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Abstract

This generic qualitative study explored the lived experience of entrepreneurs coached through a business startup. The profession of business coaching is growing and the research continues to build. However, the existing research studies have not yet addressed the lived experience of entrepreneurs coached through a business startup. This study attempts to fill that gap. The theoretical framework for this research was positive psychology and Frederickson’s (2005) broaden and build theory. Open-ended questions were utilized to interview the participants via telephone. The researcher then employed a generic qualitative thematic inductive analysis. From this, five themes emerged – Accountability, Connection, Clarity, Coach’s Agenda, and Cultivation. These themes became apparent through the various coaching experiences of the participants and offer an in depth view of what occurs in the confidential coaching relationship. The results of the study are an introduction to the coaching experience through the voice of those who have lived it. The results indicate areas that invite further study as well as suggestions for coaches who hope to improve their practice.
Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my five sons, H.T., Stafford, Colson, Dakota, and Nikan, who were children when I started my journey through graduate school and who have become young men as I complete it. You are the light of my life and without you this degree and everything else I do would be meaningless. I also dedicate this to my husband, H.L., who gave me the freedom to pursue this degree and who supported me along the way. Thanks to my mom who brought to life in me an insatiable love of learning. Through watching your passion drive you through the years, you showed me how important it is to follow my dreams and listen to my heart. Thanks to my dad for repairing the roof on his own all those years ago so you could save enough money to give me a start on my education as I worked toward my BS. Finally, I dedicate this work to the countless friends who have been by my side, cheered me on even when they had no idea what I was talking about (often making statements such as, “I assume this has something to do with your dissertation”), and celebrated every little triumph along the way. None of us reaches the summit alone and I am humbly grateful and blessed to have had an unwavering foundation on which to begin and conclude this adventure. And it has been an adventure indeed!
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CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

Business startups, defined for the present study as a new startup, a startup that has been operational for 12 months, or an existing business that is branching out in a new direction, are an important factor in the U.S. economy because they often create new jobs, particularly in local economies. Bee (2009) found that startups “raise productivity levels in a region, enhance innovation rates, and accelerate structural change” (p. 8). Be that as it may, research indicates that two thirds of new businesses survive only two years and roughly one half survive four years (Monahan, Shah, & Mattare, 2011). However, Monahan et al. (2011) noted that approximately one-third of businesses were successful at the time of closure and D’Elia (2005) differentiates between successful and unsuccessful closures, stating that only 33% of all closed businesses were unsuccessful.

When business startups fail, jobs are lost and lives are affected. Working to create higher success rates for business startups means greater economic success at the local level. With new businesses emerging daily, finding ways to increase rates of success can offer hope for entrepreneurs.

Business coaches, hereafter used interchangeably with ‘coaches,’ are one avenue that entrepreneurs can pursue that might increase success rates. While the research on people coached through their first business start up is absent, there is more and more evidence as to the value of coaching and the need for further exploration (Gregory, Levy,
As research into business coaching builds, it is important to include entrepreneurs and what their experience of coaching entails. For example, coaches help develop business people (Berman & Bradt, 2006), help people identify their skills and make better career choices (Chung & Gfroerer, 2003), and help people to increase engagement and productivity (Kombarakaran, Yang, Baker, & Fernandes, 2008). What remains unknown is whether and in what ways coaching is effective for entrepreneurs starting their own businesses. Similarly, information from the client’s perspective in general is scarce, and again, is absent in the entrepreneurial literature.

Further, because success rates for first time startups is moderate, knowing whether business coaches can increase the chances of success is an avenue worth exploring. The present research specifically addresses the lived experience of people who are coached through their first business startup.

Current research is clear that business coaching continues to offer desired results for many people, including those in career transitions, CEOs, and new managers (Berman & Bradt, 2006). While studies abroad and in Canada have questionable results as to the effectiveness of mentoring entrepreneurs through a business startup, coaching is not discussed and all these studies called for further research (Reid & Smith, 2000; St. Jean & Audet, 2009; Waters, McCabe, Kiellerup, & Kiellerup, 2002). Because coaching serves a function similar to mentoring but through a different process, it is possible that coaching can succeed where mentoring has been less than successful. In addition, studies into the effectiveness of mentoring demonstrate that what matters to entrepreneurs is feeling as if they are understood, but mentors are not certain how to achieve that (St. Jean & Audet, 2009). Conversely, coaches are trained in coming to where the client is and
using that advantage of helping clients to know that they are understood (de Haan, 2008; Kombarakaran et al., 2008). It is in asking, listening, and exploring the experiences of those who have lived it that a greater understanding of phenomenon can come to light (Polkinghorne, 2005). Finally, there is some research in the U.S. that explores the ways a mentor can assist entrepreneurs starting a new business, but the study is limited to opportunity recognition (Ozgen & Baron, 2007). Therefore, there are still questions unanswered.

To summarize, while there is research related to mentoring, what is not known is whether hiring a business coach to assist through the startup process is beneficial to entrepreneurs. This lack of knowledge is limiting to both business coaches and entrepreneurs. There is information that approximately one-third business startups fail (Gomez, 2007) but again, whether utilizing a business coach through the startup process is beneficial is unknown. The present study is expected to open the door to understanding what the coaching experience brings to entrepreneurs as they are coached into and through their business startup. This information can have value for both entrepreneurs and business coaches and can contribute to the knowledge of what business coaching might add to entrepreneurs experiencing their business startup.

**Statement of the Problem**

The specific problem to be addressed is whether the experience of being coached through a business startup has benefit. For people uncertain about the value of coaching, an exploration of the experience that entrepreneurs have as they are coached through their business startup can offer insight about the ways that coaching might be helpful, how it can be more helpful, and why they would or would not recommend it to others. It is not
known how or to what extent currently held beliefs about the value of business coaching applies to entrepreneurs starting a business. Discovering the worth or lack thereof in the coaching experience will close the gap in the literature and offer information about ways coaching is beneficial or whether it needs to be revised for people starting a new business.

Purpose of the Study

This study will extend the literature through a discovery of what it is like for people who are coached through their business startup. While there is research as to the effectiveness of coaching (Reid & Smith, 2000; St. Jean & Audet, 2009; Waters et al., 2002), it does not pertain to entrepreneurs starting their own businesses. In addition, there is little research as to the thinking involved in whether to hire a business coach or how long to retain one (Liljenstrand & Nebeker, 2008; Smither, London, Flutt, Vargas, & Kucine, 2003). By asking entrepreneurs who hired business coaches during their business startup when and why they hired a coach, and whether it was helpful, information about coaching can be gained that can illuminate benefits as well as disadvantages. First, it is important to understand business startups.

Due in part to their economic impact, business startups have been studied fairly extensively (Gomez, 2007). It is evident that there is a great deal that goes into starting a business and that very often, people do not know where to go for help (Frank, Lueger, & Korunka, 2007; Sommer, Loch, & Dong, 2009). Similarly, the literature suggests that business coaching is highly effective in developing leaders, enhancing flexibility in a more and more fluid workplace, and promoting increased workplace efficiency (Evers, Brouwers, & Tomic, 2006). However, if these traits are not beneficial for entrepreneurs
during their business startup, then the literature offers little to suggest that coaching is worthwhile for them (Levenson, 2009). Studies in the UK (Reid & Smith, 2000), Australia (Waters et al., 2002), and Canada (St. Jean & Audet, 2009) have shown that mentoring entrepreneurs during new business startups can be beneficial to self-esteem, but has not been effective in increasing success rates. However, because mentoring differs from coaching in that coaching is driven more by the client than mentoring, it is important to explore the benefits of coaching as an option distinct from mentoring. In addition, differences between the UK, Australia, Canada, and the U.S., such as cultural and economic climate, must be considered. Similar work in the U.S. shows only that work with a mentor helps entrepreneurs to recognize opportunities (Ozgen & Baron, 2005).

The present study will consider the experience of entrepreneurs in the U.S. who hire business coaches as they start their own business. Therefore, this research will add to the existing literature by exploring how coaching benefits entrepreneurs during their business startup and whether the process is smoother for entrepreneurs who utilize a coach. Understanding the experience of being coached will potentially reveal new information that coaches can use to enhance current coaching practices. This knowledge will use the generic qualitative method to fill the gap of the meaning entrepreneurs gain from being coached through a business startup.

**Significance of the Study**

The study is designed to explore the coaching experience as it relates to entrepreneurs during a business startup. As stated previously, this will potentially add evidence of ways coaching helps clients to identify and develop strengths. In this respect,
strengths-based coaching can be enhanced through this research. That is, the study can influence the path of strengths-based coaching through a discovery of whether and how the coaching experience helped clients to build upon existing strengths as they started their business. If coaching was helpful in this regard, more information can be added to the already existing information about strengths-based coaching (Foster & Lloyd, 2007). However, whereas the research available is quantitative, the information from this study will be qualitative.

In addition, the study is expected to uncover evidence as to what coaching offers that the clients could not do for themselves. As this information unfolds, practical implications include what a coach should emphasize when coaching entrepreneurs.

Finally, this research will potentially add to Frederickson’s (2005) broaden and build theory, and one practical implication is that this will conceivably take coaching in a new direction. Following from the broaden and build theory, as thinking is broadened, a client becomes more open to other possibilities, which increases the chances of success. This may be expected to change the way coaches consider their work with entrepreneurs because current research does not include information about broadening a client’s current level of thought and building on it.

**Research Design**

This study will explore the experiences of entrepreneurs who were coached through their business startup. To achieve an understanding of what the coaching experience was like for those who utilized it, the generic qualitative method will be used. Generic qualitative research method is an appropriate approach when the question
involves an exploration of an experience (Percy & Kostere, 2008). The information will be collected using interview questions designed to explore the coaching experience.

Participants will be entrepreneurs who were coached through their business startup at least six months prior to the study. This six-month period will allow for a time of personal reflection on the coaching as well as allowing some time for the business to operate. In addition, because memory fades with time (Hirst et al., 2009) no more than 12 years shall have elapsed since the coaching occurred. Purposive sampling will be used in order to establish that the participants are all entrepreneurs coached through their business startup.

Because sampling in qualitative research utilizes a small number of participants with extensive knowledge or experience of the phenomenon under investigation, nine participants will be interviewed. Mason (2010) found that there are times when one participant will suffice and other times when 35 or more participants are required. In addition, “saturation,” or continuing with the interview process until the information becomes repetitive, is sometimes recommended. However, there are uncertainties about whether saturation is actually possible due to the variability of answers possible in interview research (Curry, Nembhard, & Bradley, 2009). Further, the goal in generic qualitative research is to have enough participants to gain rich information about the phenomenon rather than to generalize to other populations. All of these considerations can create confusion as to appropriate sample size. However, because the primary goal of qualitative research is to have an information-rich sample (Percy & Kostere, 2008), there will be nine participants for this study. In addition to an adequate sample size, the quality of the study is also tied to its credibility, transferability, and dependability.
Credibility refers to how plausible the study and the results are. Results from this study will be credible through diligence in data collection, transcription, and writing. Additionally, the researcher is familiarizing herself with qualitative research in order to become more adept with the methodology. By demonstrating her understanding and diligence, credibility will be enhanced. Because the researcher is a coach and has training through both a graduate program and a coach institution, she has expertise in the area of coaching and knowledge of speaking with individuals, how to question them, and how to listen both to what they say and to what they are unable to verbalize. These skills also enhance credibility through the researcher’s ability to discern what is important in the data analysis.

Transferability, or how well the study can be applied to other times, situations, and people, cannot be demonstrated through the research because the findings of qualitative work are specific to a small number of particular individuals. Further, it is not the researcher’s responsibility to show transferability but rather, the researcher is responsible for providing descriptions that are rich enough so others can make a judgment as to transferability (Shenton, 2004). That is, “since the researcher knows only the ’sending context,’ he or she cannot make transferability inferences” (Shenton, 2004, p. 70). With this in mind, the present study will include sufficient descriptions of the research context and assumptions so readers will have a proper understanding of it so they can determine whether the study might apply to other situations.

Finally, dependability, or how well the study is described in order that others may replicate it, will be demonstrated through the description of how participants were contacted, and through the interview questions. The study will be described in detail so as
to allow another researcher to follow the sequence of events, understand how participants were located and contacted, how the data were transcribed, and how the analysis was conducted.

**Research Question**

The research question for this study involves an exploration of what the coaching experience offers entrepreneurs coached through a business startup. The question seeks to gain an understanding of what value, if any, the experience brings to people as they move through the process of starting their business. The research question is: What is the lived experience of entrepreneurs who are coached through their business startup?

**Assumptions and Limitations**

**Assumptions**

According to DeCastro (2003), generic qualitative research is concerned with the experience as it occurs for one individual. Qualitative research assumes that a given experience and the individual who experiences it cannot be separated (Giorgi, 2005). By its very nature, measuring qualitative data can be difficult and variables are complex. For example, one of the key assumptions of qualitative research is the belief that reality is constructed by individuals and the way they relate to the world (Caelli, Ray, & Mill, 2003). It is the meaning that people have constructed that qualitative research seeks to understand. This can make gathering and interpreting data particularly challenging because the researcher is the primary tool for collecting data.

Bear in mind that the aim of generic qualitative research is to gather information so as to describe the experience. Recall, however, that both the interviewer and the interviewee play active roles (Roulston, 2011), placing the process of data collection and
analysis at risk for bias, albeit unintentional. Other assumptions of the methodology involve the researcher’s creativity, flexibility, and inquisitiveness, all of which are necessary for a quality qualitative study (Hunt, 2010). Along with these is the assumption that throughout the study the researcher brings expertise, worldviews, and cultural and social habits that influence the research decisions, data collection and interpretation (Hunt, 2010). In addition to methodological assumptions, theoretical assumptions are prevalent as well.

Both humanism and positive psychology will be evident in the framework of this research. These theories assume that focusing on human strengths and moving forward from those strengths will result in greater growth and productivity than focusing on weak areas and attempting to improve them. In general, the assumption is that coaching stems from a focus on strengths and will result in greater success for entrepreneurs as they launch their business startup.

Another assumption is that participants will relay their experience honestly and accurately. In addition, it is assumed that the researcher will review the data in as unbiased a manner as possible and that the open-ended questions will elicit details about the participant’s experience. Finally, it is assumed that the results will deliver an understanding of coaching as it is experienced by entrepreneurs and may generate potential solutions to businesses failing.

**Limitations**

Because the researcher has worked as a business coach she is skilled at accuracy when interviewing clients. In addition, she has experience working with people over the phone, which will help ensure precision during data collection. Conversely, she has not
previously conducted qualitative research so this study will be particularly challenging. Additionally, the analysis itself has limitations such as the researcher’s ability to pull insight from the interviews. Similarly, qualitative analysis depends upon the researcher’s competence at pulling “patterns, themes, and categories of analysis from the data” and allowing them to emerge from the data rather than “imposing them on the data prior to collection and analysis” (Srivastava, 2009, p. 77).

With a sample size of nine this may appear as another limitation in this study. However, with the overall population to draw from including only entrepreneurs coached through a business startup, the sample size of nine is sufficient. In addition, a small, “highly informed sample can provide rich information about the topic” (Percy & Kostere, 2008, p. 8).

Ideally, the study would include only entrepreneurs who worked with coaches with graduate training resulting in an MS in psychology or a related field. By requiring graduate training a standard is established in regards to what it means to be a coach. Parameters of what it means to be a coach should be as clear as possible (Drake, 2009) and accredited graduate programs are solidly based in evidence and theory, making coaches trained in this manner an appropriate choice. However, this requirement would eliminate such a large number of coaches that it is an unrealistic parameter. Therefore, the primary requirement for the coaches is that they have a minimum of coaching certification.

**Definition of Terms**

*Business Coach.* Refers to a person who is one part of a one-on-one relationship with a client. The coach supports and facilitates client learning through identifying and
establishing goals, which is accomplished through assessment, discovery, and reflection (Bennett, 2006, p. 240).

*Business Startup.* A business that is new, active, and independent of a parent organization (Leaptrott, 2009). This includes new businesses, businesses that have been in operation for up to 12 months, and established businesses that are branching out in a new direction.

