitment and Participation

As stated earlier, the participants solicited to complete the survey were selected from the Forbes Coaches Council (FCC). Before attempting to recruit participants, I obtained permission to conduct research from the Institutional Review Board (IRB). I sent an email to practicing coaches and requested their permission to send a survey with an explanation of what the survey information would be used for and that their anonymity would be protected. I received informed consent from all participants prior to their participation in any component of the study. I also sent a survey to 50 coaches requesting their feedback and knowledge of the subject of ECs and their work in the DEI space. Of the 50 coaches who received the survey, 41 coaches responded to the survey, only 16 surveys were fully completed.

Following the initial survey, all participants who completed the survey were asked if they would be willing to partake in a semi-structured interview over the phone. Four semi-structured interview participants ended up expanding upon the original survey data. The

purpose of these semi-structured interviews was to ask relevant open-ended follow up questions in response to the initial data collection and coding. By conducting semi-structured interviews, I utilized a stated outline of questions; however, the nature of these interviews allowed me to ask any follow-up questions that arose during the course of the interview.

Data Collection

Surveys

I utilized an online survey to obtain knowledge of the subject matter. The participants were purposefully selected because of their EC expertise as current coaches or consultants. The survey will be conducted through Qualtrics™, a leading web-based survey tool which I utilized to customize the survey sent out via email to each participant. By utilizing this survey tool, I had hoped to ensure that at least 50 coaches were contacted and willing to take part in the study, which was important to help achieve data saturation and increase the accuracy of results. Surveys were completed by 41 respondents, however, 16 were fully completed.

To set the stage for the survey, I sent an email to each participant describing the purpose, the process, and asking permission to send the survey for their completion. Three open ended questions were included in the survey as well as their years of experience as an executive coach and whether they had a specific area of specialty. Anonymity was promised to the participants to encourage the executive coaches to share their rich experiences and contributions to organizations and coaching examples with their clients. No names or organizational affiliations were collected or requested on the survey. The participants were informed that Qualtrics™ would pool the responses for overall general response themes. Participants had up to 2 weeks to complete the survey in their own time. They were asked, however, to complete all survey questions in one setting.

The survey consisted of three open-ended questions which were designed to understand the experiences of ECs with respect to DEI initiatives and how they perceived

their ability to influence and assist the decisions made by organizations. In addition, these questions were designed to analyze the extent to which there was a demand for ECs with respect to organizations wanting to advance DEI initiatives and the specific elements of the assistance asked for by organizations.

The first question called upon the ECs' knowledge of the current corporate climate for DEI coaching needs, and to gauge whether there has been an increase in requests for DEI coaching since the civil unrest and murder of George Floyd in May 2020. The first question was, What types of needs are you observing or being contracted for by CEO's or organizations in the diversity, equity, inclusion, or belonging space? Has this need for assistance increased since 2020? The next question was asked of the participants to derive the ECs' experience and behaviors with coaching DEI. The second question asked participants to, Describe the actions or strategies you have actually participated in or observed from Executive Coaches which advance DEI in an organization. The third question was designed to shed light on the behaviors, actions, and power that an EC may have on advancing and possibly transforming an organization struggling or wanting to better their DEI strategy and delivery for its employees. The third question was, In what ways do you think an executive coach may impact DEI practices and culture in an organization? (Please be specific).

All of the survey data and responses to these three open-ended questions were recorded in the Qualtrics survey which I utilized to conduct the survey. If the initial round of surveys sent out to EC coaches did not gather sufficient survey data, the surveys were then sent to additional participants in order to gather sufficient data to reach data saturation. Finally, I provided my contact information to the participants at the completion of the study to allow them to ask me follow-up questions.

Semi-Structured Interviews

The survey discussed above was the first and main form of data collection, with semi-structured interviews subsequently conducted to build upon the data collected in the surveys. Interviewing is valuable to researchers in many fields (Powney & Watts, 2018). The purpose of interviews is to explore views, experiences, beliefs and/or motivations of respondents on particular matters (Gill et al., 2018). Prior researchers have also suggested that qualitative interviewing is flexible, dynamic, nondirective, unstructured, nonstandardized, and open-ended (Taylor et al., 2015).

This instrument was a semi-structured interview protocol developed by me to align with the research question and the theoretical framework of the theory of generative interactions. I selected the semi-structured interview format because this creates a level of consistency from one interview to the next, as each participant answered the same set of core questions (Qu & Dumay, 2011). This format also provides the researcher with the flexibility to ask probe questions between core questions, which can lead to greater depth and variety of responses (Stuckey, 2013). Open-ended questions were utilized as the core questions for these interviews as they allowed the participants to provide more in-depth answers than what would be achieved with closed-ended questions.

During the current study, I personally aimed to conduct approximately 10 tape-recorded, telephone semi-structured interviews using NVivo 12 software. I expected that the participants selected for the semi-structured interviews would have already completed the initial survey discussed above. Four interviewees agreed of ten to participate in the interview. These interviews were conducted over the telephone as it was expected that the range of participants' geographic locations would be too large to conduct face-to-face interviews effectively and efficiently. These phone interviews were recorded so that I could refer to them and also so that transcripts of each interview could be written.

Creswell (2013) suggested interview questions be “opened-ended, general, and focused on understanding your central phenomenon of study.” To begin the discussions, I first described the topic and asked the participants whether they had any questions or comments regarding the initial survey. Next, the participants were asked several open-ended questions which were designed to elaborate upon the themes and concepts found in the coding of the survey data. These questions were developed to help gather the additional data needed to further the themes/concepts and the overarching theory which I began developing based upon the survey responses. I expected that these questions could include some or all of the following:

- How do you view your role as an executive coach in relation to DEI initiatives?
- How do you understand the needs of organizations wanting to further improve their existing DEI initiatives?
- To what extent do you believe you can influence an organization’s DEI initiatives in your role as an executive coach?
- How do you think executive coaches can influence DEI practices?
- How do you think executive coaches can influence an organization’s culture with respect to their DEI initiatives?
- Can you provide an example of how you feel you have influenced an organization’s DEI initiatives during past experiences?
- Do you believe demand for executive coaches in DEI will continue to grow? If yes, why do you believe this is the case and what role do you see yourself playing?

These questions are only a blueprint of the questions which could be asked during the semi-structured interviews. The exact semi-structured interview questions were dependent upon the themes found in the initial coding of survey responses as well as any certain requirements for additional information or a further extrapolation upon responses. Following the

interviews, I reflected upon the conversations with the participants and wrote an additional memo based upon what was discussed during the interview.

Data Analysis Plan

Coding is the important first step which moves the researcher from description towards conceptualizing the description. When conducting coding, significant attention to the data is required. In its most basic form, coding is the part of the study that “derives and develops concepts from data” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In addition, examining the data in this way enables the researcher to thoroughly review all of the data collected through interviews and surveys, decreasing the possibility missing an important concept.

Upon receiving the surveys from the FCC coaches, the surveys were printed, and I began coding each completed survey to look for common phrases or themes. Coding is described as the process of labeling and organizing qualitative data to identify different themes and the relationships between them (Medelynn, 2020). A great way to supplement the manual coding process is to use the NVivo 12 tool. I utilized this tool to help locate, code, and annotate the interview findings of the unstructured data.

I first conducted coding for the initial survey responses. Upon completing the first round of coding, the emergent themes/concepts influenced the additional questions which were asked of participants in order to delve further into these themes. These additional questions were first asked in an additional round of surveying in which new participants took part in the survey and which contained more refined questions, relative to the initial coding data. As discussed, semi-structured interviews were then conducted with a smaller participant pool. These interviews were conducted to ask questions designed to gather information which develops upon the themes/concepts which have been identified during the initial data collection and coding process. The purpose of these iterative data collection and coding steps

was to ensure that initial themes/concepts were further developed and fleshed out in order to help produce a theory grounded in the data at the end of the analysis process.

Open Coding

Open coding prescribes that the researcher “break data apart and delineate concepts to stand for blocks of raw data” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). Open coding in grounded theory means that “data analysis is done in conjunction with data collection” (Merriam, 2009). When utilizing a grounded theory methodology, the data guides the researcher from one interview to the next. This concept was reflected in the way in which I organized the questions for semi-structured interviews based upon the initial themes/codes which were present in the data from the first surveys.

While the semi-structured interviews took place, I wrote memos and notes for each participant, which is discussed further in this chapter. This allowed me to succinctly highlight and note any of the main concepts discussed with the participant. I recorded each of the interviews so that I could access them at any time and also to provide assistance with producing a transcript for each interview. Following the interviews, I utilized the NVivo 12 tool which acts as a work bench for qualitative analysis of large bodies of textual, graphical, audio, and video data.