*Entrepreneur.* In the context of the present study an entrepreneur is considered to be someone who is a visionary and has the dedication, commitment, and drive to start his or her own business. More specifically, for present purposes an entrepreneur is someone who starts a new business (Jenssen & Koenig, 2002).

**Expected Findings**

Expected finding are difficult to discuss in terms of qualitative research because the researcher must remain as open to what the study reveals as possible. Expectations can interfere with the flow of new knowledge that the research potentially reveals. Nonetheless, in thinking through the research question and the research in general, certain expectations tend to emanate. In this case, one expectation is that the research will shed light on the experience of being coached and what that entails. This means that knowledge is expected to emerge that was not known previously in relation to coaching.

Another expected finding is that the participants will share personality traits as found by Bann (2009) in her phenomenological exploration of entrepreneurs. A similar expectation is that the research will reveal that social networks are important for entrepreneurs, as research by Jenssen and Koenig (2002) demonstrated in their work. While the expectation is that this study will find similar information as the above
research, current work might also contradict this information because a new element is being introduced: the business coach.

A final expectation is that the study will be a surprise. This expectation stays within the confines of qualitative research because it indicates that the research will speak and reveal something that is unexpected.

**Organization of the Remainder of the Study**

The remainder of the study is presented in four chapters. First, Chapter 2 is the Literature Review and briefly discusses theoretical implications, methodological literature, research related to business coaching, entrepreneurs, and business startups. To begin, business coaching is discussed, followed by a review of entrepreneurs and startups. Finally, a synthesis and critique of previous research is included.

Chapter 3 goes in depth in the methodology, which includes a justification for, and a description of, the research design, target population and participant selection.

Chapter 4 includes the data analysis and results. To conclude, Chapter 5 contains the results, conclusions and recommendations.
CHAPTER 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Introduction to the Literature Review

The purpose of this chapter is to review the literature relevant to entrepreneurs coached through their business startup. This chapter begins with a brief discussion of the theoretical implications of the study. After this is the review of qualitative versus quantitative research. Next is a review of the literature including business coaching, entrepreneurs, and business startups.

Once the above is complete, a synthesis of the current research findings is included. This section will illuminate the origins of the current research along with their relationship to one another and to the research question. Next is the critique of previous research, which will identify the strongest and weakest studies relevant to the dissertation topic. Finally, this section will conclude with a brief summary of the chapter.

Theoretical Orientation for the Study

The current study will not generate new theory but will provide rich descriptions of the lived experience of those being coached through their business startup. Through this description coaches and clients can further understand the value of business coaching. The information obtained can also offer insight as to ways coaching could be tailored to entrepreneurs starting their own business, what was most helpful (if anything) about the coaching, and what might have been more helpful. Through a description of the
coaching experience, coaches can learn what to do more of, what to do less of, what to change, and what to leave as is. Utilizing existing theories can aid in this process.

There are a number of theories that lend themselves to coaching. For example, both humanism and positive psychology have merits within the realm of coaching. Positive Psychology, as a developing theory, is still exploring such things as the identification and development of strengths (Foster & Lloyd, 2007). This study is expected to add to this growing body of evidence through hearing the collective experience of those coached through their business startup, and whether coaching was beneficial in identifying and developing strengths. Fredrickson’s (2005) broaden and build theory is of particular interest because the coaching relationship is designed to open the client to larger thinking and building upon already existing strengths. The present research may be expected to add to these theories by offering evidence of such things as ways coaching broadens the client’s current knowledge base and works to move them forward as they start a new business. There is also the possibility that the study will reveal that the coaching did not offer what the participants had hoped, in which case the current research has the potential to push coaching research and theory in a new direction or re-direct current thinking.

It is important to note that while theoretical implications are important in a generic qualitative study, the goal of the researcher is always to remain open and as unbiased as possible to what the data reveal (Giorgi, 2008). Therefore, theory does not lead the study or even guide it; rather, theory is used to help organize the data and help place the findings within the context of previously tested psychological theory. For the present study, the theories that will aid in coordinating the data include humanistic and
positive psychology. These theories will aid the researcher in that they both deal with human strengths, something that is salient when working with entrepreneurs.

Both humanism and positive psychology approach behavior from the stance of moving forward through the use of strengths. Because businesses are not built on weaknesses, it makes sense to organize the data using theories that focus on strengths.

Review of Research Literature and Methodological Literature Specific to the Topic or Research Question

Traditionally, psychologists relied on qualitative research to answer questions about human behavior. It was not until Skinner’s behaviorism that psychological research became more quantifiable and the qualitative method became less prevalent (Bartunek & Seo, 2001). In recent years, qualitative work has once again emerged and, while not as prominent as quantitative, it is becoming more common.

The quantitative and qualitative methodologies are not necessarily opposite ends of the same pole. They both seek to answer questions; although the questions they answer are different and they serve different purposes as they answer these questions. Both quantitative and qualitative research provides the basis for evidence-based practice and, most importantly, both are equally valid. It is important to realize that all-or-none, black or white thinking about quantitative versus qualitative methodology should be set aside because there are actually areas of gray between the two. Following are examples of studies that use a variety of methodology to explore coaching.

In 2009 Perkins explored the ways executive coaching can change leader behavior and improve meeting effectiveness. The study was quantitative and involved 21 participants, 20 men and 1 woman. Pre- and post-measures were taken using the Meeting
Leadership Measurement System, with the coaching occurring in between these measures. Coaching was the independent variable and meeting leader behavior was the dependent variable. Results indicate that more productive meeting leadership behaviors can be identified and enhanced. A primary limitation is that the sample is comprised only of high-potential senior executives and excludes those with low or moderate potential.

Kombarakaran et al. (2008) studied the effectiveness of executive coaching through a mixed methods design. One hundred fourteen executives and 42 coaches were surveyed using both quantitative and qualitative instruments. Executives were coached over a 6-month period in which 12 coaching sessions occurred. After the completion of the coaching, both coaches and executives were questioned using 62 close-ended and 3 open-ended questions. Findings suggest that coaching increased confidence, maximized contributions to the company, and was beneficial to the business. Limitations include a small sample size for quantitative work along with executives being selected from one source.

Work by Liljenstrand and Nebeker (2008) included 2,231 coaches who participated in a Web-based survey designed to explore coaching practices. The purpose of the research was to explore how the “coach’s academic background is related to other coaching characteristics and practices” (Liljenstrand & Nebeker, 2008, p.61). Results indicated that various backgrounds result in a variety of services being offered as well as the coaches offering services to different target markets. In addition, coaches with a psychology background were more likely to be hired by organizations than coaches trained by coaching institutions. A primary limitation is that it is difficult to explore all the aspects of coaching through a quantitative survey. In addition, even though
participants were ensured anonymity, social desirability may have played a role in some responses.

**Research Related to Business Coaching and Startups**

Since its inception in the 1980s coaching has proliferated, particularly in the business world (Bennett, 2006; Grant, Green, & Rynsaardt, 2010; Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001; Kilburg, 1996; Stern, 2004). Senior executives traditionally performed business coaching as they trained up and coming leaders. By 1981 Personnel Decisions International was the first consulting firm to offer a formal coaching program to work with individuals (Peterson, 1996). In 1992 the International Coaching Federation (ICF) was formed, creating a more structured aspect for the profession (Bennett, 2006). By 2000, coaching was reportedly the fastest growing field within consulting (Hall, Otazo & Hollenbeck, 1999). Liljenstrand and Nebeker (2008) estimated that the field of coaching is a one billion dollar per year industry. Bennett (2006) concurs and both he and Liljenstrand and Nebeker (2008) estimate the number of coaches to be between 10,000 and 16,000 worldwide.

Many business people hire coaches to help them transition through promotions, sharpen their leadership skills, and hone their ability to manage people (Kombarakaran et al., 2008). Defining coaching continues to be an elusive undertaking because there are numerous definitions of coaching just as there are many types of coaching. A common element of all the definitions is that the goal of coaching is to change behavior (Turner & Goodrich, 2010). As defined in Chapter 1, for present purposes business coaching refers to a person who is one part of a one-on-one relationship with a client. The coach supports and facilitates client learning through identifying and establishing goals, which is
accomplished through assessment, discovery, and reflection (Bennett, 2006). While the current literature does not contain information relating to coaching and business startups, there is research indicating that coaching is effective for business people, primarily executives.

Research most closely related to the present study took place in Australia and addressed whether business coaching directly or indirectly enhanced firm growth (Crompton, Smyrnios, & Bi, 2012). This quantitative work included 200 entrepreneurs. Of these, half were coached and half were not. Results of this study showed that, among other things, business coaching is a non-direct influencer of firm growth and that entrepreneurs benefit from the support of, and the expertise of, business coaching. In this study non-direct influence refers to intangible results such as self-development, relationship with the coach, and taking ownership. While this study is concerned with business coaching it utilizes a quantitative approach and is examining firm growth rather than business startups, which differentiates it from the present research.

A quasi-experimental study was conducted by Evers et al. (2006) to determine the effectiveness of management coaching. Sixty managers were divided into two groups, one group was coached and the other was not. Prior to the coaching program the managers to be coached were measured on domains: “goal setting, acting in a balanced way, and mindful living and working” (Evers et al., 2006, p. 174). A questionnaire was constructed to measure outcome expectations and self-efficacy beliefs of both the coached and uncoached groups. Results from this study demonstrated support for the effectiveness of coaching in regards to goal setting, acting stably, and on self-efficacy beliefs.
Although the Evers et al. (2006) study focused on the effectiveness of coaching it differs from the current research because it deals only with managers who are employed by the federal government. Due to this, it does not relate directly to the current study, which seeks to explore those starting their own businesses.

Similar work conducted by Kombarakaran et al. (2008) involved quantitative and qualitative survey type instruments. Participants were 114 executives and 42 coaches. This study was designed to explore the effectiveness of a coaching program and looked particularly at coaching’s tools, techniques, methods, and resources (Kombarakaran et al., 2008). This study showed support for the effectiveness of a coaching program to help executives reach stated goals, increase confidence, maximize contributions to the company, and benefit the business. However, as with the Evers et al. (2006) work, the Kombarakaran et al.’s (2008) study limited its research to coaching in the context of executives employed by companies and businesses owned by others. While results showed coaching to be effective, they do not translate to business startups.

Finally, Levenson (2009) also explored the coaching experience as it relates to executives employed by others. This study used interviews to determine the effectiveness of coaching through 12 coach-coachee pairs on business-related outcomes. The findings of Levenson’s (2009) work indicated that the coaching positively affected leadership behavior and helped executives to improve business results. However, a primary limitation of this study is that it focused on executives who had been derailed and were under threat of losing their jobs. Given this, the results do not convert well to other populations.
Research Related to Entrepreneurs

A search of the literature indicates that entrepreneurs and how they become successful are areas that need more research and are currently an enigma. Studies entail everything from entrepreneurs being ‘created’ through family issues (Gomez, 2007) to entrepreneurs being trained in entrepreneurship through education (Hisirch, Langan-Fox, & Grant, 2007). In addition, research into the characteristics and traits that prevail among entrepreneurs are largely absent and those that have been conducted are often inconclusive (Hisirch et al., 2007; Jenssen & Koenig, 2002). Finally, even defining just what constitutes an entrepreneur varies widely (Bann, 2009; Baron, Markman, & Hirsa, 2001; Jenssen & Koenig, 2002). This being the case, finding a starting point for the entrepreneur and new business ventures involves much discernment as to what direction to take, what to leave out and what to include. What the literature provides is evidence that new business ventures are a complex undertaking.

Bann’s (2009) research is perhaps the most relevant to the present study as she conducted a phenomenological study of the lived experience of entrepreneurs in the startup phase of their business. Eighteen entrepreneurs were questioned regarding background, values, beliefs and leadership along with the importance of each as they transitioned through a business startup. The study attempted to gain new and deep insight into the entrepreneur him- or herself (Bann, 2009). Participants were found through three sources: the Minnesota Small Business Development Center, referrals from professional colleagues, and volunteers. Findings suggest that many entrepreneurs elect to start their own business due to dissatisfaction with their current situation. Optimism was a common trait among participants as was a sense of well-being. In addition, findings showed the
journey to entrepreneurship is more about finding meaning and expressing self than about making money or being in business for the sake of business. A primary limitation of this research is that the results do not carry over to other populations. In addition, the entrepreneurs were not coached in this study but were simply asked about the experience of the startup.

Jenssen and Koenig (2002) conducted interviews of 100 entrepreneurs in Norway who had tried to start a new business to determine whether a network consisting of strong ties gives the mental and social support necessary to promote success. Participants were selected from entrepreneurs who had contacted a center for entrepreneurial training in Norway. The independent variable (IV) is types of social networks such as family, friends, and business associates and the dependent variable (DV) is the business startup itself and the level of success achieved through the startup. That is, the business startup (DV) is looked at in terms of how various types of social networks (IV) influence success rates. The intervening variable is the number of resources the entrepreneur had available including information, finances, and motivation. Findings suggest that strong ties are important in regards to information and weak ties are important for finance. Limitations include a small sample size, all participants are from Norway, and all sought help from one center dedicated to training entrepreneurs.

In Canada St. Jean and Audet (2009) considered the experience of entrepreneurs who worked with mentors through a business startup. The study consisted of data collected from 142 entrepreneurs who participated in a mentoring program. Entrepreneurial mentoring is defined as a form of support relationship between a novice entrepreneur and an experienced entrepreneur. The study revealed that there was no ideal
frequency for meeting with mentors, but that efficiency is what was most important. In addition, the results indicated that the mentor's expertise and experience did not affect mentee satisfaction. Primarily, it mattered to the mentee that their mentor understood their situation. Finally, mentees expected to see concrete, observable results in their business. The amount of transferability from this study is limited because the research occurred in Canada. That is, cultural and social differences between the United States and Canada can make this study less relevant to the current research due to factors such as economic climate. In addition, all of the participants are drawn from the same program, which limits how well the data translate to the present research because participants will not be drawn from the same program.

Leaptrott (2009) conducted research intended to explore the role of work family conflict on decision-making when starting a new business. The study included 648 calls to licensed female daycare providers in Florida. Questions were designed to gain information regarding the influence of work-family conflict on behavior related to planning for a new business. Results indicate that setting clear boundaries around family obligations helps new businesses succeed. Specifically, a greater degree of conflict results in a heavier reliance on intuition than other sources such as public accountants, attorneys, and bankers. Primary limitations in this study include an all female participant pool drawn from one industry in one state.

Finally, Foo, Uy, and Baron (2009) studied affect as it relates to entrepreneurship in Manila, Philippines using quantitative data with both men and women participating. Findings revealed that the entrepreneur’s affect plays a role in new business startups. In particular, Foo et al. (2009) found that negative affect increases effort on tasks that are
immediately required and positive affect increases effort on tasks that go beyond what is immediately required. One limitation of this study is that participants self-reported effort levels and therefore the objectivity of those reports may be questionable. Other limitations include the results being generalizable only in the short term because the effort levels were recorded over a 24-day period and the participant pool is localized in the Philippines.

The current research will address the limitations of selecting participants from only one source and one gender by including both genders from various locations and employers throughout the United States. Further, the current research will include business owners, rather than those employed by others, thereby addressing another limitation. Finally, a primary limitation addressed is that the participants in this study will be entrepreneurs who were coached, rather than mentored or advised, through a business startup.

**Synthesis of the Research Findings**

A thorough review of the literature is essential to understanding business coaching, entrepreneurs, and startups. Current studies indicate that business coaching is effective in helping executives set goals and move toward those goals (Evers et al., 2006). Similarly, Kombarakaran et al. (2008) demonstrated that coaching helps in goal attainment as well as offering other benefits such as increased confidence. Finally, Levenson (2009) found coaching to be helpful in improving leadership behaviors. These studies indicate that coaching is effective in a variety of business situations. In addition, Levenson (2009) asks whether the right chain of causation is being established or if a placebo effect is being created.
That is, it has been established that coaching moves people forward; helps get them “unstuck.” However, if that is not proactive within the context of business, then it is of little use. Levenson (2009) argues, for example, that “for coaching to have a business impact, the leadership behaviors that are the focus of the coaching have to matter to the business either strategically, financially, or both” (p. 104). If this connection is not being made through the research, then perhaps researchers are asking the wrong questions. Currently, the research is more focused on whether coaching helps, rather than focusing on who it helps, when it helps, and why it helps. These latter questions must be taken into consideration before it can be stated that business coaching helps business people to succeed.

However, even Levenson (2009) concedes that business coaching, such as leadership development, is beneficial, particularly for middle management and business meeting effectiveness. His point is merely to caution researchers not to make the leap from “business coaching helps” to precisely what, who, and how it helps until that chain of causation has been established. Regardless, coaching is in demand in the business world, either because it helps or because business leaders have tried other options unsuccessfully. More research is required before it can be known whether coaching’s benefits are a placebo or something more.

In addition to an exploration of the literature as it relates to business coaching, entrepreneurs and startups have also been studied. Bann (2009) explored the reasons entrepreneurs start new businesses and found that a common trait was that it brought a sense of well-being. Work by Jenssen and Koenig (2002) explored support systems and found that strong ties are beneficial to entrepreneurs when these resources relate to
information rather than finance. This suggests that entrepreneurs rely on help from friends and family more than they rely upon financial aid when starting a new business. Confirming these findings, Leaptrott (2009) found that entrepreneurs involved in conflict with family relied more heavily on outside sources such as attorneys and bankers. Finally, Foo et al. (2009) demonstrated evidence in support of the role affect plays in new business startups, showing that negative affect increases effort on tasks that are immediately required and positive affect increases effort on future tasks.

In summary, there has been research on entrepreneurs and factors that influence success/failure of new business ventures. Given that many entrepreneurs starting new businesses fail, it is important to explore the information available pertaining to what separates the successful startups from the unsuccessful. The discussed findings indicate that successful entrepreneurs utilize a variety of assets when entering a startup including informative, motivational, and material resources (Jenssen & Koenig, 2002). In short, the literature to date has explored many avenues in an attempt to help entrepreneurs focus on what is most important in starting a business that will succeed. From looking into family relationships to the type of business, studies demonstrate that there are a number of important factors to consider.

**Critique of the Previous Research**

The literature review includes business coaching, entrepreneurs, and business startups. However, the gap in the literature lies in entrepreneurs coached through their business startup. Because business coaching is under scrutiny, it is essential to continue asking the question of whether coaching is doing what people want/need it to do under their specific circumstances. The studies reviewed, although primarily qualitative, do not
explore the experience of being coached through a business startup. A discovery of what the experience was like for entrepreneurs coached through their business startup may contribute to this building literature and shed light on whether business coaching was beneficial and for who, in what manner, and why it was helpful. These questions are not currently being addressed in the business coaching literature.

To recap, the populations dealt with in the business coaching studies are limiting in that they do not specifically address entrepreneurs coached through business startups. Similarly, the research related to entrepreneurs and startups is limited by participant location, gender, and, in the Foo et al. (2009) work, the manner in which data were collected [i.e. self-report]. While the research reviewed offers evidence in support of further study into business coaching, entrepreneurs, and business startups, the limitations of these studies encourage combining those elements into one study.

Summary

This chapter presented an overview of coaching effectiveness. To this end, business coaching, entrepreneurs, and business startup studies were evaluated. These studies indicated that business coaching is effective in goal statement and attainment, as well as improving leadership behavior. In addition, the literature suggests that there are various reasons that entrepreneurs start a new business and that external support can influence success rates.
CHAPTER 3. METHODOLOGY

Purpose of the Study

A qualitative method was used to answer the research question, “What is the lived experience of entrepreneurs who are coached through their business startup?” Qualitative research seeks to understand the characteristics of human experience and to facilitate the investigation of the experience (Polkinghorne, 2005). Unlike quantitative research, in which behavior is measurable, qualitative research explores the meaning that underlies the experience. Qualitative inquiry deals with the world as it is lived or made sense of by the participants of the study (Polkinghorne, 2005). For the present research, the qualitative method was the appropriate choice because what was being explored was the subjective, lived experience of the business coaching.

Research Design

The generic qualitative approach was used. This approach was a good fit to answer the research question because it is used to describe the meaning of an experience that occurs external to the person experiencing it (Madill & Gough, 2008; Yoshikawa, Weisner, Kalil, & Way, 2008). Through this exploration the researcher gained information as to what the coaching brought to clients as they were coached through their startup. The study also explored what, if anything, the participants shared in common in the experience of being coached. From this the challenge was to discover those commonalities of the participant’s opinions, ideas, and reflection of the coaching.
experience as they were coached through their business startup. This method was appropriate for such a study because it went beyond data that could be quantified and explored the quality of the experience. Because this study looked at coaching from the inside - from those who have lived it – the qualitative method answered the question of what the experience was like for those who lived it.

As with any research, precautions were necessary to protect the integrity of the research. This was accomplished through credibility, transferability, and dependability. Credibility, or how persuasive the study and results are, was enhanced through the researcher’s diligence in data collection, transcription, and writing. In addition, the researcher has experience in conducting interviews, which allowed for the ability to push questions further without leading the participant to an expectation of a particular answer. Transferability refers to how well the study translates to other times, situations, and people and will be strengthened through the way the context of the study is described. While qualitative studies, such as this one, do not easily generalize to other populations, the results can be expected to apply to other coaching relationships. For example, findings suggested that the coaching relationship enhanced trust for the entrepreneurs. Therefore, this trait might be expected to generalize to others who are coached and not be specific to entrepreneurs.

Finally, how well the study is described so that others might easily replicate it, or dependability, was demonstrated through the procedures section of this proposal. This includes information such as how participants were located, contacted, and interviewed. Details about transcription and analysis are also included.
Target Population and Participant Selection

The population of interest was entrepreneurs who started their own business and who had experienced the coaching at least six months prior to the study. This 6-month time frame was to allow some personal reflection on the coaching as well as allowing time for the business to operate. In addition, memory can be fallible (Hirst et al., 2009) and as time passes issues of accuracy can develop. Due to this potential problem, it would be ideal to not allow more than two years to have passed since the coaching occurred. However, because there are interview techniques that can help increase the accuracy of recalled memories (Loftus, 2011; Wichert, Wolf, & Schwabe, 2013), participants were included even if the coaching occurred up to 12 years prior. Each participant came with a unique background and coaching experience due to the number and variability of coaches available, each of whom utilizes his or her own approach.

There are a vast number of coaching models currently in use and the trend is for coaches to create their own model. Therefore, no particular model was selected for study. However, the model each coach used, if any, was documented.

Because the research was qualitative, random sampling was not appropriate (Madill & Gough, 2008; Polkinghorne, 2005). Sampling in a qualitative design focuses not on large numbers of participants but rather, on a small number of participants with extensive experience or knowledge about the phenomenon under investigation. This is called purposive or purposeful sampling (Nielson, 2007). Nine participants were interviewed and were selected using purposive sampling and were drawn from the total number of people who initially expressed a willingness to participate. Sample size is a topic of much debate in qualitative research (Curry et al., 2009).
Researchers indicate that at times one participant is ample, while at other times 35 or more participants are recommended (Mason, 2010). Some argue that reaching a point of saturation, where no new information is generated, is important, while others disagree stating that saturation, as such, can never be reached because new information will continue to arise (Curry et al., 2009). To clarify, new information refers to information relevant to the research that was not revealed previously through interviews with preceding participants. The goal of generic qualitative research is to have enough participants in the study to offer information regarding the phenomenon in question rather than to generalize the findings to larger populations. Because of this, sample size can be difficult to determine. However, Percy and Kostere (2008) point out that what is important is to have a sample that is clearly information-rich about the topic, which is precisely the aim of this study.

Using Percy and Kostere’s (2008) suggestion, along with other qualitative studies that investigated the effectiveness of coaching in the fields of clinical, with a sample size of 13 (Wade et al., 2011); academic, with a sample size of 7 (Jones & Spooner, 2006); and business, with a sample size of 6 (Vogel, 2012), the sample size for the present study was nine.

Purposive sampling was used to gather participants for the study. In order to find these participants it was necessary to request information from the professionals who coached them. This was a delicate situation because the coaching relationship is confidential. However, the researcher began by contacting professional coaches who have a minimum of coaching credentials through a coaching program recognized by ICF. These coaches were located through Internet searches of such websites as LinkedIn. In
addition, a general search of business coaches was conducted via Google and coaches were contacted and the study was explained.

**Procedures**

Referrals for participants came through coaches across the United States and the individuals participating were also spread across the United States. Coaches were contacted and informed of the current research and asked if they had clients who were coached through their business startup and who might agree to participate in research designed to further the understanding of what the coaching experience is like.

The researcher asked if the coaches had ever coached an entrepreneur through his or her business startup and if so, would they inquire as to whether these clients were willing to participate in a research project. This avenue failed to produce participants, and the researcher went to the business community and attempted to find participants through such organizations as Small Business Development Centers and Chambers of Commerce, and she sought information about entrepreneurs who had started their own business and who were coached through the process. However, none of the above avenues produced participants, therefore the researcher contacted entrepreneurs directly. This contact occurred by a search of new business owners. The researcher also placed an ad on LinkedIn that explained the research and asked for interested people to contact her. An email explaining the research in greater detail was sent to interested parties and from this, a list of potential participants was generated.

Next, the researcher contacted potential participants and scheduled interview times with each. All initial contact was via email. Once this was achieved contact via telephone occurred, informed consent was thoroughly discussed and participants were
questioned as to whether they understood informed consent and whether they had any questions. The researcher set aside 60 minutes for each interview at which time she was in a locked room to avoid interruptions. In addition, the researcher used a headset that contained a mute button to avoid unnecessary interruptions, such as clearing the throat or coughing, as the participants answered questions. A digital voice recorder with a battery life of four hours was connected to the phone prior to the interviews and was tested to ensure that batteries were fresh and it was working properly. Open-ended questions were used to collect the data.

The researcher then placed the call to each participant during the scheduled time. A few casual statements were made to help put the participant at ease, and the interview process was explained. The participants were told the purpose of the interviews and that they did not have to answer any question that made them uncomfortable. Participants were told that the interview would be recorded and were told how the information would be stored. The researcher explained that the participants could use a false name for the purpose of the interview to protect anonymity or, if they preferred, a real first name could be used. After being certain that the participants fully understood their rights and the procedure, the researcher began the interview by stating her name, the date, time, and purpose of the interview as well as the participant’s name or pseudonym.

Data were collected and recorded through semi-structured, open-ended questions using interviews (Nielson, 2007). From these recordings a professional transcriptionist transcribed the interviews. A confidentiality form was obtained from the transcriptionist to ensure privacy for the participants.
Finally, the transcribed interviews were stored on DVDs as well as on an external hard drive. Hard copies were also made and all of these were stored in a locked cabinet in the researcher’s home (APA, 2002). In addition, computer data were password-protected. Once it was determined that the transcriptions were accurate and complete, the recordings were stored in a locked safe until the analysis was complete. Upon completion of the analysis, and after listening to the original recordings again to ensure that nothing was missed, they were deleted. Although email communication generally did not include sensitive information, all email communications were also deleted as soon as it was deemed unnecessary in order to protect the participant’s identity. Every precaution was taken at every stage to protect anonymity and confidentiality.

As the interviews proceeded the researcher worked to maintain objectivity and checked periodically with the participants to be sure that they were comfortable with and fully understood the questions. When the researcher completed the questions she asked the participants if there was anything they would like to add. She then thanked the participants and asked if it would be okay to contact them again at a later date for follow up questions or clarification if necessary.

**Instruments**

The data collection instrument was the researcher herself along with her ability to conduct interview questions designed to elicit the experience of entrepreneurs coached through a business startup. Not only did the researcher ask these primary questions but she also utilized her ability to ask follow-through questions when necessary in order to obtain a descriptive and personal response, as she attempted to gain access to the true nature of the experience. The researcher’s experience as a business coach was a benefit in
this process as she applied subtle coaching techniques designed to aid the participants in
drawing out the deep, underlying meaning of their experience. Both positive and negative
responses were expected and recorded.

The interview questions (Appendix A) were designed to explore the experience of
the business coaching as entrepreneurs worked through their business startup. The
questions also followed guidelines set forth by the U.S. Department of Justice designed to
yield greater accuracy in the recall of events over a period of time (Department of Justice, 1998). It should be noted that many of these guidelines are techniques coaches are
trained to use such as not asking leading questions, pausing to allow time for the
interviewee to fully answer the question, encouraging the interviewee to actively and
voluntarily offer information, and establishing rapport.

Research Questions

While the primary goal was to remain within the questions, there was an
allowance for variation depending on the answers each participant offered because a
qualitative researcher must always strive to create questions that allow for the “greatest
latitude to explore phenomena and ask probing questions to yield thick description”
(Chwalisz, Shah, & Hand, 2008, p. 393). In addition, there was a putting aside of
questions, theorizing, or generalizing regarding an experience and considering only the
experience itself. A constant and active effort to suspend judgment was required; along
with a diligent awareness of the researcher’s own pre-conceptions (Giorgi, 2006).

There were demographic questions asked first including gender, age, race, and
location. Other questions included:

1. What type of business do you operate? How many people do you employ? What is the
annual net return from the business?

2. Did you have a partner or partners working with you? If yes, were they coached as well?

3. What kind of education/training do you have that relates to business startups?

4. How often did you meet with your coach each month? How long was each session? How many months did you meet?

The guiding questions are:

1. At what point did you realize that you might hire a professional business coach as you designed your first business start-up?

2. Describe the process of hiring a professional business coach and what factors you considered.

3. What did you hope to gain from your work with a coach?

4. Please describe how the coaching relationship developed?

5. Tell me about the coaching experience and what resulted.

6. Describe anything unexpected that occurred during the coaching.

7. How did you know whether you were making progress?

8. Explain whether the coaching added anything that you could not do for yourself.

9. Describe anything that did not work well with the coaching.

10. Tell me about anything you may have learned from the coaching that has benefitted you beyond your business start-up?

**Data Analysis**

After the data were collected via interview, recorded, and transcribed, the data analysis phase began. Once it was determined that the transcriptions were accurate
through a thorough examination of the recordings and the transcripts, an analysis was conducted using Percy and Kostere’s (2008) generic qualitative thematic inductive analysis.

1. Review and become familiar with the transcribed interviews. This step includes highlighting information that appears to be meaningful.
2. Review the highlighted information to determine relevance to the research questions.
3. Discard data considered non-relevant to the research question, but keep on file for later reevaluation.
4. Assign each data item a descriptive code.
5. Cluster items that appear to be connected or related in some way as themes/patterns begin to emerge. The words used to describe these patterns are no longer the participant’s, but the researcher’s.
6. Identify data items that demonstrate a specific pattern (this may include direct quotes).
7. Explore patterns for overarching themes.
8. Arrange themes in a type of matrix according to their corresponding supporting patterns. The matrix will include the descriptors from step 4.
9. Formulate a structured statement of each participant’s experience. This step will include each theme’s scope and substance.
10. Combine the analysis of data, that are consistent across the participant’s data, for each participant and blend them into a composite synthesis of the data collected regarding the research question.
11. Present data as a descriptive summary that includes preexisting, emergent, and overarching themes, which may include illustrative quotes.

Finally, the researcher listened to the original interviews were listened to again to determine if there was anything new to be gained from hearing them after having done the analysis. In addition, the researcher listened to the interviews in order to determine if anything was left out.

**Ethical Considerations**

Ethical concerns were addressed as fully as possible throughout the study. In accordance with the American Psychological Association (APA, 2002) the researcher complied with APA Ethics Code Standard, 2.01 Boundaries of Competence and worked with only the population her training allowed. She avoided conflicts of interest (APA Ethics Code Standard 3.06, 2002). Participants read informed consent forms prior to the interviews (APA Standard 3.10, 2002), which included their rights to decline participation in the study and/or withdraw at any time. No names or any identifying information were used on the interview forms to further protect the identity of the participants (APA Ethics Code Standard 4.01, 2002). All collected information was stored in a locked safe and all information collected via email was password-protected. Once transcription was completed and double checked for accuracy, the original tapes were destroyed (APA Ethics Code Standard 4.01, 2002).