Throughout the coding process, I utilized comparative analysis. Comparative analysis enables the researcher to follow the key tenets of grounded theory methodology. Comparative analysis is a process that allows the researcher to analyze data to determine whether a relationship exists. For the current study, comparative analysis ensured standardization of the data review process for all of the relevant data collected during the collection process.

Axial Coding

Axial coding pertains to “cross-cutting or relating concepts to each other” (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). This is the stage in the coding process where categories are created in which

codes can be organized during open coding. I began this process by drawing connections between the open codes and interpreting the collected data. The NVivo 12 tool played a significant role in the axial coding process, as it is a powerful tool which can assist in grouping codes into categories. At this point in the data analysis process, the data collected from each participant included its own groupings of categorized open code.

The next stage included selecting codes and categories of codes which occur across multiple interviews and surveys, with these codes being kept. Any code recognized as an outlier with no pattern relative to the other data was discarded at this point to ensure that the codes which were kept were common across responses and were not outliers. Categories were further refined for codes, as these categories begin to narrow in scope prior to the selective coding phase.

Selective Coding

Once the open and axial coding cycles were conducted for all of the relevant collected data, the final step of coding took place. In grounded theory, selective coding is the final coding step in the data analysis process. This process takes into account all of the categories determined in the axial coding phase in order to produce one succinct and unified theory. Once in the selective coding phase, the researcher should be able to develop “a core category, propositions, or hypotheses” (Merriam, 2009). During the process of semi-structured interviews, it is likely that the questions asked of participants would have differed based upon the questions developed from the open coding phase. The responses of each participant influenced the questions asked of the following participant, as this helped to relate questions to the categorized selective coding data to assist with the data collected for the selective coding phase.

At the end of the selective coding process, I expected that one single theory would have been deduced from the data. The open coding and axial coding stages are critical in

producing codes and categories of codes which can assist the researcher in developing one final theory. Once I completed selective coding, I was able to deduce a name for the theory which emerged from the data. This is discussed in depth to provide the rationale and data supporting the theory which was developed through the utilization of grounded theory methodology.

Memo Writing

Memo writing is an important and necessary step within the grounded theory research methodology. These memos represent my individual interpretive analysis which included my thoughts and ideas that emerged during the early coding process. My interpretations represent informal ways in which I can track ideas while justifying the findings of the study. To complete this step, I took notes during each of the semi-structured interviews. I compared these notes during the coding stages with the goal of developing the theory at the end of the data analysis process. Diagramming is a useful tool which I utilized to help provide a representation of how different codes found within the memos are linked together. This step can also be used to provide a connection between the codes found in open coding to the categories developed in axial coding.

Trustworthiness

Trustworthiness in qualitative research is the analog to reliability and validity in quantitative research. Four elements constitute the overarching concept of trustworthiness. The four elements are credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability. In the following paragraphs, I define each of these four elements, identify the inherent “threats” in the research design of the current study, and describe how I minimized these threats.

Credibility

Credibility corresponds with internal validity and refers to the degree of fit between the information that participants share and the results as presented by the researcher (Nowell

et al., 2017). In other words, credibility describes the internal validity of the study. To ensure credibility, I utilized several different strategies, each of which are designed to help maintain the credibility of the study.

The process of data collection is one area of the research design where credibility can become comprised. To maintain the internal validity of the study, I created a well-established data collection plan to ensure that data collection was conducted in accordance with the data collection plan established prior to any data collection taking place. To promote credibility, I engaged in peer debriefing during data analysis. Peer debriefing involves having another party review the emerging coding and analysis (Petty et al., 2012). This provides another perspective on the analysis, which helps to ensure that the analysis truly emerges from the meanings in the data (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

Another procedure that I used to support credibility is member checking. When conducting member checking, researchers ask that participants review the transcripts of the interviews to verify that the information therein is accurate (Petty et al., 2012). Furthermore, researchers can also ask participants to review the outcomes of the analysis to verify that their meanings were interpreted correctly during the coding and thematic analysis process. In this study, I engaged in member checking of both transcripts and the completed analysis. Conducting member checking increased the authenticity of the final transcript.

Dependability

Dependability refers to the degree to which research procedures are documented and reliable. Dependability in qualitative research is analogous to reliability in quantitative research (Lincoln & Guba, 1986). Providing a clear, thorough description of data collection and analysis procedures is one method of supporting dependability.

One aspect of the research process which may have decreased dependability is the evidence collected during the data collection and analysis process. To maintain dependability,

evidence was recorded and stored throughout the research process. Evidence included the production of full transcripts based on the semi-structured interviews conducted with each participant. In addition, recordings of the semi-structured interviews provided me with a data source to refer back to if any questions regarding participants responses arose during the data analysis process. Using triangulation also promotes dependability because this process facilitates assessment of consistency between multiple forms of data (Yin, 2014). In this study, I assessed the degree of data convergence across interviews and surveys.

Maintaining a record of the data analysis process also supports dependability, as this provides a transparent account and record of the data collection and analysis process as it progresses (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015). Over the course of data collection and analysis, I kept a record to document any emerging issues, questions, or choices I made to resolve any problems that emerged during any step of the study. A document record also builds credibility because it documents the researcher's interpretations of the data during collection and analysis (Petty et al., 2012).

Transferability

Transferability refers to the degree to which findings are applicable to policy, practice, and future research, or the degree to which results of a qualitative study apply to other people or contexts. Transferability addresses the external validity and is the qualitative version of "generalizability" of the study's results. Lincoln and Guba (1986) suggested that transferability in qualitative research is analogous to external validity in quantitative research. In the current study, I supported transferability by providing thick descriptions of the study's setting, participants, and data. Providing this level of description allows readers to determine for themselves the degree to which this study's findings may transfer to their own settings (Merriam & Tisdell, 2015).

In addition, transferability can also be maintained by ensuring that the sample size of the qualitative study is sufficient to the point that results are transferable. Sampling sufficiency refers to both the sample size and to the appropriateness of the sample, so that the data collected from the participants provides sufficient insight into the phenomenon. The current study included a sample size of at least 4 interviews of individual executive coaches to achieve data saturation and ensure transferability of results. Sixteen respondents were included in the study to achieve data saturation and maintain transferability.

Confirmability

Confirmability refers to the objectivity or the ability of others to confirm or corroborate findings (Chess, 2017, section 3, para. 3). Confirmability can also be understood as the faithfulness of the researcher's analysis to the participants' experiences and perspectives. Lincoln and Guba (1986) suggested that confirmability in qualitative research is similar to objectivity in quantitative research. A lack of ample evidence can often impact the confirmability of results. Therefore, I provided ample evidence to support any claims which were made based on the data collection and data analysis process. Providing ample evidence for any claims ensured that confirmability was maintained, which also ensured that all results were objective and able to be confirmed based on the evidence provided.

I developed confirmability by stating any of my beliefs or assumptions which could potentially influence the results. It is important that qualitative researchers acknowledge any of their beliefs or assumptions which may be identified as influencing the results. By stating beliefs and assumptions from the beginning, I was able to improve the confirmability of the results whilst also ensuring the objectivity of the results.

Ethical Procedures

It is important to conduct an ethical research study to ensure that participants are protected from harm and abuse (Halse & Honey, 2005). I utilized purposive and convenience

sampling strategies in the data collection phase, with only willing participants taking part in the study. Therefore, there were no ethical concerns regarding participants, as all participants signed an informed consent form acknowledging their willingness to participate in the study and that they were aware that if they decide to withdraw from the study, they could do so at any point in time. In addition, no other potential risks for harm were identified as inherent in this study. The informed consent form signed by participants also informed them of who has access to their data, which may include the board chair, committee members, IRB and peer reviewers, and a college representative. Prior to any screening, recruiting of participants, or data collection, I obtained IRB approval.

Data management of all data collected during the research process ensured that the data provided by participants was stored safely and anonymously. All stored data will be retained for 3 years after the study has been completed given the possible intention to use this data for further research. This data will also be stored securely for 3 years to ensure that I have easy access to the raw data if asked by a committee member, IRB reviewer, peer reviewer, or CDS representative to produce the raw data for inspection. During this 3-year period, I will protect all data by having the data saved on online servers that will require any individual attempting access to enter a secure password (Marshall & Rossman, 2011). At the end of the 3-year period following the completion of the study, electronically stored data will be destroyed through deletion software to ensure that it cannot be re-accessed (Creswell, 2013). In addition, data stored in written form owing to the involvement of a survey in the study will be shredded and burnt. The proper destruction of all stored data will ensure that there will not be any future access to data gathered from participants, which will ensure that all of their responses remain anonymous and private. Finally, all appropriate approval letters are provided in appendices of this study, including the IRB informed consent and IRB approval letter.