**Expected Findings**

When conducting qualitative research it is typically not appropriate to discuss expecting findings. In this way the researcher can remain as unbiased as possible and it allows the data to speak for themselves without the influence of researcher expectations.
(Bartunek & Seo, 2002). That being said, one expectation was that the study would reveal whether and in what ways coaching was beneficial for entrepreneurs as they worked through their startup. According to the literature, coaching should, at minimum, help the entrepreneurs with goal setting and achievement and help them to develop leadership behaviors (Evers et al., 2006; Leaptrott, 2009). Technically, the study is in place to investigate the experience of the entrepreneurs who were coached. In addition, there was a secondary question underlying this: The value, or lack of value, the entrepreneurs found through the coaching experience. From this, the primary expectation was that the research would reveal what meaning, if any, coaching brought to entrepreneurs coached through their business startup.
CHAPTER 4. DATA COLLECTION AND ANALYSIS

Introduction: The Study and the Researcher

This chapter presents results produced using the research design, sampling procedures, data collection, and data analysis as described previously. Data were collected through structured interview questions aimed at exploring the coaching experience described by entrepreneurs starting their own business. The chapter begins with a discussion of the researcher: why she chose this topic, and how she is qualified to collect and analyze the data. From there the chapter presents a description of the participants, the research methodology applied to the data analysis, and a presentation of the data and results of the analysis.

The Researcher

The researcher developed the idea for the study through her interest in business coaching and her concern for the direction coaching is taking. Liljenstrand and Nebeker (2008) showed that the profession of coaching is growing rapidly and as it does so its boundaries are becoming less clear. Adding research to the coaching literature can help further define it as a profession, explain its purpose, and disclose its effectiveness. These are the primary reasons the researcher chose a topic around coaching. As Kilburg (2004) noted “what happens in coaching engagements remains quite mysterious” (p. 204). Therefore, a study that explores the relationship from a qualitative perspective has the potential to increase the understanding of what occurs in a coaching situation.
This is the first qualitative study the researcher has conducted. However, her training as a coach has helped to prepare her in the art of interviewing as she attempts to draw out information that will aid in the understanding of a personal experience. In addition, her coach training/background has provided her with the skills needed to contact participants via the telephone and talk with them in a relaxed yet professional manner. Given her background as a coach, there is the possibility of personal bias interfering with the analysis.

The researcher’s personal background and training in coaching might possibly bias her to look for positive comments in the interviews. However, her awareness of this possible bias will help in preventing that from becoming a problem. Further, the research appreciates emergent data, or data that surfaces unexpectedly. Due to this, she will search for the expected as well as the unexpected as she combs through the interviews.

**Description of the Sample**

The sample consisted of nine participants, four men and five women who were coached through a business startup. While the original hope for the research was for entrepreneurs who had started a variety of businesses, the participants all started either coaching practices or coaching/consulting practices. This is perhaps due to the fact that the participants were primarily located through coaching websites.

Over 44 people responded to the inquiries. Seventeen did not respond to follow-up communication, seven did not meet the criteria, nine decided not to participate due to scheduling issues, and two did not show up for the scheduled interviews and did not respond to further communication. The participants were interviewed voluntarily and met the following criteria:
1. They were coached through a business startup
2. At least 6 months had passed since the coaching occurred
3. No more than 12 years had passed since the coaching occurred
4. They were between the ages of 18 and 65

The nine participants were diverse in terms of age with a range between 30 and 63 and an average age of 49. All participants were located within the U.S. Most were sole proprietors with no employees or partners. However, one had three employees and one had contract coaches who work with her. See Table 1 for basic demographic information.

Table 1. Participant Demographics

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Demographic</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Age:</strong></td>
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</tr>
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<td>18-30</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-40</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41-50</td>
<td>2</td>
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<tr>
<td>5-9</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10-12</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>50-100 thousand</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>100+ thousand</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

The nine participants in this study were successful entrepreneurs. The following information is provided as insight into each participant. Pseudonyms were used to protect their identity.
Participant 1. Elisabeth

Elisabeth is a 57-year-old woman, lives in a Southern state and operates a coaching platform designed to help people gain a better understanding of coaching as well as to find a coach best suited for their needs. This is her second company [she sold the first] and while she is sole proprietor she has subcontractors and coaches who work for the company. She is an energetic individual with a passion for coaching. Although she attended college and has a background in entrepreneurial endeavors, she stated that, “The academic part of college didn’t lend itself to me going into business by myself and… my last company is where I learned a ton about running a business.” She further explained that she has been in business for 18 months and is just starting to monetize her company and is currently below $50,000 a year.

Participant 2. Katie

Katie is 45-years-old and owns a professional coaching/training business and, like Elisabeth, she lives in a Southern state. She has no employees or partners in the business. Her background includes a bachelor’s degree in business and she also has training through coaching institutions. Katie was fairly quiet during the interview and spoke only when she was answering an interview question. She “started another business last year” that she did not utilize a coach for. She has a direct mannerism and is to the point. She has been in business for three years and generates $30,000-$60,000 per year.

Participant 3. John

John is 62-years-old, lives in a Pacific Coast state, and runs a coaching and consulting business. He has a part-time virtual assistant but no other employees. John was easy to talk to and had a pleasantness about him that made the interview enjoyable. As far
as education and training John said, “I spent 20-years in consulting… the only education I got on business startups was through my coach training.” He has been in business for two years and brings in $300,000-$600,000 annually.

**Participant 4. Kelly**

Kelly is a 40-year-old woman who is a professor of psychology at a Southern university. In addition to working at the university she operates a small coaching business in which she specializes in family coaching. Kelly has no employees and her “goal was never to have a big practice” but she would “like to be coaching more than I am now.” She is an ambitious person with a number of goals and the energy to take them on. She has been coaching for just over a year and did not specify the amount of income from her business.

**Interview 5. Todd**

Todd is 50-years-old and lives in a Rocky Mountain state. He operates a coaching business that focuses on leadership development. His coaching certification process “didn’t necessarily recommend [hiring a coach] but it was something that we had talked about in class” Todd is confident and in-charge while maintaining an approachable and pleasant mannerism. His work in coaching is so that he “has something to retire to.” He is not ready to leave his current occupation but is looking ahead and planning for a future that is approaching. He has more than three decades “of leadership experience in a variety of settings and situations.” He has been in practice for three years and generates $65,000 annually.
Participant 6. Camille

Camille is 30-years-old, lives in an Eastern state, and runs a private executive coaching practice that employs three people. Her background includes a master’s degree in applied positive psychology. In addition, she has worked as an empirical researcher related to human consciousness for more than 10 years. Camille is ambitious, optimistic, and creates positive energy through her voice and comments. She stated:

I have been very, very lucky... I’ve had a number of different mentors and coaches show up for me along the way... I feel very blessed that there’s been a lot of people that have been a part of helping me learn how best to conduct myself in the business world.

Camille has been in business for seven years and chose not to disclose her income.

Participant 7. Mike

Mike is 43-years-old and lives in a Southern state. He owns and operates a management consulting business. Mike’s background includes service in the United States Air Force, a master’s degree in management, and he is currently in the dissertation phase of a PhD in organizational psychology. Mike is knowledgeable in a number of areas including management, strategic planning, and organizational development. He also “worked as an internal consultant [in the Air Force] to various units.” His interview was relaxed and comfortable and he was forthcoming with information. Mike has been in business for two years and “hasn’t hit the six figure mark yet.”

Participant 8. Dave

Dave is a 52-year-old coach who lives in an Eastern state. His background includes an MBA from Harvard, and a “Jump Start” program through the Professional Coach’s Alliance. He describes the primary focus of his work prior to coaching: “I was
mostly a strategy person mostly advising senior leaders on how to develop good marketing sales, operational strategies, vision statements, all that kind of stuff.” Dave has a lively personality and brings energy to the conversation. He is easy to talk to, easy to listen to, and open to another’s viewpoint. He has a diverse background and willingly admits to areas where he is less knowledgeable. Dave has been in business for four years and generates between $100,000 and $200,000 annually.

Participant 9. Emily

Emily is 63-years-old, lives in an Eastern state, and is an integral coach (i.e. coaches the whole person). She has a master’s degree in organizational development, is a Professional Certified Coach, and is waiting to hear back on her Master Certified Coaching certification through ICF. Emily works with a variety of clients and her emphasis is on development. She is a dynamic individual and sounds passionate about her work. The interview was relaxed, friendly, and informative. Emily has been in business for 11 years and her income varies but is typically in the low six figures.

Research Methodology Applied to the Data Analysis

The generic qualitative method exhibits some or all of the characteristics of qualitative work but does not utilize one specific qualitative methodology (Caelli, Ray, & Mill, 2003). While the goal is to understand an experience or event, the experience or event occurs externally rather than internally to the person experiencing it. Of primary importance with a generic qualitative design is to have a theoretical position prior to starting the research (Cooper & Endacott, 2007). The theoretical analysis of the present study was driven primarily by the theory of positive psychology with an emphasis on
Frederickson’s broaden-and-build theory (Frederickson, 2005) and secondarily by the theory of humanism.

**Data Collection**

Once approval from the Internal Review Board (IRB) was granted, data collection using the generic qualitative method began. This involved semi-structured interviews of nine entrepreneurs who were coached through their business startup. Prior to the interview each participant signed and returned an informed consent form per IRB. All nine participants were coaches who are operating either coaching businesses or a coaching/consulting business at least part-time. Participants were located using a variety of techniques. The majority of participants came through ads placed on the social network LinkedIn. More than 100 email inquiries were also sent out after gaining information from coaching and entrepreneurial web sites. Of the more-than 44 people who responded to the ads and email inquiries nine chose not to participate due to time constraints, seven failed to meet the inclusion criteria, 17 failed to respond to follow-up communication, and two did not show up for the scheduled interviews and did not respond to further communication.

Each participant was contacted through email to verify eligibility, at which time an interview was scheduled. Interviews were conducted telephonically and lasted 20-40 minutes. Interviews, while comfortable and casual, were also business-like and timely. Open-ended questions were used to elicit answers that were detailed and personal. Participants were encouraged to answer as candidly as possible and were told that there was no right or wrong answer. The researcher explained that she was interested in his or her personal experience and encouraged participants to relax and answer as openly and
honestly as possible. The interviews were enjoyable for both the researcher and the participants as indicated by such statements as, “This is great. I feel like you’re asking really wonderful questions,” and, “This has actually been very helpful in terms of me rethinking about that process from a year ago and deciding what I want to move forward with.” At the end of the interview each participant was thanked for their participation in the study.

The interviews were recorded using a digital voice recorder connected to a cell phone. The files were downloaded as MP3 files and were then given to the transcriptionist who completed the transcriptions and returned each interview within three days. The participants were referred to as P1, P2, and P3…etc., indicating they were the first participant or the second and so on. This helped to protect anonymity as well as simplifying the process of referring to participants during the analysis. In the discussion of the analysis the participants are referred to by pseudonyms because this personalizes their contributions. The researcher double-checked the transcribed interviews against the original recording for accuracy.

Data Preparation and Coding

Data analysis followed Percy and Kostere’s (2008) thematic induction analysis. During step 1 the researcher listened to the recordings while reading the transcriptions to verify accuracy. The researcher read each transcript again for greater familiarity and an overview of the interview. During this step any indications of time were highlighted in order to collect and document the demographic information. That is, how long it had been since the coaching occurred, how long the coaching lasted, and how long the business
had been operational. In addition, information that appeared to be meaningful was
underlined.

Step 2 involved a review of the underlined phrases or sentences that seemed
meaningful or related to the research question. Step 3 involved disregarding any data that
was considered non-relevant to the research question. This information was disregarded
but not discarded because it may need to be reviewed again later.

Step 4 consisted of identifying categories in each interview and assigning a
descriptive code. This typically consisted of a word or words that described the
experience that had been underlined in step 2.

During step 5 the researcher clustered the words from step 4 that seemed to be
connected or related in some way. For example, the participants used words such as
“partnership,” “friendship,” or “connection” when describing their relationship with the
coach they had hired. Therefore, these three phrases were considered related and were
clustered.

Step 6 included pulling direct quotes from the interviews that demonstrated a
specific pattern. Step 7 explored the patterns for overarching themes (Appendix B). In
step 8 the researcher arranged the themes in a matrix according to their corresponding
supporting patterns. This matrix included identifying categories from step 4 (Appendix
B). During step 9 the researcher wrote a brief review of each interview that depicted the
substance of each theme. Step 10 included combining the work completed in steps 1-9
and blending them into a composite synthesis of the data collected that relates to the
research question. Finally, step 11 involved presenting the data as a descriptive
summary.
One final note: An overview of the coaches who had worked with the participants was considered relevant because it tells the reader such information as the cost of the coaching and the length of time each participant was coached. Therefore, this information has been summarized in Table 2.

Table 2. Overview of Coaching

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Information</th>
<th>Number of Participants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Coaches Training/Experience:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unknown training/up to 20 years experience</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ICF Certified</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Minimal Training</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unsure</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cost of Coaching:</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>No Cost</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$100 - $200/mos.</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$201 - $400/mos.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>$401 - $600/mos.</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>More than $601/mos</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Time Coached:</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>6 months or less</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>Less than 1 year</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1-2 years</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>No. Sessions Monthly:</strong></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td>All participants had between 1 and 4 sessions monthly</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Length of Session:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 participants had sessions that lasted 30-60 minutes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 participants had sessions that lasted 60-90 minutes</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Why Coaching Ended:</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2 participants are still meeting with their coach</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7 participants cited “no longer the right fit”</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Presentation of the Data and Results of the Analysis

There were 10 primary interview questions, which are summarized below along with a sample of the answers. There is a sampling of the answers along with the question because this can be beneficial in order to aid the reader in placing the participant’s comments/answers into context. In addition, a representation of the answers helps to clarify what the researcher was attempting to learn through the questions.

Question 1

At what point did you realize that you might hire a professional business coach as you designed your startup? The answer to this question varied from “immediately” to being several months into the new business. Dave said, “It was part of the [coaching] program that I had purchased” and Todd “hired the coach during my certification process”

For some of the participants there was no question as to whether they would hire a coach, but for others the experience was quite different.

Kelly stated:

Doing peer coaching for the first couple months I kind of got a feel for what coaching was… the topics were pretty artificial, but I liked the process. I liked the idea of being able to have my very own personal coach to help me through that process so… I had the idea in February and then maybe two months later I was actually working with a coach.

Emily described her experience:

After learning the formalities of coaching I was terrified to try it. It was really scary. And actually the coaching school I attended sent me my first paid client and I was so nervous that I hired a coach from the same school to coach me for six month and shadow me as I was coaching this woman.
Question 2

Describe the process of hiring a professional business coach and what factors you considered. Many participants admitted to having little control over who they would hire because it was part of a program or package. Others had full reign of whom they would hire such as Katie, “I had met her so there was rapport there. We had similar backgrounds so the rapport was developed quite quickly and I really respected her program as well.”

Camille and Mike also knew their coaches prior hiring them. Mike explained, “He was someone that I knew well and he was very successful.” Kelly went online and wanted someone highly qualified. She wanted someone with a PhD and a Master Certified Coach Certificate. She “wanted a coach with the highest credentials.” After exploring credentials she would go to their website and look for someone “who looked like someone I would be connected with.” Conversely, Camille was less interested in background and sought coaches with life experience.

Question 3.

What did you hope to gain from your work with a Coach? All the participants were clear on what they hoped the coach would bring to them and their new business. Mike said, “My goal with working with a coach was to kind of short circuit getting going from coach class to business.” Similarly, John described his goals as, “I hoped to gain some significant insight in terms of a business startup with a coaching emphasis.” Elisabeth related that she:

Hoped to gain great guidance and clarity as to the next steps to build a business that was sustainable and that would be built smoothly to get off the ground easily and my vision was to have that support system to help me see what was working and what was not working as I was building it.
Dave was highly specific in what he hoped to gain:

[I hoped to gain] useful ideas around growing the business. How to market myself. Testing ideas. What do you think of this? I’m thinking about trying that. And he [the coach] had a lot more small business experience than I did which was good because I had, going into this, zero small business experience.