Summary

The purpose of the current study was to address the lack of focus on DEI initiatives within the corporate world. I achieved this by analyzing the role which can be played by executive coaches regarding the advancement of DEI initiatives within organizations. I selected a grounded theory research methodology for the current study because it allowed me to come to the best conclusion to the research question through the opinions and experience of practitioners. This may not be an exact science, but I was able to produce and explore a strong theory at the end of the data analysis process. A sample of 50 domestic, executive coaches was selected to take place in an initial survey. Sixteen survey responses were analyzed to ensure data saturation. Following the initial survey, additional surveys were sent out to develop upon the initial themes/concepts found through open and axial coding. Finally, four participants took part in semi-structured interviews so that I could gather more concise data by asking questions that build upon the themes/concepts which were developed at this stage in the process.

I utilized grounded theory qualitative research to analyze participant responses. The collection of participant responses included both surveys and semi-structured interviews, with the questions asked later in the data collection process being influenced by the initial codes developed from the earlier collected data. In Chapter 4, I discuss the theory which was developed through this process in much greater detail. I also provide a discussion of how the coding and data collection process led to the development of the stated theory.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

In Chapter 4, I begin by presenting an overview of the study including the problem, purpose, and research question posed. I then provide a summary of demographic information of participants before discussing the analysis of the data. Finally, I present the findings of the data and conclude by summarizing all analyses.

Overview

The problem addressed in this study was that despite the heightened awareness of the need to address systemic racism and inequality across the United States, there is a lack of focus on DEI initiatives within the corporate world. The purpose of this study was to address the problem by exploring how executive coaches may ameliorate the lack of focus on DEI initiatives within corporations. The following research question fulfilled the purpose and addressed the problem of this study:

RQ: How may executive coaches advance the development of diversity, equity, and inclusion in organizations?

Demographics

There were 16 complete survey respondents and four participants interviewed in this study. All respondents and participants worked as executive coaches. A demographic overview of survey respondents is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1*Demographics of Survey Respondents*

15 survey participants		
Gender	Female	7
	Male	7
	Identifies as other	1
Age group	25-40	3
	40-55	9
	55+	3
Years as an EC	1 to 5 yrs.	3
	6 to 10 yrs.	5
	10+ yrs.	7

I also conducted four semi-structured interviews with executive coaches to gain additional knowledge about the experience of executive coaches in the corporate world. Participants represent a diverse range of experience. Their demographic information is summarized in Table 2.

Table 2*Demographics of Interviewees*

Participant	Sex	Age	Years as an Executive Coach
P1	Female	55+	25+
P2	Male	40 - 55	12+
P3	Female	25 - 40	8
P4	Female	40 - 55	10+

Data Analysis

I used Corbin and Strauss' (2008) constant comparative method used for developing grounded theory as my method of analysis. This includes three phases of coding: open coding, axial coding, and selective coding (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I conducted each step using NVivo 12 and created memos and diagrams throughout the process. First, I conducted open and axial coding for survey answers. Second, I reiterated the process for interviews.

Finally, I merged coding from all transcripts and grouped together code groups to reveal emergent themes. These steps are discussed in depth in the following sections.

Open Coding

Open coding includes separating data into codes while constantly comparing data and identifying different categories, properties, and dimensions (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). I completed this process by coding each line of each transcript and assigning initial codes to all text. I repeated this process for each survey question and each interview transcript.

Surveys

There were 16 responses to each of the three survey questions. Open coding of question one resulted in 29 unique codes, question two yielded 21 codes, and question 3 yielded 24 codes. In memo 1, I highlighted key quotes that came from each question as a means of immersing myself in the data. A respondent to question 1 said,

The challenge has been that the system focuses on easily identifiable factors (often out of the individual's control) that contribute to differences. It does not address ways all humans are the same (Deal's Retiring the Generation Gap, Jung's 4 life stages, astrology/numerology). As a society, we are being distracted by the centralized hierarchical system and led down a path with few viable solutions. We need to ask different questions creating a grass roots uprising where people present completely innovative solutions that are in the individual's control.

This response highlights that DEI should be innovative, celebrate individuality, and emphasize connectedness. A response to question 2 focuses on teaching others to be responsible for their role in DEI. The respondent said,

Similar to Jordan B. Peterson, I am trying to teach people to focus less on freedoms and rights (victim mentality) and to instead become accountable and responsible

(owner mentality). I have not interacted with too many coaches who approach this the way I do.

Interviews

I conducted open coding for each interview transcript. This resulted in 92 unique codes. In memo 3, I wrote observations following the open coding process of transcripts. I noted the following:

- Ideas expressed include using DEI as a part of the business strategy, giving people a voice, the need for an outside perspective (i.e., someone outside of the business/organization) to coach DEI, and the need for personalizing coaching to meet people where they are.
- Most participants tend to meet with HR or a Diversity Officer rather than the CEO, but some expressed interacting with the CEO.
- The idea of unconscious bias came up many times.
- Recommendations include building relationships, building off the workplace mission statement, cultivating belongings, and actually integrating DEI and not just checking off the training box.
- Like the surveys, most stated there has been an increase in DEI trainings over the past couple of years, but participants also emphasized that this increase is externally motivated and thus may not last.

Axial Coding

Axial coding involves grouping together similar codes to make categories of the data (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In this step, I created top level categorical codes and nested similar initial codes under each category. I completed this step separately for surveys and then for interviews.

Surveys

The survey data were separated by question. I grouped codes into categories for each question and then later compared across all three. In memo 2, I summarized the categorization of codes as follows:

- Question 1:
 - Increase (10 codes)
 - Implementation (10 codes)
 - Bias (4 codes)
 - Same Need (2 codes)
 - Support Minorities (2 codes)

- Question 2:
 - Accountability (5 codes)
 - Other interpretations of diversity (4 codes)
 - Trainings (4 codes)
 - Supporting minorities (2 codes)
 - Tools (2 codes)
- Question 3:
 - Teaching methods (10 codes)
 - Awareness (7 codes)
 - Support professional and personal development (6 codes)

Through comparative analysis, I determined that bias training is mentioned in all three questions. Implementation, trainings, and teaching methods, which are categories under different questions, can likely be grouped together during selective coding. A common theme among categories and across questions was supporting marginalized groups.

Interviews

Following open coding interview transcripts, I conducted axial coding in which I combined the 93 codes into 13 groups. In memo 4, I noted the following:

Looking at these groups, it is clear that DEI must be explored by first building relationships and understanding others. The need and interest for DEI has increased, but there is question as to whether this is out of genuine interest or to simply “check off the box” and fulfill a DEI requirement. DEI should be part of the business plan, build off of the company’s values, and should be part of the long-term company plan. Other groups that seem to be frequently discussed are acknowledging the need for DEI training, supporting POC (persons of color), having an outside entity or person conduct training, and challenging traditional power structures and norms.