On this question all participants mentioned hoping for greater clarity or help with getting clear on their vision. The majority also spoke about more concrete issues such as marketing and hoping to get some help with that.

**Question 4.**

This is a two-part question and was written with the hope of coming to a better understanding of how entrepreneurs view coaching and the coach relationship.

**question 4A.**

What does the phrase “coaching relationship” mean to you? While all participants agreed that the relationship is the focal point of the coaching experience, their reasons and experiences varied. The phrases “partnership” and/or “connected” were used by all of the participants and five participants also used the word “friendship” to describe the coaching relationship. Mike summed it up as, “Without a relationship, I’m not certain that you can have the kind of trust that’s necessary, that’s required to be successful.” Emily described a coaching relationship as, “The partnership that is between the coach and the coachee. It’s a very trusted, sacred space.” Finally, Todd described it as, “The client’s connection with the coach.”

A lengthier explanation of the coaching relationship comes from Kelly:

When someone hires a coach, it’s the way in which they agree to interact with each other to support – so the client feels supported by the coach. So I guess it’s sort of the agreements and expectations and notions of what to expect and then the process of the activity that builds that relationship.
question 4B.

Can you describe how the coaching relationship developed? While all the participants had a similar idea as to what the “coaching relationship” should be, their actual experiences with the relationship varied. Katie’s experience was, “The relationship very much deepened, almost even towards a friendship and a peer-type support… It became more of a deepened coaching conversation. I don’t have the words for it. Versus a you-coach-me-client, it was a true partnership.” Emily’s comments were similar, “It was based on trust, confidentiality. It evolved into a friendship. It was just a very trusting, sacred relationship.” Conversely, John’s experience was much less than what he had expected, “I think I put him on the defensive because I was asking for more than he was prepared to offer or felt he needed to offer, so I think at some point it got a bit tenuous.”

Question 5.

Tell me about the coaching experience and what resulted. All the participants, even those who were less satisfied with the coaching, said there was value in the experience. John had this to say, “I think it did serve a purpose… I think there was value in the process but it was superficial. I’ve learned more from books than I did from the [coaching].” Emily, who wanted to model her coach’s style, expressed it this way:

You need to have somebody to model, I think, when you’re doing any kind of work like this and then over time your own voice comes out… that person is there somewhere in the development of you, but your own voice is now more dominant.
Katie’s coaching experience culminated in this manner, “A couple of things resulted. One, I had a full business strategy, written clear. And [our relationship] continued so now I’m a mentor coach for her program.”

Elisabeth responded as follows:

In the beginning my expectations were, “Oh, I’m going to have a coach and that’s really going to help me get this business off the ground,” and the reality was, it depends on what business it is… I really didn’t know what I was doing [with website design] and my coach didn’t know anything about websites either… so he couldn’t coach me on that… I think he was totally frustrated with the whole process. It was like, this is not the thing he wanted to coach on… it was sort of drudgery to get through this and so I had this great coach but I was really using the coach for all the wrong reasons.

Question 6.

Describe anything unexpected that happened during the coaching. Many participants said nothing unexpected happened while others seemed to enjoy this question and were delighted with the surprises that showed up.

Emily revealed that:

What was unexpected was how intuitive she was on the areas I was fearful of getting involved in and coaching where I was preventing myself from growing and developing. She was quite direct in her coaching of me to show me how I was almost sabotaging myself from my own success. Her skills were so refined. It was like business but it became more than that. She wanted to coach the whole person; all of me. And that’s how it was a surprise at how skillful she was at that. It was a beautiful surprise.

Kelly said, “I wasn’t expecting to have such clarity around how to balance educator vs. coach in the middle of a coaching session so I thought that was unexpected… that was nice.”

Two participants did not enjoy the unexpected elements. In response to this question John asked, “You mean besides being dissatisfied?” And Elisabeth stated, “I felt
like my coach got really frustrated because the business wasn’t moving very fast, and so that was surprising to me. It’s like, ‘Hey wait a minute, you’re the coach. I’m the one who’s supposed to be frustrated.’”

**Question 7.**

How did you know whether you were making progress? The answers to this question varied from filling out goal statement forms to simply going from week-to-week and discussing what had been going on. Dave explained, “We’d write down what we wanted to accomplish this week. What action steps this week? What are the things I learned from this meeting?” Mike said, “We would try to keep an eye on the long-term goals. I didn’t look for any immediate indicators of success. I knew this was going to be a long-term process.” Finally, Todd said that he pays attention to the ‘a-ha’ moments, “There will be this silence… and then, I never thought of that before… I need a minute to think about that question.”

**Question 8.**

Explain whether the coaching added anything that you could not do for yourself.

Camille’s response to this question was:

I think having that kind of support and that kind of a team around me in the beginning was essential for me. I don’t think I would have evolved to it. I don’t think I would have felt confident and secure going out into the marketplace on my own.

Dave said:

Coaching brings out a sense of self-awareness that’s very hard to get to just on your own… Sometimes it’s just through hearing my own words coming out, writing it down, holding myself accountable, there’s a whole different set of learning that happens when that’s going on… the majority of people have a tougher time seeing through… the clutter and just see what they’re actually telling
themselves. And the coaching helps to clear that out and get you focused on the things that you want to be focused on.

Katie explained that, “I can teach it to other people, but actually doing it for myself was a challenge… there was a lot of clarity in it, the accountability was very important.” John’s experience was, “[The purpose] was to go through a programmatic offering in a systematic manner to handle the basics of marketing. Could I have figured it out myself? Yeah, I suppose so, over time.”

Question 9.

Describe anything that did not work well with the coaching.

Kelly’s reply was:

I came to a session having posted my first blog or something like that. I was super excited about it, and my coach asked me a question not related to it and I didn’t answer her question… and said I would come back to it and then I told her about how excited I was about this thing I had done and she said, “That’s really interesting that you just ignored the original question.” And really sort of discounted me… and I said, “You know, you’re kind of a buzz kill. I was really excited. I took these steps forward toward my goal and you’re really calling me out on something that I think is pretty insignificant.” And she got defensive, which I didn’t think was helpful at all… but then she kind of came back around and later she said, “I’m really sorry for what happened with that…” I’m paying for the time… and I was super excited and by the end of the talk I was really pissed off at her.

The response from Elisabeth was, “There’s a lot of coaches and a lot of people who hire coaches and if there’s not the right alignment between the two of them, it’s not going to be a great relationship.”

Emily’s answer was from a different angle:

That’s the beauty of coaching… I resisted some of the ideas that she gave me and so that was really fun to hang out there, too. [Asking why I was resisting] taught me that resistance is also doing something… and it just is a juicy place to go hang out with coaching.
Question 10.

Did you learn anything from the coaching that has benefitted you beyond your business start-up? Todd answered with, “She said, ‘There are a lot of bad coaches in the industry, and you need to be a world-class coach – not a good one, not an average one, a world-class coach.’ And I will never forge that session.” Mike replied, “It just feel good to have a network of allies that you can call on for advice… just having the knowledge that there’s a network there, that helps.” Katie stated, “Yes. Personally. Knowing my purpose, my authentic expression in the world. More self-awareness, clarity. And it’s also helped me help my clients. It also changed my own coaching. It deepened my own coaching with clients.”

Camille’s response was:

Absolutely. Out of this there’s been a lot more thought and mindfulness about my role in the world at large. Not just myself as a coach or businesswoman, but who I am here to be… many of the conversations… aided me in understanding my purpose, my path, my mission, and my personal vision.

Themes

In order to identify themes a quick summary of the data analysis included a review of each interview while listening to the recordings to help ensure accuracy. Following this were several readings of each transcript to increase familiarity with the data as well as to underline phrases that seemed related to the research question. The researcher then clustered the underlined phrases that seemed connected or related in some way. After arranging the themes in a matrix according to their corresponding supporting system, the researcher wrote a brief review of each interview. She then combined the
work from the above steps and blended them into a composite synthesis of the data that related to the research question.

Through an exploration of commonalities within the interviews, the researcher discovered connecting threads that illuminated shared aspects of the participant’s experiences of being coached. The shared experiences, or themes, are important because it is through the themes that the data can be understood and placed into a context that is useful for the reader. Further, the themes organize the data and can then be discussed in terms of the theoretical orientation of the study.

The five primary themes that emerged through the process of analysis as described above are: Accountability, Connection, Clarity, Coach’s Agenda, and Cultivation. It should be noted that John’s coaching experience fell short of what he had hoped for and as a result, his responses do not align with any of the themes except for Coach’s Agenda. However, because his responses are authentic and offer a different perspective they are interwoven throughout the discussion of the themes.

**Theme 1 – Accountability**

Accountability was the strongest theme and was mentioned by all nine of the participants in a variety of ways throughout their interviews. From the process of hiring the coach to taking responsibility for their decision about whom they hired, each participant found that accountability and the experience of being coached are tightly linked. There was a differentiation made between being held accountable and being told what to do. As Elisabeth explained, “The coach will be there to help you be accountable to practice the new skill but they aren’t there to teach you the new skill.” Emily voiced it
a little differently and found that having a coach boosted her confidence, “I felt a lot of responsibility. So I really loved the idea of having somebody shadowing… me.”

John’s experience of accountability came more in the form of the feedback he offered his coach, “I think I was very specific about what I didn’t get versus what I had hoped that I would get.” That is, his accountability showed up in the form of letting his coach know that his expectations were not met. John was accountable in his review of the coaching experience.

Another aspect of accountability was the push it gave some of the participants to take the next step. As Todd said, “She taught me how to go start doing something… Go start asking people. And I did and I got a client that way.” Similarly, Kelly stated, “Coaching really gave me accountability and impetus to keep moving forward.” Camille’s experience with accountability transferred to how she interacts with her own clients, “I try to be proactive about what’s working and what’s not, so we can make it the best relationship possible.” While accountability can refer to the coach holding the client accountable, the client holding the coach accountable, or personal accountability that emerged through the experience, this is an aspect of the coaching that all of the participants intimated during their interview.

Coming back to Elisabeth, she tied the accountability piece into coaching as a whole, “It is so substantial and significant for people to understand how they can live the life that they want with the help of someone who’s going to make them accountable.” Listening to the experience of each participant it is clear that the accountability door swung both ways: Not only did they expect accountability from their coach, but also they expected the coach to hold them accountable on some level.
Theme 2 – Connection

Connection was the second strongest theme and came second to accountability only because John’s experience excluded any sense or mention of connection. However, all the participants, including John, were clear on what they think the coaching relationship should be. Mike believes that “coaching is all about the relationship. Without a relationship, I’m not certain that you can have the kind of trust that necessary, that’s required to be successful.” Katie described it as “a partnership. An agreed contractual partnership.”

And he went further to say:

The ability to verbally articulate and bounce ideas off one another. Co-create… she would add, I would add… I would not be able to do it on my own. I don’t want to say friendship, but it got very close that way.

Elisabeth said, “The coaching relationship is like having a best friend whose only focus is all on you and you never have to have any focus on them and they’re going to be there through thick and thin.”

Most of the participants talked about fit, which is about feeling comfortable with the coach. They seemed to have some idea in mind of what or who they were looking for in a coach. Kelly said, “The fit was a little different than I expected… it just wasn’t what I was looking for.” In a similar way, Emily stated, “This was a very easy selection… I already knew her and already knew how she worked.”

Dave explained that he and his coach became quite close through the months they worked together. For him, this resulted in the need to amplify the awareness of what needs to happen in a coaching session:
Sometimes being that very familiar can go too far and it just becomes a nice chitchat session as opposed to real work. So the closer you become in a friendly standpoint, there’s the danger of slipping too far and now it’s just a nice conversation with a friend.

During the discussion of the coaching relationship, what each participant expected it to be, and what it turned out to be, the participants used such words as partnership, alignment, friendship, and feeling understood. As Camille said, “there seems to be a natural rhythm to these relationships” and when things shifted between her and her coaches and she started to feel managed “that was the end of the life cycle for me.” It should be noted that the coaching relationship is of such importance to each of the participants, that none hesitated to end the relationship and/or move on when it no was longer a good fit. As can be seen in Table 2, of the nine participants interviewed only two are still working with their coach.

**Theme 3 – Clarity**

This theme presented itself in answer to the question about why the participants made the decision to hire a coach. Almost exclusively the reason centered on gaining clarity, focus, or seeing through the clutter. Specifically, Dave said, “the coaching helps you clear out [clutter] and get you focused on the things that you want to be focused on.” Recall that it was Dave who earlier mentioned that getting too close to the coach could create problems of staying on task and iterated that he and his coach would need to take a breath and “get back on track.”

One of Kelly’s main objectives when hiring a coach was to learn to separate who she is professionally from who she is personally and to find balance between those. She expressed, “I think all of us are pretty good at sort of getting lost in the daily grind and
forgetting about our big goals. I think that’s one of the reasons we hire coaches.”

Analogously, Emily said that she “wouldn’t have been able to zero in as clearly on those areas that, to me, were preventing me from being a more skillful coach.”

Another side to clarity involves being stuck. Elisabeth said, “They’re there to help you through whatever’s in your way, for getting to the next step in your future. Like, what’s blocking you?” Todd echoed Elisabeth’s sentiment, “I wanted to ask somebody a lot of questions and then just be coached because there’s things inside me that were blocking me, just like my clients. There’s something blocking them.”

Mike stated, “I just try to apply it where I can and it helps me to see and treat prospects differently… I also look for new opportunities that I wouldn’t have noticed before.” Conversely, John’s experience was, “The focus was about 80 percent on marketing… It was pretty basic.” His description of the coaching made the experience seem quite rigid, scripted, and lacking in clarity.

Part of the clarity that showed itself came in a more concrete manner. Camille referred to it as “very hard target things that show you that you’re making progress” such as “creating documents, creating operational modalities, and SOPs.” Dave referred to it as “it’s more about the ability to ask the right questions, guide people in the right direction. And it’s all about self-awareness.” Similarly, Camille said the coach should let “the client discover the solutions rather than leading them so heavily.” Finally, Kelly said, “We spent a lot of time teasing the whole professional/personal self and how I put that out to the public and so it was really about me sort of understanding my own process and who I am professionally versus personally.”

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Hearing the participants discuss issues around clarity, focus, and goals was reminiscent of time the researcher spent in coach training because these are such important areas in coaching. As they discussed these topics [clarity, focus, and goal] the participants were energetic, enthusiastic, and sometimes discouraged if these concerns were not being addressed. The theme of clarity seemed to be foundational to the success and/or satisfaction of the coaching experience.

**Theme 4 – Coach’s Agenda**

The coach’s agenda intruding on coaching sessions was a point of frustration for all the participants who experienced it. However, the participants made it clear that it is not an uncommon occurrence for the coach to cross that line. As Dave said, “The coach shouldn’t be looking to get things personally out of the coaching session.”

Todd had an experience that involved hiring a coach that was probably not the best fit for his needs. He said that he “didn’t do a very good job of researching the industry” and “not knowing one [coach] from another, I chose her.” He later clarified, “The reason I felt like I didn’t do a very good job, she’s not a coach of coaches. I didn’t realize there was such a thing.” This compelled the question, “Why didn’t she refer you?” Todd answered:

I wondered that all along and probably figured it out just before we finished. And it’s probably why I didn’t extend [the coaching]… what I came up with is I think she was more interested in me than I was in her. I know that sounds arrogant and I don’t mean it to be that way, but I think she was really curious about what I was doing… and she was really anxious and curious about getting back to what I’ll call her “roots” in corporate America, and she was kind of living vicariously through me.
As the interview progressed it became so obvious that Todd’s needs were not being met that the researcher asked, “Why did you continue to stay with her?” Todd explained that he had signed a contract and would be charged whether he continued or not.

Later in the interview Todd stated that he had a sense that his coach was writing a book and he “felt like I was a test monkey for what was going to be in her book and I didn’t ask for it but it was forced on me.” Similarly, Mike discussed that knowing your coach has your best interests at heart is imperative to the coaching because you might otherwise be “suspicious of… their agenda.” Camille’s experience was on track until near the end. She said, “At the end of the coaching relationship… I started to feel a little bit managed as opposed to coached.” She said she is very sensitive to that with her own clients because of her experience and she tries “really hard to be mindful of that” to make sure she holds her own agenda at bay.