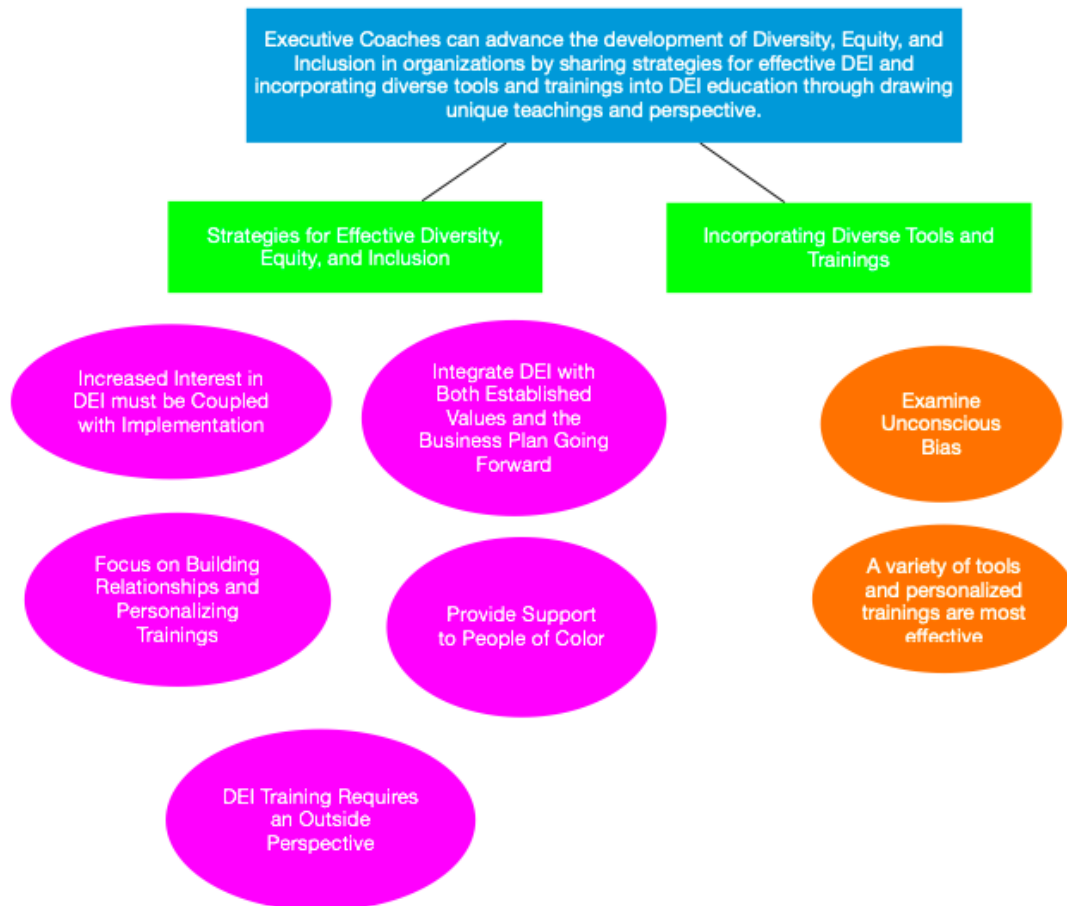
Selective Coding

The third and final step is selective coding, which involves connecting core categories and identifying relationships (Corbin & Strauss, 2008). In this step, I looked for common categories of codes across all transcripts, including each survey question and interview

participant transcript, and identified themes. I first identified seven key themes and then grouped them into two principal top categories. Figure 2 illustrates these groupings.

Figure 2

Concept Map



Results

Two key categories emerged following analysis, as illustrated above. These categories are strategies for effective DEI and the need to incorporate diverse tools and methods in trainings. Five themes emerged under category one, and two themes emerged under category two. These themes are summarized in Table 3.

Table 3

Summary of Themes

Category	Themes
Strategies for Effective DEI	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Increased interest in DEI must be coupled with implementation2. Focus on building relationships and personalizing trainings3. Integrate DEI with both established values and the business plan going forward4. Provide support to People of Color5. DEI training requires an outside perspective
Executive Coaches must incorporate diverse tools and methods in DEI trainings	<ol style="list-style-type: none">6. Examine unconscious bias7. A variety of tools and personalized trainings are most effective

Category 1: Strategies for Effective DEI

Category 1 emphasizes that in order for an executive coach to spur genuine DEI in corporations, they must incorporate effective strategies. Five themes emerged under category

1. These themes are summarized in Table 4.

Table 4*Summary of Themes for Category 1*

Theme	Number of References in the Data	Files Represented
Theme 1: Increased interest in DEI must be coupled with implementation	35	5
Theme 2: Focus on building relationships and personalizing trainings	29	7
Theme 3: Integrate DEI with both established values and the business plan going forward	19	5
Theme 4: Provide support to People of Color	18	6
Theme 5: DEI training requires an outside perspective	5	2

Theme 1: Increased Interest in DEI Must be Coupled with Implementation

The first theme that emerged in response to category 1 is that while there is an increase in interest in DEI trainings among corporations, this increased interest is often due to the pressure to fulfill a requirement that has arisen from racial trauma and inequalities that have become prevalent over the past couple of years since the murder of George Floyd. Many

believed that increased interest in trainings does not automatically equate to the effective implementation of DEI.

Participants and respondents did agree that there has been an increase in interest of DEI among corporations. A respondent said, “[Interest] is increasing 200%.” Participant 4 described an increase in requests for DEI training, stating,

My experience with coaching and the space of DEI last year, I definitely saw an increase in requests for DEI support, overall, and I just want to give context to that because although I do coach, there are some consulting opportunities as well, that I support, and my background, of having been an HR professional for about 20 years prior was very helpful. Much of the increase in requests were post George Floyd.

They discussed how the increase in requests for DEI support occurred post-George Floyd and was therefore rooted in societal context.

When asked if there has been an increase in inquiries regarding DEI trainings, a survey respondent said, “Yes, there has been an increase in ‘ask’ for this coaching.” Participants observed an increase in ‘ask,’ but many feared that this does not translate to actual implementation. Another survey respondent said, “I do not believe needs [for DEI] have increased, but these topics are more because of societal events and media attention.”

Participant 1 described their fear that an increased interest is more of a trend than active change. Participant 1 stated,

Yes, but I think the jury remains out if the increase will continue. Because what I'm seeing now what I saw in the summer was, you know, we've got some awareness, all of a sudden, there's things going on, that we should probably be paying attention to in society. And then it became, maybe we should be paying attention to something going on in our own companies. Then it became, well, let's do a couple of things. But in the

meantime, there's still this pandemic, and I have a concern that this is going to be a trend rather than a dynamic change.

Participant 1 continued, stating that they feared the increased requests in DEI training occurred just to ensure companies have a record of trainings. Participant 1 shared,

But I would suggest more than 50% of the time HR is saying “go take this class on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion”, people take the class, everybody checks the box, and they all walk away thinking something's gotten better. And that's a problem. In my mind, the backlash from this is going to be brutal.

Companies must approach DEI in their workplace by actually implementing policies that reflect DEI trainings and inspire genuine diversity, equity, and inclusion.

Theme 2: Focus on Building Relationships and Personalizing Trainings

Another key strategy that executive coaches use to effectively further DEI in the workplace is by building relationships, cultivating understanding, and personalizing trainings. This was expressed 29 times and was represented in all seven files (i.e., survey response questions and interviews). Participant 3 emphasized the importance of personalizing trainings to resonate with people and give them a voice, stating,

Without that voice of the employee, I really don't feel like it's possible for a company to put out a strategy that will resonate with people, because it's almost as if you're trying to solve for something that you have no idea is really happening. You need real feedback based on the voice of the people that you're trying to advocate for. There's nothing more frustrating to people of color than someone coming out and telling you how they're going to help you... diversity is a very personal thing for people of color as well, because you are asking them to share their own experiences which takes courage. Because the only way that people learn about how to be aware and to be more inclusive is by hearing the experience of people.

Participant 4 discussed the need to include different perspectives and learn from others.

Participant 4 stated the following:

We may not outwardly say inclusion, but that would be a critical element to any effort if you're looking to kind of improve your team dynamics, or, or better yet, yes it's a team but the intent of a team or leader, effectively leading a team is being able to really celebrate everyone's gifts and bring that together in a way where the power of difference is tapped into on a regular basis so it means that we have to go deeper and appreciating what are the differences in our team, what are the different behavioral driver.

In addition to incorporating DEI from a relational and empowering perspective, participants discussed tailoring trainings to different levels of positions. They shared the following:

We've got three different levels that we want you to put the training through; entry level/ frontline, the middle management that manages that frontline and then our senior executive team. And so, we had the exact same training, but our delivery was different based upon who we were talking to. We started at the entry level, and we put them through the training they said oh my god we love this, this is amazing. This is the kind of training I am really really excited that our organization is endorsing! It's exactly what we were needing the middle level said when asked for feedback, they said wow this is interesting. There's a lot of things I was not expecting. I've learned a lot. I'm going to have to sit with this a bit. Then, the senior level said, I can't believe you came in here with this information, this is not what we're looking for at all. I feel like you're trying to sell us on an idea, and they cancelled the engagement. Wow, whereas the junior level and middle management level said this was so interesting, this is amazing, this is exactly what we need, they also said typically when we get

something like this, they end up canceling it or they don't continue it. Which is exactly what ended up happening with this client. The senior leadership did not see a need and thought we might have been opening pandora's box on subject matter that they didn't realize was a real need to be aired out and discussed with the employee population. And so, for me that just highlighted the disconnect between all three levels.

Theme 3: Integrate DEI with Both Established Values and the Business Plan Going Forward

Theme 3 involved incorporating DEI in both existing business principals and future business objectives. DEI should be based off of existing values and company mission statements and should also be seen as a tool to spur business going forward. There were 19 references in the data to this theme with five files represented.