Other participants had moments of feeling managed. John said that he was “asking for more specificity around areas he [the coach] wasn’t covering.” He further stated that, he put the coach “on the defensive because I was asking for more than he was prepared to offer or felt he needed to offer.” Elisabeth expressed that her coach became frustrated because what she needed was “not the thing he wanted to coach on.” Like Todd, Elisabeth had signed a contract. However, even though she had paid for a year she left after nine months of coaching (It should be noted that she parted with her coach on good terms and he is still a colleague that she works with). She added that the coach and the client really need to “understand each other before they decide to form the relationship.”
Finally, Kelly’s experience was discussed during the presentation of Question #9: Describe anything that did not work well with the coaching. To summarize, she had come to a coaching session really excited because she had made progress toward her goals and the coach discounted her. Kelly called her on it saying, “You know, you’re sort of a buzz kill.” At which point the coach became defensive. In Kelly’s case, the coach backed off, re-grouped and later apologized for her behavior. Overall, Kelly’s experience with her coach was a good one, and this incident served as a reminder about how easy it can be for a coach to “slip.”

**Theme 5 – Cultivation**

Cultivation as a result of the coaching is the fifth theme and refers to the primary gains the clients made. Through their work with a coach, most of the participants described much growth, learning, and building that took place for them. Each was careful to distinguish between the coach telling them something versus them learning something. Elisabeth said that she learned a lot about clarity, “When things are fuzzy are you going to keep them that way? Are you going to allow your life to be fuzzy?” She stressed that clarity does not have to be about work but also extends “to relationships, where you want to live, or anything else.”

Mike discussed the learning he gained, “I wanted to learn how he [my coach] became successful as a consultant… I’m still learning.” He emphasized that he now notices opportunities that he would formerly have missed and that his coach cultivated “growth and development.” Katie said that she “definitely wouldn’t be in my business where I am without having a coach.” One of the things Todd’s coach taught him “is how
to integrate my coaching practice and my full-time job.” He further said, “She did help me figure that out. But she didn’t tell me what it was.”

This theme also presented itself through such statements as Dave saying, “Coaching brings out a sense of self-awareness.” Similar to this, Elisabeth described a coach as, “They help you to see when you’re off track.” Through this self-awareness and help in seeing whether you are on the right track, growth and forward movement are cultivated. Emily’s coach was “intuitive in the areas I was fearful of getting involved in” and it was through the coach’s directness in approaching those areas that Emily was able to flourish.

Kelly’s experience with cultivation was a little different because she “wanted to just experience being coached.” She believes that this has served her well and that she better relates to her clients for having been coached herself. After further reflection she noted, “As soon as my coaching stopped, I kind of stopped moving forward… so maybe it was more helpful than I’m giving it credit for.” Like Kelly, Todd noticed growth and development but seemed unsure how much credit to give his coach, “I believe I wouldn’t have learned some things about myself. Don’t know how important that has been for my coaching practice, but I think there’s some degree of importance there… It wasn’t a nothing, that’s for sure” (Recall that it was Todd who felt he could have made a better selection with his coach).

**Summary**

The purpose of this generic qualitative study was to explore the lived experience of entrepreneurs coached through a business startup. Nine participants who owned either
a coaching business or a consulting/coaching business were interviewed. The research achieved its goal through the completion of transcribed interviews.

Data analysis revealed five themes: Accountability, Connection, Clarity, Coach’s Agenda, and Cultivation. The data presented in this study described the coaching experience of the participants who were interviewed. Their [the participants’] backgrounds, training, and goals varied, as did the coach they worked with, and each had a unique experience that was detailed in the analysis using quotes to illustrate experiences and themes, but it is clear that there were shared patterns among the participants. Chapter 5 will include a summary and discussion of the results along with a discussion of the findings. This will include a discussion as to how the categories do or do not relate to one another. In addition, a discussion of the literature and how it does or does not fit with the current findings, limitations of the study, recommendations for improving practices, and suggestions for future research will be included.
CHAPTER 5. RESULTS, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Introduction

The primary goal of this chapter is to review how successfully the research question was addressed. In order to accomplish this, after this brief introduction a summary and discussion of the results and a discussion of the conclusions are included. In this discussion the literature is brought in as part of the conversation to explore whether and in what ways it fits with the analysis. Following this is a section covering limitations of the study, recommendations for future research, and a conclusion.

Summary of the Results

The purpose of this study was to explore what the coaching experience is like for entrepreneurs who are coached through a business startup. Through the research question the researcher sought to understand the coaching experience through the voice of those who were coached. One hope was that the research would indicate whether the process of being coached was beneficial for those starting a business. With this information the profession of coaching could potentially be enhanced and would help coaches refine their coaching to better serve entrepreneurs starting a new business. This chapter will briefly discuss the literature and the methodology used.
Literature Review

The literature reviewed for this study included topics from positive psychology (Foster & Lloyd, 2007; Frederickson, 2005), a review of the research methodology (Duffy & Chenail, 2008; Giorgi, 2008; Marchel & Owens, 2007), research related to business coaching and startups (Bennett, 2006; Grant et al., 2010; Kampa-Kokesch & Anderson, 2001; Kilburg, 2006; Stern, 2004), the goal of coaching (Bann, 2009; Baron et al., 2001; Bennett, 2006; Turner & Goodrich, 2010), research related to success and entrepreneurship (Gomez, 2007; Hisirch et al., 2007; Jensen & Koenig, 2002), and research related to issues entrepreneurs face (Foo et al., 2009; Leaptrott, 2009; St. Jean & Audet, 2009).

The literature review revealed that entrepreneurs starting a new business face many challenges and often don’t know where to go for help. The coaching literature was lacking as it relates to entrepreneurs and business startups. Through the literature review it was determined that there was a need to explore the coaching experience of entrepreneurs coached through a business startup.

Whereas the literature in the areas of business coaching and entrepreneurship has grown, the information about the experience of being coached through a business startup is still lacking. A further and more recent review of the literature revealed no new relevant research published during the completion of this research.

Methodology

A generic qualitative approach was utilized in this study. The intended sample size was nine and the resulting participant pool included four men and five women who were coached through their business startup. The original target population was
entrepreneurs who had started a variety of businesses. However, the result was nine participants who are all in the coaching/consulting industry and who were coached as they started their own practices. This change in population was not due to a decision the researcher made, rather these are the individuals who responded to a request for interviews. It is not clear why these are the people who were interested in participating in the study but it could be due to the manner in which they were located. These men and women were found primarily on the social network LinkedIn when they responded to an ad placed on the website. The ads were primarily placed in coaching groups on that site, but there were also ads placed in entrepreneurial and business sites that did not receive a strong response. As explained in Chapter 4, the initial responses to the ads did not result in a sufficient sample and after changes were made to the parameters for the coach and the business startups, an acceptable sample resulted. Participants were contacted to be sure they met the inclusion criteria for the study and an interview involving open-ended questions was scheduled. The interviews were transcribed and were analyzed using Percy and Kostere’s (2008) thematic induction analysis as described in Chapter 4.

Findings

As discussed in Chapter 4, data analysis revealed five primary themes – Accountability, Connection, Clarity, Coach’s Agenda, and Cultivation. These themes are a combination of why the participants hired a coach and what the experience brought them. Some of the themes are included in previous research conducted around the profession of coaching but some of the information adds to the existing literature. How the findings from this research fit with the existing literature and add to it is discussed.
below. Included in this section is whether and in what ways the themes interact with or contradict one another.

**Discussion of the Results**

The research question was, “What is the lived experience of entrepreneurs coached through a business startup?” The goal was to discover whether coaching helps, in what ways it is or is not helpful, and what the personal coaching experience of the entrepreneurs consisted of. There were five primary themes that surfaced through the data analysis – Accountability, Connection, Clarity, Coach’s Agenda, and Cultivation.

In order to solicit candid responses from the participants, open-ended questions were designed whose end result was information that was personal, insightful, and honest. Of the nine participants in this study two were not happy with the overall result of the coaching. The other seven met most of their goals through the coaching and were either satisfied or extremely satisfied with the results. All the men and women questioned were clear about what they hoped to gain from working with a coach. However, coach selection and how to go about selecting a coach was less clear. While this did not arise as a theme, many of the participants mentioned that they struggled in their choice or were dissatisfied with their choice even though they took responsibility for choosing the coach. Wasylyshyn (2003) found that the best executive coaches are those grounded in both business and psychology and that one of the top criteria for choosing a coach was graduate training in psychology. However, in the present study only one participant sought a coach with graduate training in psychology and six of the participants were uncertain about their coach’s background or training.
As the researcher listened to the participants recount their experience she noticed that they each brought a distinct flair to the questions and their stories were varied and unique. Being entrepreneurs, they were all self-assured and confidently spoke of their experience, unhesitant to include the less successful aspects. The participants were engaging, open, fun to listen to, self-aware, and the conversations were, for the most part, life giving in that they brought an air of openness and positivity with them. The researcher was delighted to find herself in the company, although it was via telephone, of such high achievers who were aware of their accomplishments, discussed them with pride that lacked arrogance, and exhibited humility through admitting they have more to learn. This was an extraordinary group of people who stepped forward to offer their experience to unknown others who might benefit.

Of primary importance in this research and the results it produced is that positive psychology is one theory that aided the researcher in organizing the data. The theory of positive psychology explains that of the 24 primary character strengths identified one of the top five is the “capacity to love and be loved” (Kauffman, 2006, p. 234). This idea of connection is mentioned in the coaching literature (de Haan, 2008; Kombarakaran et al., 2008, Polkinghorne, 2005) as well as the entrepreneurial literature (Bann, 2009; Jenssen & Koenig, 2002; St. Jean & Audet, 2009) and was consistently identified by the participants as an important aspect of their coaching experience. Of particular interest is that more than half of the participants moved onto other coaches, even if they had a strong connection with their current coach.

When asked about why participants moved onto another coach, the most common answer was expressed in terms of the coaching no longer being a “good fit.” It appeared
that the participants grew beyond the capacity of their coach to continue helping them make progress. Of the nine entrepreneurs interviewed, five moved onto another coach, two remained with their coach, and two left their coach but did not move onto another. This was an unexpected finding in the analysis and does not appear in the literature.

Leadership was not mentioned by any of the participants. This was a surprise because leadership is typically an important aspect of both what is sought and what results from business coaching (Kombarakaran et al., 2008; Perkins, 2009; Wasylyshyn, 2003). This was also mentioned in Chapter 3 as something the researcher expected from the results. However, upon reflection this might be due to the participants, with the exception of one, being a sole proprietor. Still, the construct of leadership is heavily prevalent in the coaching literature and is a primary reason business people cite for hiring coaches (Berman & Bradt, 2006). This failure of leadership to surface can be important for coaches who work with entrepreneurs because they might possibly have an underlying assumption that the client would be seeking leadership development. The current study contradicts that, because leadership went largely unmentioned by the participants. Comments from the participants did not seem to indicate that the coaches were trying to demonstrate the importance of leadership by putting their own agenda over that of their clients. However, it is possible that the coach-coachee relationship is one that creates an environment conducive for the coach’s agenda to arise (Bennett, 2006). Because the coaching relationship is one thought of in terms of friendship, as noted by many of the participants, the coaches might get a sense that in order to remain in a position of power, as it were, they need to push their agenda into the sessions (Ellis,
More on this can be found in this paper under the section titled *Suggestions for Improving Coaching Practices*.

Similarly, while confidence did not fully develop as a theme it was mentioned by two of the participants. This was unexpected and contradicts the literature because there is research emphasizing that confidence is frequently an end result and desire of the coaching (Kombarakaran et al., 2008; Levenson, 2009). As entrepreneurs embark on a new business the trait of confidence might be expected to be relevant because it is confidence that can keep a project moving forward (Foo et al., 2009; Frederickson, 2005; Leaptrott, 2009). Indeed, one reason people hire coaches is to increase self-confidence (de Haan, 2008). These are not the only unexpected findings that came from the analysis.

Through the readings of the interviews, the researcher noted that while a number of the participants experienced at least some dissatisfaction from the coaching, they were hesitant to speak negatively of their coaches. Indeed, the participants stood by their choice of coach, took ownership of that choice, and reiterated that he or she is still a great coach. This is an important observation because there were times when the participants stayed in a coaching relationship that they realized was not working for them. In two instances it was because the client was locked into a contract.

The theme of being connected seems interwoven with that of cultivation. This is because when people make a connection with one another it is natural to cultivate the relationship or each other in the relationship (Sweeney & Fry, 2012; Yabusaki, 2010). The participants made comments that involved the use of words and phrases such as “trust,” friendship,” and “we became very close.” These word choices indicate a relationship that transcends something strictly professional, yet maintains an air of
professionalism. In this is where connection and cultivation meet. Yabusaki’s (2010) research clarifies this when she discusses cultivation in relation to having a safe place to explore and find one’s own voice.

In addition, the interaction between cultivation and connection goes both ways. That is, as a relationship is cultivated the connection between people becomes stronger, and as the connection strengthens the relationship is cultivated. During the interviews there were two participants who were particularly drawn to their coach and in both cases, the sense of cultivation and connection were quite strong. In these cases the participants spoke of their coaches with enthusiasm, admiration, and awe. They were expressive in how the coach went beyond the surface and was able to draw information from them. It was with an engaging tone that they spoke of their experience. In contrast, participants less satisfied with their coaches were dry and flat in their tone and had little to say about the coach and what occurred in their experience.

Two other themes that appear related are accountability and clarity. It is in reading the participant’s own words that this association first surfaces. For example, Katie said, “There was a lot of clarity in it and the accountability was very important.” Similarly, Elisabeth explained, “The coaching relationship is like having a best friend whose only focus is all on you… and they’re going to be there to make you accountable to yourself.” Conversely, the theme of coach’s agenda did not seem to tie in with any of the other themes. This theme seemed to cause resistance and friction. It created doubt about the coach’s motivation and ultimately ended many of the coaching relationships. Another point about the coach’s agenda is that the participants seemed very intuitive about recognizing when they were not the focus of the coaching relationship.
As with cultivation and connection, clarity can similarly enhance accountability. Through greater clarity the accountability piece becomes less clouded, increasing the likelihood that the client will be accountable. The interviews shed light on this through the mention of goals, goal setting, homework, the coach expecting certain tasks to be completed, setting deadlines, and not wanting to disappoint the coach. As accountability increases, clarity can unfold and illuminate the next logical step.

Finally, these four themes – connection, cultivation, accountability, and clarity – can inspire each other. Frederickson and Joiner (2002) referred to this as an upward spiral. They explained, “positive emotions broaden people’s thought-action repertoires, encouraging them to discover novel lines of thought or action” (p. 172). That is, as people discover new ways of behaving and thinking they build their physical, intellectual, social, and psychological resources (Frederickson & Joiner, 2002). To put this in terms of the present research, as the participants were coached and their relationship with their coach grew, they learned new ways to be accountable both to themselves and to others. In turn, these new behaviors enhanced other thought and action patterns, such as clearer thinking, trusting enough to become more connected, and a desire to grow and develop. The interaction of these four themes, accountability, clarity, connection, and cultivation, validates Frederickson and Joiner’s (2002) data related to an upward spiral.

The participants in this study answered questions that were designed to explore their individual experience of being coached through a business startup. The candidness with which each person answered the questions leaves the researcher confident that the experience was thoroughly explored, and the information gained was honest and insightful. By listening with an open-mind to the participants as they described what
occurred within the confidential coaching relationship, the ideas and themes that emerged are accurate to the best of the researcher’s knowledge and ability. Therefore, it is possible for coaches to find applicable information in the final analysis to use in their own coaching practices.

The findings from this study substantiate the theories of positive psychology, which has its roots in humanism and the work of Carl Rogers [among others] (Seligman & Steen, 2005). It was this theory that aided the researcher through organizing the data after the analysis had taken place and it is this theory that forms the foundation for the conclusions to rest on. As Kaufmann (2006) stated, “The new field of positive psychology provides a robust theoretical and empirical base for the artful practice of life and executive coaching.”