Participant 4 discussed how DEI should be built off of what the company has already established as core values. Participant 4 shared the following:

I actually worked with companies where it already is built in their mission statement, such as one of their statements say "creating a better world" or their mission statement says, "Do the right thing" which literally was the words of their founder, and they would have the picture of that legacy leader. I suggest to them to use what they already are saying their mission is as the platform to say, we already have this in our call-to-action day to day. I often say take a look, it's in your history, build on that statement, doing the right thing is about embracing diversity, creating a better world is about making sure everyone - customers and employees - feel included and treated equitably.

They continued, stating, “Fill in the blank as it relates to strengthening that from a DEI standpoint. So, to make a long story short, my main recommendation to my clients is, let’s start with your company’s mission statement and build from there.”

In addition to building on what companies have already established, participants emphasized the need to utilize DEI as a support to the company’s business plan. Participant 2, for example, said, “Driving DEI in an organization must be a strategy for either driving business or recruiting and retaining talent or it will just be a flavor of the week.” This relates to theme 1 and demonstrates how by looking at DEI through a business lens, it can become effective and be implemented. They went on to share,

They said you know hey, we've got this diversity plan, which is a well-publicized diversity plan, come in and talk to us and see if there's anything that you can do to help us execute this plan that we have in place. And so, we responded to that, but we were able to elevate the conversation to a business level as opposed to just talking about diversity. And so, the question was, when you look at your senior leadership team, how are you, how is this plan influencing the direction that they're taking the business, how is this influencing their long-term strategic plan.

Theme 4: Provide Support to People of Color and Anyone Vulnerable to Prejudice

All respondents agreed that in order for DEI to be effectively implemented, companies must provide support for People of Color (POC) and anyone vulnerable to prejudice. The first step in establishing support is challenging traditional societal and workplace structures. Participant 4 said,

The first thought most people assume is a male, a certain age etc., so again if we're really going to help, and I think executive coaching can be one of the tools to help in really removing barriers that get in the way of an inclusive, psychologically safe environment that we all want to work in. And I always say environment because these

days I think we know that environment is not going to have four walls as we traditionally had in the past.

The second step in supporting people vulnerable to prejudice is through affirmative action policies. One survey respondent said,

I have helped build a CEO succession strategy that included fast tracking “diverse” candidates. This included a process that would cultivate credibility for the individual within the organization as well as their own confidence that they belonged in that particular role.

Another respondent offered, “I have coached executives on their thoughts around being required to hire certain racial groups in order to represent the constituents of their clients.”

Third, companies can be supportive by creating a safe environment that recognizes their generational and racial trauma. Participant 2 described the need for companies to remove barriers that have long been constructed against POC and others. They described the following:

How well are you identifying and removing barriers that stand in the way for your folks because I can want to do a good job, I can know what a good job looks like, but I've got this thing that I can't get past because I don't have access to the right people or resources or money or whatever the case or training or mindset or whatever the case might be. And that's where I need your support. And that for me, that's where the training needs to sit, removing barriers that stand in the way but there has to be barriers that stand in the way of helping you achieve your business goals.

Theme 5: DEI Training Requires an Outside Perspective

The final theme that emerged from category one is that DEI training requires an outside perspective and, often, trainings from individuals who are not internal to the organization. Thus, executive coaches are crucial in advancing DEI in the corporate world.

Participant 1 described how an outside perspective is needed to help identify a lack of DEI, as internal actors have a tendency to focus on each other's progress and ignore where progress can still be made. They said,

There needs to be somebody who sits on the outside saying, wait a minute, here's a microaggression, that the CEO just said, and here's another one, three vice presidents are all out there spouting and thinking they're doing the right thing, who is monitoring this? And so, when you're self-regulating, you are going to have trouble getting better. Because the chances are, you're going to be very busy rewarding each other for the wonderful work you're doing. But that doesn't mean that somebody of diversity actually sees it that way.

Participant 3 echoed this idea, saying, "Companies need an outside influence, such as an executive coach, to bring those flubs to life, walk the talk!" They also highlighted that employees are more likely to openly discuss their experience with DEI with an outside professional rather than a company executive. P3 shared,

The difference of my suggestion I made above that you need real feedback from the employee is, people feel more comfortable with a professional effort managed by an external entity (coach/trainer) then being asked to gather and share with a company leader.

Category 2: Executive Coaches Must Incorporate Diverse Tools and Methods in DEI Trainings

Category 2 is executive coaches must incorporate diverse tools and methods in DEI trainings. Theme 6 relates particularly to unconscious bias trainings, as it was a common theme across all transcripts and answers. Theme 7 dives deeper into diversifying trainings through mixed methods and approaches. Themes 6 and 7 are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5

Summary of Themes for Category 2

Theme	Number of References in the Data	Files Represented
Theme 6: Examine Unconscious Bias	19	6
Theme 7: A Variety of Tools and Personalized Trainings are Most Effective	22	5

Theme 6: Examine Unconscious Bias

As mentioned, unconscious bias was discussed across all answers and was mentioned in many different contexts. Therefore, executive coaches can implement effective DEI in companies by always addressing unconscious bias. A survey respondent described how addressing unconscious bias begins at the individual level. The respondent stated, “[First is] helping identify unconscious bias in individuals and helping them come to terms with their previously unidentified unconscious bias. It all starts with the individual.” Another respondent reflected this idea by describing their approach as,

The ability to build neuro-agility in individuals and teams is an area I focus in, and that does uncover blind spots or biases that are brought to conscious attention to be able to work on effectively... For my practice, we mostly focus on the individual's mindset and building a system to heighten awareness of unconscious bias.

P4 described organizations being an environment for unconscious bias by saying, “An example that I think in the coaching space, we as coaches need to work on this but as well in

helping organizations, things like cultural fit for an organization are laden with opportunities for unconscious bias.”

Addressing unconscious bias on a personal and individual level is crucial to obtaining genuine DEI. Theme 6 focuses on examining unconscious bias, and not just on trainings. Many participants mentioned an increase in requests for unconscious bias trainings, but one emphasized that unconscious bias trainings are not enough to combat unconscious bias and a lack of DEI in companies. They said,

My standard response to a request for coaching is: If you are looking for unconscious bias training that's not what I'm offering you. I did have occasion to speak to a few companies that all they were looking for is unconscious bias training and, in those meetings, I had mentioned the fact that best practice, or in my experience, just doing training is not going to meet the mark. So, I always talk about let's get the voice of your employee.

Theme 7: A Variety of Tools and Personalized Trainings are Most Effective

The final theme revealed that those executive coaches can be more effective by using a variety of tools and methods in their trainings that are personalized to clients' needs. Participants and respondents described using surveys, focus groups, and podcasts as ways of facilitating discussion, feedback, and increasing awareness of the need for DEI. Participants also emphasized the need to effectively define DEI, use a flexible program, and teach that DEI should be prioritized.

Additionally, coaches should define clear goals. One respondent said, “If the coach is strategic and effective, they can change DEI culture through the implementation of SMART goals.” Participant 3 said that training must be more holistic and go beyond simple training modules. They said, “The worst requests are, we need a training module or a video about

harassment or anti-discrimination as a quick fix to say we are doing something around recognizing differences.”

Finally, participants described the need to learn from different perspectives and utilize different lived experiences to personalize trainings. A respondent described learning from other executive coaches, stating, “I have taken part and spoken at two different DE&I summits and have listened to many other executive coaches who are women/POC/LGBTQ+ talking about coaching around DEI issues.” P2 discussed the need for individual voices, perspectives, and taking a personalized approach by saying, “Different thinking [leads to] a different result.”

Summary

In this chapter, I described the three-step process of coding conducted and used for this study. I explored how open coding, axial coding, and selective coding led to seven themes nested under two main categories. Ultimately, those themes and categories resulted in the theory listed below.

Executive coaches can advance the development of DEI in organizations by sharing strategies for effective DEI and incorporating diverse tools and trainings into DEI education through drawing on unique teachings and perspectives.

CHAPTER 5
DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS, IMPLICATIONS, LIMITATIONS AND
RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

In 2020, there was an increase in focus on systemic racism and inequality in society at large and, by extension, within organizations. Prompted by a series of highly publicized incidents involving police misconduct and the ongoing public response thereof, companies have renewed their focus on delivering timely and effective DEI initiatives. In this qualitative research, I examined ways in which executive coaches can better implement DEI training within their respective organizations and sought to analyze how executive coaches seek to advance the goals of their programs. The data were gathered through a series of semi-structured interviews with executive coaches ($N = 16$) on their perceptions of their programs, their analysis of improved effectiveness, and opinions on the programs' successes and failures. Utilizing grounded theory, I identified salient trends and themes within the subjects' responses and extrapolated those findings into specific recommendations for the effective application of DEI programs in the future. I argue that executive coaches can advance the development of DEI in organizations by sharing strategies for effective DEI and incorporating diverse tools and trainings into DEI education through drawing on unique teachings and perspectives.

Interpretation of Findings

Strategies for Effective DEI

The subjects identified five different strategies for improving effectiveness of DEI initiatives. The growing interest in DEI programs must be coupled with implementation. The growth in interest of DEI programs has been well documented (Cutter & Weber, 2020). This growth has prompted questions, however, as to the actual implementation of programs.

Respondents in this research pointed out that “interest” has not always produced the desired implementation. Furthermore, previous researchers have speculated on the long-term durability of many of the initiatives where they were implemented, arguing that strong pushback from certain sectors such as conservative American political movements, threatens their continued implementation (Guynn, 2020). This pushback has persisted despite studies that have shown interventions to be effective at increasing DEI in organizations (Cutter & Weber, 2020; Maurer, 2020). This research has largely buttressed these insights. The subjects raised concerns of the long-term viability of programs and questioned whether outside political pressures coerced companies to implement DEI programs.

Subjects noted the importance of interpersonal relationships 29 times in the collected data, reflecting a deep concern with the importance of personalized interactions between coaches and their pupils. They reported that a strong relationship between members is critical in tailoring specific interventions based on personality, identity, and position within the company. These observations largely echo the findings of previous researchers, who have also highlighted the importance of interpersonal relationships in coaching (e.g., Gan et al., 2021; Nash, 2018). Strong relationships have been shown to allow for clearer communication and honesty (Frodsham, 2020). Creating an environment that builds trust and communication between individuals allows for more effective implementation of DEI interventions.

Another core theme relates to the integration of DEI with company values and business objectives. Organizations have already had ethical standards in place prior to the implementation of DEI initiatives and must therefore be compatible with the existing corporate value structure. Researchers have noted that streamlining interventions into existing corporate structures is important, not just for effective implementation, but for acceptance from corporate leaders (Lewis-Duarte & Bligh, 2012). Seiler (2019) noted the need for corporate workers to simultaneously understand the economic logic of the organization and

the need for feedback between coaches and organizations. Previous researchers have noted that mismatches between corporate objectives and DEI initiatives are likely to result in ineffective programs (Will & Hamilton, 2021). Also of note is the observation that many companies are ultimately economic beasts and aim to remain financially profitable above all else, especially to shareholders. Improving DEI may be regarded as valuable only insofar as it increases the bottom line, rather than any dedication to social justice or ethical outcomes. Allocating precious resources towards DEI programs means fewer resources for other business-focused initiatives. This research largely supports previous observations, but as Baum (2021) pointed out, there is a lack of empirical research on the interaction between corporate culture and DEI initiatives.

There was unanimous consent among the respondents that companies must provide sufficient support for POC and those vulnerable to prejudice in the implementation of DEI programs, including challenging traditional hierarchies, improving diversity among the corporate leadership, and addressing issues of racial trauma. Other researchers have made similar prescriptions to challenge DEI programs to be more effective in their purpose. Smith et al. (2021), for example, identified the problem of the so-called “White Male Protagonists” in the DEI and corporate training literature. The implicit assumption within many programs is that the subjects will be white and male, largely ignoring the diverse reality of the workplace. Indeed, other researchers such as Kraus et al. (2022) and Roche and Passmore (2021) have identified the problem of “colorblindness” in the development and implementation of DEI programs, viewing the corporate environment as a largely raceless place. This research echoed these concerns and calls for including POC more fully into the existing programs as well as diversifying the corporate environment.

The final theme in the first category is the importance of outside perspectives on DEI implementation. The subjects cited the need for outsiders to effectively affect change within

the organization. They reported that internal hires are likely to be beholden to corporate leaders and have internalized company policies that might run counter to DEI objectives. These prescriptions largely reflect other researchers, who have made similar observations about the importance of diverse sources of feedback (Ferdman et al., 2020; Golbeck, 2021). Taylor (2019) highlighted the importance of outside council on interventions, arguing that corporate leaders and corporate structures bias decision making towards profit incentives and away from issues of inclusion.

Executive Coaches Must Incorporate Diverse Tools and Methods in DEI Trainings

The second category developed from the primary codes is the prescription to incorporate diverse tools in the implementation of DEI initiatives. The first of these is to address sources of unconscious bias. The subjects urged for investigating individual sources of bias and addressing them to ameliorate the sources of bias. Approaches to accomplish this goal include identifying neuro-agility in order to recognize when bias skews individuals' behavior. There are few explicit references to unconscious bias in the literature, which remains a relatively understudied phenomenon. Schuyler et al. (2021), however, advocated the use of mindfulness training in order to better address DEI objectives. Mindfulness training has been shown to improve subjects' awareness of harmful bias and unconscious actions that may adversely affect the community at large. This vector of research remains underdeveloped in the literature, revealing a notable research gap.

The final theme in the data was the importance of using a variety of tools in DEI interventions. The subjects reported that standardized "one size fits all" approaches to DEI are likely to be ineffective at meeting the diverse needs of different organizations. They advocated using a variety of tools, including surveys, focus groups, and podcasts, to facilitate feedback and discussion, as well as having clearly defined goals. They also advocated for personalized interventions commensurate with individual characteristics and organization

function. These prescriptions have been largely supported in the previous literature. Dillard-Wright and Gazaway (2021) argued for varied approaches covering different aspects of identity and role within the organization including age, sexual orientation, and disability. Furthermore, regarding the workers in a holistic way, taking in individual characteristics as a part of an integrated whole should be an integral part of the DEI process (Baum, 2021).

Limitations of the Study

This study was limited by the sample of subjects. Although over 75 coaches were solicited for the survey, only 16 gave full survey answers because of the time consuming, verbatim survey process. Executive coaches represent a limited, albeit important part of the DEI project. Executives, workers, and managers are also integral parts of the process, and their perspectives as to the effectiveness and desirability of DEI interventions were not addressed in this study. It is possible that the other stakeholders in the organization have very different perspectives on the desirability or efficacy of DEI interventions and thus should eventually be incorporated into future research. Furthermore, given the diverse selection of executive coaches with backgrounds in different fields, geographic locations, and time in their positions, it is difficult to say which insights are generally applicable and which are unique to their own situations.

Recommendations

This research illuminates several vectors of future research. First, given the relative recent nature in widespread interest in DEI initiatives, there are few longitudinal studies that assess their effectiveness over time. Indeed, given ongoing concerns about the durability of interest in these initiatives, as well as political hostility to them, suggests that their long-term viability may be in jeopardy. Thus, further research into the sustainability of interest in DEI programs is recommended.

Secondly, while there is some research into the effectiveness of DEI programs on unconscious bias, it remains a relatively understudied subject of the field. This research identified unconscious bias as a large concern for executive coaches, who called for greater focus on interventions to ameliorate the effects of unconscious bias in the workplace. Exactly what interventions beyond simple mindfulness training, however, remain to be explored. Future researchers should investigate this phenomenon more fully and identify effective interventions.

Finally, while the interaction between corporate value structures and DEI has been widely theorized, there is a lack of empirical research on the matter (Baum, 2021). Further researchers should investigate the extent and nature of these interactions. This research would be useful in the blending of DEI and corporate value frameworks.

Implications

The relatively recent increase in interest in DEI interventions has not yet yielded mature understandings of the most effective approaches to implementation. The subjects identified five strategies for improving effectiveness, including increased implementation, focusing on relationships, integrating DEI with existing corporate value structures, including POC within the programs, and maintaining an outside perspective when addressing concerns. Furthermore, participants called for a targeting of unconscious bias as well as a diverse toolset for DEI instructors to implement their programs more effectively. These prescriptions indicate a field that is still in its nascent stages and has room to grow to make more inclusive, diverse, and equitable environments in organizations.

Conclusion

In this qualitative study, I examined the perspectives of executive coaches through semi-structured interviews and grounded theory methods to identify more effective methods of implementing DEI interventions. In 2020, there was a significant increase in social

activism surrounding racial inequality and diversity within all facets of American society. This activism had a commensurate effect on organizational culture and goals. These DEI programs have lofty goals, with the hopes of increasing social justice within public spaces. In order to achieve these goals, however, a greater understanding of best practices in DEI programs is necessary. As the nation continues to grapple with the complex challenges of DEI, more academic research should be geared towards actionable insights into DEI initiatives.