**Accountability**

Accountability shows up in the coaching literature in the form of identifying, establishing, and meeting goals (Bennet, 2006). In addition, Gregory, Beck, and Carr (2011) contended that a primary purpose of effective coaching is to help coachees learn to better regulate their own behavior in order to achieve desired outcomes. Like Bennet (2006), Gregory et al. (2011) discuss goal setting and feedback as a manner in which to achieve this accountability. This is a theme that was voiced by every participant in the study and supports the literature. In addition, accountability is a one of the core competencies of coaching as defined by the coaching practices of ICF (Core Competencies, n.d.).

One participant said, “You have to take ownership of your own life.” Another discussed holding himself more accountable along with having a coach that would hold
him accountable. Others mentioned accountability in terms of responsibility or commitment to the coach. For some, the accountability came in the form of filling out paperwork each week or doing homework assignments that kept them accountable to their coach and to their own goals. Accountability was, for these nine participants, a significant part of the coaching equation.

Accountability appeared to be a primary reason that these participants hired a coach. Many of them voiced that they believe they could have accomplished their goals without a coach. However, they stressed that it would have taken much longer and for some, might have taken years longer. Because people often don’t hold themselves to their own deadlines, being accountable to someone can make a difference in whether tasks get completed. As far as accountability emerging as one of the themes, the researcher was not surprised. It is in doing something that goals are achieved, and coaching stresses movement; setting goals and deciding how to reach them. At minimum, it appears that all the participants had at least a marginal level of success in the area of goal attainment.

This theme endorses Berman and Brandt’s (2006) research on the importance of having what is needed to achieve goals and remain focused on those goals. Another aspect of accountability is simply not allowing clients to tolerate complacency. The goal of coaching is to change behavior and to make the client as successful as possible (Turner & Goodrich, 2010). It is through accountability that this is best achieved. Whether the coach asks for weekly updates or teaches clients self-accountability, the goal is for greater success through setting and achieving small goals a week at a time. This changes the client’s behavior and opens them to new opportunities they might have previously
missed (Frederickson, 2005). There is evidence that coaching produces positive outcomes (Kilburg, 2004) and accountability is vital to these outcomes.

As far as theory, accountability is alluded to under the theme of integrity in the positive psychology literature (Seligman et al., 2005). Beyond that, it is not considered as central to human flourishing and/or optimal living [as far as being mentioned specifically]. It is possible that in the literature whether it is coaching, entrepreneurial, or positive psychology that accountability simply falls under another name such as responsibility or self-control. While the finding of the theme accountability supports the literature in a number of ways, in the present study it was clear to the participants that they wanted to be accountable to themselves and were seeking someone to hold them accountable.

**Connection**

The theme of connection readily supports the coaching literature. Wasylyshyn’s (2003) research revealed that the top personal characteristic of an effective executive coach was the ability to form a strong connection with the executive. Moreover, making connections with people and creating positive relationships with others is a necessary part of developing human strengths and well-being (Aspinwell & Staudinger, 2003). Therefore, connecting with the coach can create a foundation for the coaching experience that helps the client to move forward and flourish. One trait all the participants in the current research shared is the awareness that they needed outside help to fully achieve what they were working towards. Even prior to hiring a coach, the participants expressed the importance of working with someone who shared similar interests and who seemed
like a “good fit.” It appears that the participants intuitively sought the type of coach they believed they would connect with.

For example, one participant talked about feeling understood and another talked about alignment. More than one participant mentioned having a background similar to their coach and selecting the coach for that reason. Another participant said that trust and confidence in the coach “really cements the relationship.” Camille referred to the coaching relationship as “essential.” Similarly, Mike said, “It’s all about the relationship. There has to be a relationship for them [the coach] to see where you’ve come from.” When the participants talked about the coaching relationship it was in positive terms. All of these comments and descriptions emphasized the importance of the relationship to the process of coaching.

Mike’s experience with connection was unique in the present study because he was the only participant who met with his coach face-to-face (Some of the other clients met with their coaches in person, but were not coached in person). Mike said the face-to-face aspect made a difference because “you’re in a more intimate moment” and “it’s easier to read the other person.” While he understands that coaching over the phone is common and he often does so himself, he believes that having at least the initial consultation in person can be helpful in establishing connection. Indeed, one factor that often leads to negative coaching outcomes is the inability to develop working relationships (Kilburg, 1996).

Finally, Emily talked about how her coach was wonderful about “deep listening” and noticed “what is being said and what is not being said.” A very distinct part of Emily’s experience included this: “And rather than paying attention to the ‘what’ that’s
going on… she paid attention to the ‘who.’” She went on to elaborate, “[My coach was interested in] who is this person, you know, that’s in front of me?” In this comment where the coach recognized who she was coaching and not only what was going on with the client, lies the essence of connection. Very often, people run into walls or barriers that seem impenetrable. Effective coaches will listen to what is not being said in an effort to discover if the block is something ongoing with the client or is a one-time occurrence. If it is a part of who the client is, the work takes a very different course than if it is simply an external situation. However, to reach the who part of the equation requires a deeper connection that many coaches miss (Foster & Lloyd, 2007).

Kauffman (2006) mentions another type of connection that can occur within a coaching relationship, “Whatever the nature of the challenge, the coach tries to find the bridge connecting that challenge to the client’s primary strength” (p.245). Todd’s experience validates this:

Originally I thought I was going to be a life coach and I didn’t really know what that was and what my coach helped me see is what my strengths are…And one of the things I’ve done all my life is leadership and so that’s where I landed with my niche… and she did help me figure that out.

This serves as an excellent example of effective coaching. Sifting through Todd’s strengths, working with him to explore what he excels at, and finding a way to incorporate it into his coaching is a definite move forward for him. This type of connection can be vital to the coaching experience. If the coach were to miss this piece, future work with this client can falter because the foundation does not rest on strengths. An exploration of where the client’s expertise lies can also open the client to his/her own strengths and help in developing that strength and turning it into a basis for their business.
Overall, connection is significant because it aligns the interests between the coach and the client. Without this the client can feel misunderstood and may believe the coach lacks interest in the client’s well-being (Kilburg, 1996). As discussed above, the finding of this theme supports the literature.

Clarity

The theme of clarity encompasses focus and being centered. Foster and Lloyd (2007) stated, “the most important question is not ‘What are we doing’ but rather ‘Who do we intend to become?’” One participant expressed the importance of clarity this way, “The coach is there to help you through whatever’s in your way, for getting to the next step in your future.” Another commented, “I wouldn’t have been able to zero in as clearly on those areas that, to me, were preventing me from being a more skillful coach.” Similar to Foster and Lloyd (2007), Bann (2009) found that entrepreneurs more often start their own businesses as a way to find meaning and express themselves than to make more money or for the sake of business. That is, gaining clarity around goals, big and small, supports previous findings.

Information from the interviews verified that the participants were looking for clarity more in the sense of wanting to be their best than simply hoping to gain a clearer view of their business. One participant said, “I know the value of being coached and I wanted to promote that value to the world because it is so substantial and significant for people to understand how they can live the life that they want.” Another said that she wanted the experience of being coached so “that I could kind of understand how to be a better coach.” In this context clarity comes through living the experience and is new information in that there are currently no studies that explore this concept. Four of the
participants said that coaching was recommended as part of their training but one of them said that it was more implied than suggested. Another of the participants was assigned a coach and none of them talked about any kind of instruction on how to select an appropriate coach. Although there were issues around coach selection and finding the right “fit” the consensus was that it was to be expected. That is, the participants took it in good faith, didn’t complain about the process of selecting a coach or the money they spent on a coach that didn’t fully deliver. There is more on this under the section Suggestions for Improving Coaching Practices.

As one participant said, “it was really about me sort of understanding my own process and who I am professionally versus personally.” Another put it this way, “Coaching… has much more to do with the ability to ask the right questions.” This backs up research from Kombarakaran et al. (2008) in which they found that the best coaches ask clarifying question and facilitate higher levels of objective thinking.

From the comments above [that were taken from the interviews] it is evident that clarity has two distinct yet congruent meanings. The first is about helping people to understand what is in the way of their progress or what obstacles are keeping them from taking the next step. The second is about an increased understanding of the self. That is, there is an external and an internal component to clarity. Both are equally valuable and both require the coach’s full attention to discern between the two. Very often the client might not realize the difference in where the obstacles originate so the coach’s job becomes one of discernment and helping the client to clarify. This was achieved effectively for many of the participants in this study. Even those who were dissatisfied with the coaching were typically clear about what they needed from the coach that they
were not getting. Perhaps this is part of the coaching process and could explain why so many participants move onto another coach. That is, through the coaching experience, as the client gains clarity, they might come to realize what they actually need and that the coach they originally hired is not the right person for the job. This is new insight, not evident from the existing literature, and suggests an important opportunity for additional research.

**Coach’s Agenda**

Of the five themes that emerged from the research the theme of coach’s agenda is the most distinct in that it does not relate to a characteristic of the participants but rather, addresses an issue with the coach. John sums it up as follows: “The essence of the coaching relationship is all about the client’s agenda. It’s not the coach’s agenda. And so I think that was a kind of violation of one of the basic tenets of coaching.” The participants were quite aware of where the coach’s attention was. Of particular interest is that this theme contradicts the literature as far as what should occur in a coaching relationship. There are studies and articles that discuss the coach’s responsibility to clients in determining if the relationship is one that is conducive to growth and development (Kombarakaran et al., 2008; Liljenstrand & Nebeker, 2008; Turner & Goodrich, 2010).

According to ICF’s core competencies the coach is responsible for determining whether the relationship is a fit as well as establishing appropriate boundaries prior to beginning the coaching sessions (Core Competencies, n.d.). In addition to this, the core competencies state that the coach is obliged to track the relationship and confirm with the client that the coaching is effective and that the client is making progress. However, the
Competencies do not address coaching contracts and what coaches are obligated to do if/when it becomes clear that the coaching experience is faltering. To clarify, the core competencies relate to coaching practice and are not taken from the academic literature. This inconsistency could indicate a need for greater cohesion between coaching practice and academia. Perhaps ICF and academic researchers might work together to create common goals or work through a common process. This process might include input from coaches and indications of their concerns, if any, about what occurs in the coaching relationship (Gregory et al., 2011; Turner & Goodrich, 2010). It might also be necessary to further clarify/redefine what coaching is and what is expected of someone who refers to him or herself as a coach.

Several of the participants talked about what happens when the focus of the coaching seems misplaced. Elisabeth said, “I don’t think he wanted to be my coach.” When this type of realization occurs there is often a limp to an unsatisfactory close (Wasylyshyn, 2003). Elisabeth concluded, “We had decided just to part ways… because it became evident that what I was looking for more out of him, he could not help me with.” There is evidence that trust within a coaching relationship is especially relevant for high achievers and that they are only open-minded when they have respect for someone (Jones & Spooner, 2006). Additionally, the Jones and Spooner (2006) study demonstrated that that high achievers, such as entrepreneurs (Hisrich et al., 2007) are less receptive to coaches who have huge egos, are there for themselves, or show self-interest. This information is corroborated by Kombarakaran et al.’s (2008) assertion that outstanding coaches are known for, among other things, high levels of integrity and clear boundaries
of professionalism. One participant stated, “the coach shouldn’t be looking to get things personally out of the coaching session.”

One problem with coaches putting their agenda before that of their clients is that it betrays a basic precept of the coaching relationship (Evers et al., 2006). The frustration participant’s voiced in the interviews was perceptible not just through their words, but also through their tone when they described it. Their attitude when describing this was often disengaged, dry, and lacked enthusiasm. Additionally, the coach creating this frustration seemed to be the primary reason the client left the relationship. There was a sense of the clients moving on because the coaches had lost touch with their reason for hiring a coach. There is evidence that people know and are aware of being in the presence of competent people (Kilburg, 2006), and when they are they tend to feel more secure, more like taking risks, and are more like their true selves. Kilburg (2006) continues to say that the opposite is true when working with people who are not as competent: “People take fewer risks and, most often, leave their true selves at home” (p. 69).

One participant described the coaching relationship as putting the client’s agenda first: “That’s the bedrock of the coaching business. Otherwise, you’re a mentor or a consultant. And that’s not what I hired.” This description endorses the coaching literature. Fuqua and Newman (2002) demonstrated that coaching should always be encouraging and lead to empowerment. Furthermore, people are often stuck and trying to solve the wrong problem (Fuqua & Newman, 2002) and they hire coaches to help get them unstuck, solving the right problems, and moving forward. The participants seemed to understand this basic tenet and their frustration stemmed from the realization that their coach was not beneficial in achieving the envisioned clarity.
Whereas the researcher did not anticipate the coach’s agenda arising as one of the themes, it does reinforce the literature. Bennett (2006) stated that there are currently no generally accepted, identifiable, and distinct skills for coaches. He goes on to discuss the lack of expected training/education for coaches. This understated emphasis on how coaches operate, where and how they are trained, and what skills they possess might lead to the issue the present research unveiled in relation to the coach’s agenda. Similarly, Levenson’s (2009) work highlights questions surrounding coaching and whether it is effective in achieving its aim with clients. For Levenson (2009) the question becomes whether coaching is actually beneficial or instead clients might reap no benefits from the coaching but could be helped equally well through human resources or other training/performance interventions. A look at Table 2 shows that only one of the coaches hired by participants in this study was ICF certified and that 6 participants were unsure of how or where their coach was trained, or what type of training their coach had. This is discussed further under the section named Suggestions for Improving Coaching Practices.

Cultivation

The theme of cultivation supports the literature through stressing development, growth, and behavioral change (de Haan, 2008; Kombarakaran et al., 2008; Stern, 2004). Indeed, the entire focus of coaching is on the future and moving toward goals. In order to move ahead and enter the future prepared, cultivation is a necessity. Berman and Bradt (2006) discuss coaching and describe it using terms such as: strategic planning, team-building, creative problem solving, capitalizing on strengths, development and
implementation of new skills, and strength building. All of these terms are positive, future-focused, and require cultivation of existing and new behaviors.

The theme of cultivation validates Frederickson’s (2005) broaden and build theory. A good example is Mike’s statement: “I just try to apply it where I can and it helps me to see and treat prospects differently… I also look for new opportunities that I wouldn’t have noticed before.” It is the final part of this statement that is highly reminiscent of Frederickson’s (2005) theory in that the coaching opened him to what he previously did not see and he, accordingly, responds in a new and different manner.

There is evidence that when people are in an environment that is accepting and positive, they become “more generative and creative in their actions… and more receptive to new ideas” (Foster & Lloyd, 2007, p. 33).

Another example of broaden and build can be seen in the comment from another participant, “I think I had to relearn some things afterwards that I felt were different than the coaching she had provided me.” This is evidence that the coaching broadened the client’s thinking and substantiates Frederickson’s (2005) theory. That is, he did not simply follow what his coach had said but rather, took what he had learned, relearned it, and applied it. This is at the heart of broaden and build. Frederickson (2001) found that positive experiences are conducive to encouraging people to engage with the world around them and utilize adaptive behaviors.

Beyond the broaden and build theory, Kombarakaran et al. (2008) noted that coaches who excel have a passion for helping others grow and perform. This is also supported by the present study. For example, one participant explained that while his coach helped him to figure out what he needed to know, she didn’t tell him. Similarly,
another participant explained, “the coach is really there for growth and development.” Still another described her experience, “I hoped to gain that support system to help me see what was working and not working as I was building [the business].” Further, positive psychology emphasizes human flourishing, which includes finding meaning in one’s work (Frederickson & Losada, 2005). In harmony with this is Evers et al.’s (2006) work that found that coaching helps people to live and work in a manner that is mindful.

To conclude, this study supports studies in entrepreneurship and coaching through confirming the importance of cultivation, growth, and development. In a similar way, the participants in the present study emphasized the value of this theme. Emily described her experience, “She [the coach] was working with me to shift out of the problem-solving mode with my clients and letting the client discover the solutions rather than me leading them so heavily.” She concluded by explaining that her coach was not hesitant in asking the “edgier questions” even after they became “good friends.”

**Summary**

The results of this study produced five primary themes: Accountability, Connection, Clarity, Coach’s Agenda, and Cultivation. With the exception of coach’s agenda, the findings of all the themes supported the existing literature. Some of the themes flow together and inspire the others such as accountability/connection, and clarity/cultivation. Coach’s agenda does not enforce, encourage, or support the other four themes. It appears from these results, from the literature, and from the ICF Core Competencies that the issue of the coach’s agenda intruding into the coaching sessions needs to be more fully addressed.
Overall the participants found the coaching experience helpful and were satisfied with what resulted. There was some mention of problems or situations that arose and had to be dealt with, but the participants accepted responsibility for their choices and worked through the problems as they occurred. Ultimately, the study answered the research question and the goals of the research were achieved. The results demonstrated that coaching is helpful for entrepreneurs starting a new business and that it does make the process more efficient. There were comments that indicated the rate of success was accelerated due to the coaching and that the participant would not be where they were without it. In addition, the results disclosed the ways it is helpful. To review, participants talked about their coach setting goals, assigning homework, and asking for weekly progress reports. This was one of the primary objectives of the study. By talking with people who were coached and hearing their account of the experience, coaches can take these stories and apply the information with their clients.

In addition, the study was successful in exploring the experience of being coached. It was through the voices of the participants that the underlying experience revealed itself. Through the excitement, frustration, satisfaction, disappointment, and surprise in the participant’s descriptions the coaching experience permeated the interviews. From the decision to hire a coach to the point of terminating the relationship, the participants shared their stories. The researcher found the reasons people entered a coaching relationship were as varied and personal as the participants themselves. For some it was because the opportunity presented itself, while for others it was a deliberate search for a specific type of coach. The participants in this study were clear about what
they hoped to gain from their coaches and were quick to discern whether they were, in
fact, receiving that contemplated end.

The researcher was delighted and surprised by how readily the participants shared
their experiences. They were eager, honest, and open in their answers and did not hesitate
to take responsibility for the parts of the experience that they might have been able to
improve. That is, they were willing to say that looking back, it might have been helpful if
they had asked their coach questions about how the coaching was progressing or if they
had pursued aspects of the coaching that seemed ‘off.’ The participants were also
unwavering in moving on when the relationship no longer worked with the exception of
two participants who had signed a contract.

This was an exceptional group of people. Each had started at least one business or
had previously owned a business. Yet, many still credited their coach with much of their
success. Even for the participant who was least satisfied with his coaching, he admitted
that there was some value in the experience. All nine participants were aware that while
the coach was helpful, it was up to them [the participant] to do the actual work. It was a
satisfactory end to the study to realize that the research question was fully addressed and
the research goals were realized.

Limitations

The original thinking behind this research was an exploration of the coaching
experience of entrepreneurs who were coached through a first-time business startup. The
researcher wanted to talk with people who had been coached by someone who held at
least a master’s degree in psychology or a related field along with coaching certification
of some sort. Unfortunately, there were hurdles to locating such participants so the
parameters of the study changed. Ultimately, the researcher altered the study to include entrepreneurs who were coached through a business startup, first-time business or otherwise. She also changed the requirements for the coach’s background and training. The graduate training requirement was dropped and as long as the coach had some level of coaching certification, they met the standards for the study. In the end, these changes created one of the greatest limitations of the study: All the participants are coaches or coaches/consultants.

Asking coaches about a coaching experience yielded considerable information. However, the researcher contends that talking to non-coaches about a coaching experience would possibly yield different results. Coaches understand the process from the inside, whereas non-coaches would primarily understand the process from the outside. This different perspective would potentially produce answers distinct from what was discovered in the present study.

Another limitation is that many of the participants could not answer the question regarding the type of training their coaches had. While it was clear that the coaches all had some training and certification in coaching, most of the participants couldn’t explain where they were trained or what type of certification they had. This is limiting in that it makes the study difficult to duplicate because so little is known about the coach’s background and training.

Other limitations include all participants and coaches being from the United States. It is possible that asking the same questions of entrepreneurs outside the U.S. would yield different results. It is also feasible that talking with entrepreneurs who utilized coaches trained outside the U.S. would provide different answers. A larger
sample size might have provided answers to the research questions that verify the current data or, conversely, that contradict the current findings.

The interview questions were well-received by the participants and seemed to have covered the research question well. None of the participants had anything additional to add at the end of the interview and several indicated that they enjoyed the questions and found the experience insightful. One aspect of the research design that could be improved was the way the participants were located. It was a difficult process that was time-consuming and repetitive. Perhaps that is sometimes the only way to find people willing to share their experiences, but for this study it seemed lacking.

**Future Research Recommendations Developed Directly from the Data**

The first recommendation would be a follow-up study that involves non-coaches and explores their experience of being coached through a business startup. As stated previously, hearing what the coaching experience is like for non-coaches could generate unique information not found in the present research. A second recommendation would be to examine what entrepreneurs look for in a business coach. The present study demonstrated that this is not a primary concern for entrepreneurs, but Kombarakaran et al. (2008) found that the more qualified the coach, the better the outcome of the coaching.

The coach’s agenda is another topic that might prove worthy of further study. Perhaps as part of a quantitative study clients could answer questions about how effectively the coaches held their own agenda at bay. Another topic that emerged from the data is the client’s intuition. The participants in this study were aware about whether the coach was focused on the client or on their own agenda, whether the choice they had made was the right fit, and when it was time to move on to another coach. This intuition
is worth exploring as it relates to coaching. That is, does the coaching enhance the intuition through its process of introspection or are entrepreneurs simply highly intuitive?

A final recommendation is to delve into whether coach’s agenda presents as a problem only for entrepreneurs or if it shows up in other types of coaching such as life coaching. There are a number of questions that arise through the theme of coach’s agenda. One question is, “Is this a problem because the coaches in the present study were coaching coaches?” Another is, “Do entrepreneurs recognize the conflict of coach’s agenda more readily than others?” These are just two recommendations for further research that are related to coach’s agenda.

Recommendations Derived from Delimitations of the Study

The primary recommendation is that there is a continued need for research around the profession of coaching. Kilburg (2004) argued that what occurs in the coaching experience remains a mystery and there is a lack of studies that describe what coaches actually do with their clients. Levenson (2009) agrees with these assertions and argues further that simply saying “coaching helps” does not suffice. The profession of coaching needs evidence that not only is coaching helpful, but in what ways it is helpful and who it helps. This field offers researchers numerous opportunities for research that might determine the path of the profession.

Suggestions for Improving Coaching Practices

It was mentioned previously that two of the participants remained with a coach that they believed was not benefitting their efforts because they were locked into a contract. A question worth asking might be, “Why would coaches hold clients to a contract that may not be in their [the client’s] best interest?” De Haan, Duckworth, Birch,
and Jones (2013) argued that there is not enough research in the area of coaching outcomes and this lack leaves coaches uncertain about what aspects of coaching work and whether coaching helps clients with their critical objectives. That is, it might be largely up to the client to discern whether the coaching is working because the coach, currently, might not have the appropriate information to properly make that judgment. This creates a conundrum because the client is probably not trained in this type of discernment, either. However, the coach’s primary concern should be for the client and one of ICF’s core competencies includes the coach’s ability to understand whether his/her coaching is an effective match for the client (Core Competencies, n.d.). One of the participants, while discussing the termination of the coaching relationship, summed it up this way, “You don’t know until you know.” This is an unfortunate final thought for a client exiting a coaching relationship.

Another consideration for improving coaching practices is to require training and education for coaches. Liljenstrand and Nebeker (2008) pointed out that “the only real barrier to entering coaching is the coaches’ ability to solicit clients” (p. 58). They go further to say that anyone can offer their services as a coach and while certification programs are available they are not required. There is concern that the profession will become so diluted as to disappear if professional standards are not created and enforced (Levenson, 2009). There is evidence that the most effective coaches have a background in psychology (Berman & Bradt, 2006) and are not only theoretically based but utilize several theoretical models (Turner & Goodrich, 2010). A further examination of the most effective coaching practices and what background and training they have might help coaches better understand what is needed to improve their effectiveness as a coach.
A piece of the education and training for coaches might include being coached or working with a coach for a specified period of time. Either or both of these experiences could prove valuable in helping the coach to realize how difficult it can be to find the “right” coach. Working with a coach, or doing a type of internship, could be greatly valuable because there is guided practice under such conditions. This might mean that individual coaches would shoulder the burden of deciding to hire and pay a coach to shadow them, if the end product is a more effective coaching practice that better serves the clients, it would be time and money well spent.

The present study indicates a need for helping people find a coach. Two participants turned to the Internet and simply did a search of coaches, read through the information, and selected a coach based on that information. Five participants selected their coaches because they knew them or were familiar with them. The other two participants selected coaches from those available through their coaching programs. One participant stated that he was not aware that there were coaches whose work centers specifically on training other coaches. Another chose a coach who had not previously worked with entrepreneurs. Because there is evidence that the academic background and training can be a determining factor in the coach’s effectiveness (Kilburg, 2004) it is important to offer help for people who are seeking coaching. [One of the participants has a coaching platform that offers just such a service. Her business is designed to allow people to listen to a variety of coaches, what they offer, how they work, and what they charge. This is precisely the type of service that is needed to assist people in selecting an appropriate coach.]
A fourth and final suggestion is for coaches to remain open to what the client is pursuing. That is, the current study found that leadership development was not of primary importance to this group of entrepreneurs. This information contradicts the literature as it relates to business coaching. Therefore, many coaches might make the assumption that leadership is one trait an entrepreneur starting a new business might hope to enhance. Remaining open and allowing the client to lead the session will help to ensure that the client gains from the coaching what he/she hopes to gain. As Levenson (2009) asked, “If coaching improves leadership behaviors but those behaviors are not the critical factor impacting business performance, then what is the point of the coaching?” (p. 104).

**Contributions to the Existing Literature**

This study adds to the existing literature through the discovery that people seeking business coaching do not necessarily understand the ramifications of selecting a coach. This is important because it can help coaches to consider their advertising techniques, website design, and what they consider when a potential client contacts them. Because this topic is understudied in the literature, it is meaningful in the sense that many coaches might not realize how confusing the coaching landscape can be to potential clients. It is possible that the focus of coaches and how they set up their website/advertising is more about drawing clients in than it is about helping them understand what it is. More discernment might be called for from the coaches themselves in deciding whether to work with a client.

A second contribution is the coach’s agenda dominating the coaching session. Because this is not currently addressed in the literature it is a considerable addition due to the importance of focusing on the client’s needs and agenda. It is possible that coaches
are unaware that this occurs and unless it is illuminated as a potential problem it will possibly continue.

A final possible contribution is that of a coaching contract. While this did not emerge as a theme and was not directly addressed through the interview questions, it was illuminated through the data analysis. There were two participants who figured out fairly quickly that their coach was not a good fit but they both remained in the relationship because there was a contract in place. Offering advice to people hiring coaches and what signing a contract might mean is an important aspect of the coaching that should be addressed.

**Conclusion**

The research exploring the coaching experience from the position of those who experienced it has been educational, rewarding, and insightful. As the interviews progressed, the researcher gained a greater understanding of why entrepreneurs hired coaches to help them with their startup. She also realized the difficulties entrepreneurs face once they decide to hire a coach. The research was born of a genuine curiosity about what the coaching experience was like for people starting a new business. The results of the study were beyond what was anticipated. There is still a great deal to learn about the coaching experience that will continue to lead the profession forward.

Much of what was revealed in the research validates current studies while other aspects of the research added to the existing literature. There were five themes that emerged and were discussed: Accountability, Connection, Clarity, Coach’s Agenda, and Cultivation. And other researchers could further explore any of these topics.
The participants in this study came from varied backgrounds and gave different reasons for working with a coach. For some it was a first-time experience, for others it was another step in a long line of working with coaches. Hearing the participants recount their experience was something the researcher will not soon forget. In the listening there was a realization of lives that are affected, sometimes in a positive way and sometimes in an unfavorable way, through the experience of hiring a coach to help in the early stages of a new business.

While it is fair to say that the research question was answered through the interviews, it is of interest to note that the results did not necessarily validate the field of coaching. However, it is important to keep in mind that the purpose of the research was to explore the coaching experience, not to validate the field of coaching. Taking a closer look at what the study revealed about the experience of being coached through a business startup revealed it was personal, often satisfying, sometimes frustrating, and overall resulted in bringing at least some value to the participants.

While most of the participants were satisfied with their coach and stated that they found the experience was beneficial, they were not precise in describing how the coaching helped other than broadly stating that it was, indeed, helpful. There were participants who mentioned homework assignments and setting goals, so this was one manner in which the coaching was helpful. One participant stated, “I would say coaching can be very valuable to a startup business. Extremely valuable.” What is clear is that high-achieving individuals reached out for help and eight of the nine participants in this study found the experience was beneficial. Overall, the participants stated that they would not be where they are without their coach.
With the exception of John, every participant walked away from the coaching experience with new insight and/or new ways of moving forward. A final point here is that while these clients all got something out of the coaching experience, it is important to not misinterpret that as a successful coaching engagement. Both the coach and the client should take time to explore what the something that was gained actually was and whether it is what the client paid for. The researcher heard the participants voice that the coach was not the right fit or was not meeting their needs and then add that he/she was “still a great coach.” Perhaps a clearer definition of “great coach” is called for because the most effective and best coaches recognize when their client’s needs are not being met (Levenson, 2009). This was discussed briefly under the theme of clarity. The coach who leaves clients feeling less than satisfied with the coaching might actually have done an exceptional job. To clarify, it is possible that the coach brought the client just what he/she needed: The information and clarity to make a different choice in coaches.

As is common with research, this study has opened many avenues of thought and topics worthy of further exploration. That being said, the researcher is confident that she has included those suggestions most relevant to the present research. It was her attempt to be as inclusive as possible without being so broad as to venture off topic and away from the research question.

This work will perhaps open the door to others whose curiosity centers on the profession of coaching and whose desire it is to explore what occurs within the confidentiality of the coaching relationship. There are entrepreneurs who function well and who are successful but who also realize having an advocate can help them move forward more effectively and/or efficiently. Coaching is one avenue available for
entrepreneurs who are seeking greater achievement. The participants in this study demonstrated the ability to prevail and take ownership of their choices. They did not make excuses or wait for the perfect time – they believed in their vision and moved forward. Their coaching practices are successful and growing. They were willing to discuss their experiences to help others. What they voiced from their personal, confidential experience with their coaches should be used to institute new research in the area of entrepreneurs coached through a business startup.


APPENDIX A. INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. What type of business do you operate? How many people do you employ?
   What is the annual net return from the business?

2. Did you have a partner or partners working with you? If yes, were they coached as well?

3. What kind of education/training do you have that relates to business startups?

4. How often did you meet with your coach each month? How long was each session? How many months did you meet?

The guiding questions are:

1. At what point did you realize that you might hire a professional business coach as you designed your first start-up business?

2. Describe the process of hiring a professional business coach and what factors you considered.

3. What did you hope to gain from your work with a coach?

4. Can you describe how the coaching relationship developed?

5. Tell me about the coaching experience and what resulted.

6. Describe anything unexpected that occurred during the coaching.

7. How did you know whether you were making progress?

8. Explain whether the coaching added anything that you could not do for yourself.

9. Describe anything that did not work well with the coaching.

10. Did you learn anything from the coaching that has benefitted you beyond your business start-up?
## APPENDIX B. OVERARCHING THEMES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participants</th>
<th>Themes</th>
<th>Supporting Pattern</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 | Accountability | Accountable  
|               |                   | Blame  
|               |                   | Truth  
|               |                   | Commitment  
|               |                   | Responsibility  |
| 1, 2, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 9 | Connection      | Relationship  
|               |                   | Friendship  
|               |                   | Connect  
|               |                   | Partnership  
|               |                   | Similar  |
| 1, 3, 4, 5, 7, 8, 9 | Clarity          | Focus  
|               |                   | Clarity  
|               |                   | Blocking  |
| 1, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8 | Coach’s Agenda   | Frustrated  
|               |                   | Defensive  
|               |                   | Managed  |
| 1, 2, 5, 7, 8, 9  | Cultivation      | Growth  
|               |                   | Learned  
|               |                   | Model  
|               |                   | Developing  |