REFERENCES

- Athanasopoulou, A., & Dopson, S. (2018). A systematic review of executive coaching outcomes: Is it the journey or the destination that matters the most? *The Leadership Quarterly*, 29(1), 70–88. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.leaqua.2017.11.004>
- Baum, B. (2021). Diversity, equity, and inclusion policies: Are organizations truly committed to a workplace culture shift? *Journal of Business and Behavioral Sciences*, 33(2), 11–12.
- Bay, J. (2022). Fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion in the technical and professional communication service course. *IEEE Transactions on Professional Communication*.
- Bernstein, R. S., Bulger, M., Salipante, P., & Weisinger, J. Y. (2020). From diversity to inclusion to equity: A theory of generative interactions. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 167(3), 395–410. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-019-04180-1>
- Boysen-Rotelli, S. (2021). *An introduction to professional and executive coaching*. IAP.
- Bozer, G., Sarros, J., & Santora, C. J. (2014). Academic background and credibility in executive coaching effectiveness. *Personnel Review*, 43(6), 881–897. <https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-10-2013-0171>
- Clift, J. D. (2019). *A grounded theory study on the process of coaching toxic leaders* [Doctoral dissertation, Capella University].
- Clohesy, S., Dean-Coffey, J., & McGill, L. (2019). Leveraging effective consulting to advance diversity, equity, and inclusion in philanthropy. *The Foundation Review*, 11(3). <https://doi.org/10.9707/1944-5660.1483>
- Corbin, J., & Strauss, A. (2008). Strategies for qualitative data analysis. *Basics of Qualitative Research. Techniques and Procedures for Developing Grounded Theory*, 3(10), 9781452230153.

- Creswell, J. W. (2013). *Steps in conducting a scholarly mixed methods study*. DBER Speaker Series. University of Nebraska Lincoln.
<https://digitalcommons.unl.edu/dberspeakers/48/>
- Cutter, C., & Weber, L. (2020). *Demand for chief diversity officers is high. So is turnover*. The Wall Street Journal.
- Dillard-Wright, J., & Gazaway, S. (2021). Drafting a diversity, equity, and inclusion textbook inventory: Assumptions, concepts, conceptual framework. *Teaching and Learning in Nursing, 16*(3), 247–253. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.teln.2021.02.001>
- El-Amin, A. (2022). Improving organizational commitment to diversity, equity, inclusion, and belonging. In *Social justice research methods for doctoral research* (pp. 208–221). IGI Global.
- Ferdman, B. M., Prime, J., & Riggio, R. E. (Eds.). (2020). *Inclusive leadership: Transforming diverse lives, workplaces, and societies*. Routledge.
- Frodsham, J. (2020). Coaching for sustained change: Leading diversity, equity, and inclusion initiatives. *Forbes Coaches Council*, 3–4.
- Gan, G. C., Chong, C. W., Yuen, Y. Y., Yen Teoh, W. M., & Rahman, M. S. (2021). Executive coaching effectiveness: Towards sustainable business excellence. *Total Quality Management & Business Excellence, 32*(13-14), 1405–1423.
<https://doi.org/10.1080/14783363.2020.1724507>
- Gill, G. K., McNally, M. J., & Berman, V. (2018, September). Effective diversity, equity, and inclusion practices. In *Healthcare management forum* (Vol. 31, No. 5, pp. 196–199). Sage.
- Glaser, B. G. (1992). *Basics of grounded theory analysis*. Sociological Press.
- Golbeck, A. L. (Ed.). (2021). *Leadership in statistics and data science: Planning for inclusive excellence*. Springer Nature.

- Guynn, J. (2020). Trump diversity training ban roils corporate America. *USA Today*, 01B-01B.
- Halse, C., & Honey, A. (2005). Unraveling ethics: Illuminating the moral dilemmas of research ethics. *Signs*, 30, 2141–2162.
- Hanley, S. L. (2019). *Executive coaching in practice: A descriptive phenomenological analysis* [Doctoral dissertation].
- Herman, B. (2021). Diversity, equity, and inclusion for data workers: A stakeholder approach. In *Academy of management proceedings* (Vol. 2021, No. 1, p. 16534). Academy of Management.
- Hogan, R., Curphy, G. J., & Hogan, J. (1994). What we know about leadership effectiveness and personality. *American Psychologist*, 49, 493–504. <https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.49.6.493>
- Joo, B. K. B., Sushko, J. S., & McLean, G. N. (2012). Multiple faces of coaching: Manager-as-coach, executive coaching, and formal mentoring. *Organization Development Journal*, 30(1), 19–38.
- Joshi, K. D. (2022). Are we doing enough? A threefold approach to continue our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion. *ACM SIGMIS Database: The DATABASE for Advances in Information Systems*, 53(1), 7–9. <https://doi.org/10.1145/3514097.3514099>
- Judge, W. Q., & Cowell, J. (1997). The brave new world of executive coaching. *Business Horizons*, 40(4), 71–77. link.gale.com/apps/doc/A20141968/AONE?u=anon~481a6533&sid=googleScholar&xid=5bd30577

- Kampa-Kokesch, A. (2001). Executive coaching: A comprehensive review of the literature. *Consulting Psychology Journal*, 53(4), 205–228.
<https://doi.org/10.1037/1061-4087.53.4.205>
- Karakhan, A. A., Gambatese, J. A., Simmons, D. R., & Al-Bayati, A. J. (2021). Identifying pertinent indicators for assessing and fostering diversity, equity, and inclusion of the construction workforce. *Journal of Management in Engineering*, 37(2), Article 04020114.
- Kilburg, R. R. (2000). Executive coaching: Developing managerial wisdom in a world of chaos. *American Psychological Association*, 6.
- Kraus, M. W., Torrez, B., & Hollie, L. (2022). How narratives of racial progress create barriers to diversity, equity, and inclusion in organizations. *Current Opinion in Psychology*, 43, 108–113. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.copsyc.2021.06.022>
- Lewis-Duarte, M., & Bligh, M. C. (2012). Agents of “influence”: Exploring the usage, timing, and outcomes of executive coaching tactics. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 33(3), 255–281. <https://doi.org/10.1108/01437731211216461>
- Lincoln, Y. S., & Guba, E. G. (1986). But is it rigorous? Trustworthiness and authenticity in naturalistic evaluation. *New Directions for Program Evaluation*, 1986(30), 73–84.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/ev.1427>
- Lukaszewski, J. E. (1988). Behind the throne: How to coach and counsel executives. *Training and Development Journal*, 42(10), 33–35.
- MacIntyre, P. L. (2020). Supporting change leaders with executive coaching. *International Journal of Organizational Innovation (Online)*, 12(4), 375–386.
- Marshall, C., & Rossman, G. (2011). *Designing qualitative research*. Sage

- Mason, M. (2010). Sample size and saturation in PhD studies using qualitative interviews. *Methods for Qualitative Management Research in the Context of Social Systems Thinking*, 11(3). <https://doi.org/10.17169/fqs-11.3.1428>
- Maurer, R. (2020). *New DE&I roles spike after racial justice protests*. SHRM. <https://www.shrm.org/resourcesandtools/hr-topics/talent-acquisition/pages/new-dei-roles-spike-after-racial-justice-protests.aspx>
- Merriam, S. B. (2009). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation*. Jossey-Bass.
- Merriam, S. B., & Tisdell, E. J. (2015). *Qualitative research: A guide to design and implementation* (4th ed.). Jossey-Bass.
- Nash, J. A. (2018). *The power of relationships: Navigating the dance of change through executive coaching*. Weatherhead School of Management.
- Nathaniel, A. (2021). Classic grounded theory: What it is and what it is not. *The Grounded Theory Review*, 20(1).
- Nowell, L. S., Norris, J. M., White, D. E., & Moules, N. J. (2017). Thematic analysis: Striving to meet the trustworthiness criteria. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 16(1). <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406917733847>
- Petty, N. J., Thomson, O. P., & Stew, G. (2012). Ready for a paradigm shift? Part 2: Introducing qualitative research methodologies and methods. *Manual Therapy*, 17(5), 378–384. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.math.2012.03.004>
- Powney, J., & Watts, M. (2018). *Interviewing in educational research*. Routledge.
- Qu, S. Q., & Dumay, J. (2011). The qualitative research interview. *Qualitative Research in Accounting & Management*, 8(3), 238–264. <https://doi.org/10.1108/11766091111162070>

- Rakesh, A., & Chandran, N. (2021). The promise of diversity, equity, and inclusion in 2021 and beyond. *NHRD Network Journal*, 14(3), 314–316.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/26314541211030590>
- Rees, P. L., & McLaughlin, D. J. (2018). Peer leadership and mentoring in engineering: A potential path for changing organizational culture to positively impact diversity, equity, and inclusion. In *2018 CoNECD-The Collaborative Network for Engineering and Computing Diversity Conference*.
- Resnick, S., & Fuller, J. C. (2021). Diversity, equity, and inclusion: Meeting new demands—and requirements—for accountability. *Board Leadership*, 2021(174), 4–8.
<https://doi.org/10.1002/bl.30184>
- Roche, C., & Passmore, J. (2021). *Racial justice, equity and belonging in coaching*. Henley Centre for Coaching.
- Schuyler, K. G., Watson, L. W., & King, E. (2021). How generative mindfulness can contribute to inclusive workplaces. *Humanistic Management Journal*, 6(3), 451–478.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/s41463-021-00120-2>
- Seiler, H. (2019). The client as a provider of developmental feedback for the executive coach. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*, (S13), 114–125.
<https://doi.org/10.24384/rzmc-pz10>
- Sherman, B. W., Kelly, R. K., & Payne-Foster, P. (2021). Integrating workforce health into employer diversity, equity, and inclusion efforts. *American Journal of Health Promotion*, 35(5), 609–612. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0890117120983288>
- Shorty, R. (2021). *Managing whiteness for inclusion: A proposed theoretical framework using contact theory & critical race theory in reducing racial bias* [Doctoral dissertation, Benedictine University]. ProQuest Dissertations Publishing.

- Skiles, M., Yang, E., Reshef, O., Muñoz, D., Cintron, D., Lind, M. L., Rush, A., Armani, A., Faust, K., & Kumar, M. (2020). Beyond the carbon footprint: Virtual conferences increase diversity, equity, and inclusion. *Research Square*.
<https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-106316/v1>
- Skinner, S. (2020). An empirical investigation of leader identity formation and implications for executive coaching and leadership development. *Philosophy of Coaching: An International Journal*, 5(2), 18–39. <https://dx.doi.org/10.22316/poc/05.2.03>
- Smith, G., McElhaney, K., & Chavez-Varela, D. (2021). The state of diversity, equity & inclusion in business school case studies. *Journal of Business Diversity*, 21(3).
- Sorensen, K. B., Blix, L., & Edmonds, M. A. (2021). *Providing attestation for diversity, equity, and inclusion in hiring practices: An instructional case using Microsoft Power Bi*. SSRN. <http://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.4017943>
- Stuckey, H. L. (2013). Three types of interviews: Qualitative research methods in social health. *Journal of Social Health and Diabetes*, 1(2), 56–59.
<https://doi.org/10.4103/23221-0656.115294>
- Taylor, S. J., Bogdan, R., & DeVault, M. (2015). *Introduction to qualitative research methods: A guidebook and resource*. John Wiley & Sons.
- Taylor, T. (2019). Why every CEO needs an executive coach. *BenefitsPro*.
- Thomas, D. R. (2006). A general inductive approach for analyzing qualitative evaluation data. *American Journal of Evaluation*, 27(2), 237–246.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/1098214005283748>
- Tobias, L. L. (1996). Coaching executives. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 48(2), 87–95. <https://doi.org/10.1037/1061-4087.48.2.87>

- Trevillion, F. M. H. (2018). Executive coaching outcomes: An investigation into leadership development using five dyadic case studies illustrating the impact of executive coaching. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching & Mentoring, 16*.
- Van Oosten, E. B., McBride-Walker, S. M., & Taylor, S. N. (2019). Investing in what matters: The impact of emotional and social competency development and executive coaching on leader outcomes. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research, 71*(4), 249–269. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cpb0000141>
- Weissmann, G. S., Ibarra, R. A., Howland-Davis, M., & Lammey, M. V. (2019). The multicontext path to redefining how we access and think about diversity, equity, and inclusion in STEM. *Journal of Geoscience Education, 67*(4), 320–329. <https://doi.org/10.1080/10899995.2019.1620527>
- Welcher, A. (2019). *Diversity is who we are. Inclusion is what we do: Creating a blueprint to become a more inclusive organization*. Harvard Graduate School of Education.
- Will, P., & Hamilton, O. (2021). Is political correctness holding back progress on diversity, equity, and inclusion? *LSE Business Review*.
- Yin, R. K. (2014). *Case study research design and methods* (5th ed). Sage.

Appendix A: Memos

Memo 1
Survey
Open Coding
15 Respondents

The surveys were split by questions, rather than respondents. Therefore, I did open coding for each question.

Question 1:
29 codes

Most respondents agree that there has been an increase in need for DEI. However, some said the NEED has not increased (it's always been needed), but societal events have pushed it into focus.

Needs discussed include bias training, clear definitions of DEI, support for historically marginalized groups, and more.

Key Quote: "The challenge has been that the system focuses on easily identifiable factors (often out of the individual's control) that contribute to differences. It does not address ways all humans are the same (Deal's Retiring the Generation Gap, Jung's 4 life stages, astrology/numerology). As a society, we are being distracted by the centralized hierarchical system and led down a path with few viable solutions. We need to ask different questions creating a grass roots uprising where people present completely innovative solutions that are in the individual's control."

Questions 2:
21 Codes

Respondents discussed a variety of actions and strategies taken including trainings, support, using DEI to inform workplace policies, developing individual character (i.e., emotional intelligence), and confronting unconscious bias.

Key Quote: "Similar to Jordan B. Peterson, I am trying to teach people to focus less on freedoms and rights (victim mentality) and to instead become accountable and responsible (owner mentality). I have not interacted with too many coaches who approach this the way I do."

Memo 2
Survey
Axial Coding
15 Respondents

Question 1:

Categories of codes

- Increase (10 codes)
- Implementation (6 codes)
- Bias (4 codes)
- Same Need (2 codes)
- Support Minorities (2 codes)

*"Same need" codes can be used as a counter view of the predominant category, increase.

*Bias, unconscious bias, implicit bias, keeps coming up in the data.

*Different strategies under implementation.

Question 2:

Categories of codes

- Accountability (5 codes)
- Other interpretations of diversity (4 codes)
- Trainings (4 codes)
- Supporting minorities (2 codes)
- Tools (2 codes)

Question 3:

- Teaching Methods (10 codes)
- Awareness (7 codes)
- Support professional and personal development (6 codes)

Notes: Bias training comes up in all 3 questions. Implementation, Trainings, and teaching methods (each category under different questions) can likely be grouped together in selective coding. A common theme among categories across questions is supporting marginalized groups through affirmative action, support, etc.

Memo 3
Interviews
Open Coding
Codes: 92

There were 92 codes after open coding the interview transcripts. Ideas expressed include using DEI as a part of the business strategy, giving people a voice, the need for an outside perspective (someone outside of the business/organization) to coach DEI, and the need for personalizing coaching to meet people where they are.

Most people seem to meet with HR or another a diversity officer rather than the CEO, but some expressed interacting with the CEO.

There is also emphasis on the need to acknowledge racial trauma and people's experiences.

The idea of unconscious bias came up many times.

Recommendations include building relationships, building off of the workplace mission statement, cultivating belongings, actually integrating DEI and not just checking off the training box, and more.

Like the surveys, most say there has been an increase in DEI trainings over the past couple of years, but participants also emphasize that the increase is externally motivated and may not last.

Memo 4
Interviews
Axial Coding
Groups of Codes = 13

I combined the 93 codes into 13 groups. Looking at these groups, it is clear that DEI must be explored by first building relationships and understanding others. The need and interest for DEI has increased, but there is question as to whether this is out of genuine interest or to simply "check off the box". DEI should be part of the business plan, build off of the company's values, and should be part of the long-term plan.

Other groups that seem to be frequently discussed are acknowledging the need for DEI training, supporting POC, having an outside entity or person conduct training, and challenging traditional power structures and norms.

Memo 5
Selective Coding
Interviews and Surveys
7 main groups

During open coding, I created hundreds of codes. I then grouped together codes in groups during axial coding. Finally, I clustered different groups into coherent ideas or themes. These seven main 'topics' are:

1. There is an increased interest in DEI but it needs to be coupled with actual implementation.
2. Coaches should focus on relationship building and should personalize trainings to individuals and groups.
3. Unconscious bias is always present and should always be challenged.
4. When addressing DEI in the work place, it's important to look both back and forward. Build DEI off of the mission statement and company values, but also discuss how it integrates into the company's business plan going forward.
5. Provide support to minorities and POC in all areas including setting them up for success in the work place, acknowledging their unique challenges, and developing a safe environment.
6. To adequately implement a DEI strategy, businesses and organizations must bring in an outside perspective.
7. "Tools and Trainings" - I pulled this out separately. It likely won't work into the theory but can inform the importance of a coach.