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PhD THESIS

Summary

Managers' perception of the contribution of executive coaching in improving managerial communication in Romanian organizations

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CONTENTS

CHAPTER 1. INTRODUCTION

This paper is developed in a context marked by significant transformations in organizations, influenced by digitalization, artificial intelligence and changes in work dynamics. Managerial communication plays a key role in managing these transformations, and executive coaching is increasingly recognized as an effective tool in optimizing communication processes and developing organizational leadership.

Existing studies on executive coaching emphasize its positive impact on the development of leadership skills, increased performance and improved interpersonal relationships in the professional environment (da Silva et al., 2024 and Ribeiro et al., 2021) Executive coaching is considered a strategic method to facilitate organizational change, providing leaders and managers with the necessary support to improve their communication style, decision-making ability and team management skills (Vlachopoulos, 2021)

In Romania, the use of executive coaching is in a process of expansion, but there are still many organizations that have not implemented this type of intervention in a systematic way (Nicolau et al., 2023). International studies show that in environments where executive coaching is integrated into managerial development strategies, significant improvements are observed in the clarity and effectiveness of communication, conflict management and increased employee engagement (Pandolfi, 2020 and Peláez Zuberbuhler et al., 2020).

Empirical studies on executive coaching and its impact on organizational communication are still limited in Romania, which creates a relevant research space for this paper. Organizations from different sectors, including manufacturing and banking, can provide valuable insights into how executive coaching influences organizational culture, leadership style and managerial communication effectiveness (Gan et al., 2021). The quantitative and qualitative studies proposed in this paper aim to explore these aspects, bringing relevant empirical data from the Romanian business environment.

1.1. Motivation for choosing the theme

The research is based on the need to better understand the mechanisms through which executive coaching can improve managerial communication and to propose a model applicable in Romanian organizations. The obtained results will contribute to the development of knowledge in the field of organizational communication and can be used by managers, human resources specialists and coaches to optimize communication and leadership strategies in Romanian organizations.

This paper explores the role of executive coaching in improving managerial communication in Romanian organizations, with the main objective of analyzing how this process influences the effectiveness of leaders and the relationships between team members. In an organizational context marked by accelerated changes due to digitalization and new work paradigms, managerial communication becomes an essential factor for the success of a company (Trenerry et al., 2021). Executive coaching is recognized as an effective method to develop leaders' competencies, facilitating not only the improvement of communication skills, but also the creation of an organizational environment based on constructive feedback, active listening and motivation (McCarthy and Milner, 2020).

The choice of this theme is motivated by the growing need to optimize managerial communication in Romanian organizations, in a context characterized by accelerated change, digitalization and the transition to an increasingly dynamic work environment. Poor managerial communication can lead to confusion, internal conflicts, decreased employee motivation, and difficulties in implementing organizational strategies, thus affecting overall company performance (Musheke and Phiri, 2021). Executive coaching is recognized as an effective tool to develop leadership and communication skills (Peláez Zuberbuhler et al., 2020), but there are still few studies analyzing its concrete impact on organizations in Romania.

1.2. Research topic and its relevance

This paper starts from the central question about the effectiveness of executive coaching in improving managerial communication. Although coaching is widely used internationally to develop leaders and increase team performance, in Romania this practice is not yet fully integrated in the organizational culture of many companies. Moreover, there is a lack of empirical data highlighting how executive coaching concretely contributes to improving the clarity of messages, developing a communication style based on active listening and constructive feedback, and creating a more open and effective organizational climate.

Differentiating executive coaching from other forms of professional development, such as mentoring or consulting, is also problematic. In many organizations, the terms are often confused, and the specific benefits of executive coaching are insufficiently understood and harnessed. Moreover, there are challenges in integrating the process into the management structure of organizations, with reluctance to change being a major obstacle to adopting new methods of communication and leadership.

The aim of this research is not only to identify the benefits of executive coaching in managerial communication, but also to explore the perceptions of managers and employees on

this process. The study aims to provide a clear perspective on the challenges and opportunities that executive coaching brings, analyzing how it can be implemented more effectively in Romanian organizations. The obtained results will help to clarify the role of this tool in the development of leadership competencies and will propose a model applicable in companies, with the ultimate goal of improving communication and creating a more collaborative and effective organizational environment.

The relevance of this research is manifested both academically and in the business environment, with significant implications for the understanding and application of executive coaching as a tool for optimizing managerial communication in organizations.

For academia, this work contributes to the development of knowledge in the field of organizational communication and leadership, integrating concepts from organizational psychology, management and communication studies. The research brings a fresh perspective on the impact of executive coaching, providing a comparative analysis between classical communication models and modern approaches based on feedback, active listening and motivation. In addition, the empirical studies included in the paper add value to the literature by providing relevant data on the perception of executive coaching in Romanian organizations, an aspect insufficiently explored so far. Thus, the paper can serve as a basis for future studies on the influence of coaching on organizational culture, team effectiveness and transformational leadership development.

For the industry, this research provides an in-depth understanding of how executive coaching can improve managerial communication and, by extension, organizational performance. In an increasingly competitive business environment where change and adaptability are essential, leaders need to develop effective communication skills to keep employees motivated, reduce conflict, and facilitate organizational transitions. The study proposes concrete solutions for integrating executive coaching into leadership development strategies and explores ways in which companies can create an organizational culture based on collaboration, transparency and constructive feedback.

The practical relevance of the research is also emphasized by the analysis of some companies in Romania, which allows the identification of local particularities in the implementation of executive coaching. This applied approach offers companies a guide adapted to the local economic and cultural realities, facilitating the adoption of effective leadership and communication strategies. In addition, the results of the study can serve as a basis for the development of training programs for managers and human resources specialists, thus supporting the long-term competitiveness of organizations.

Through its multidisciplinary approach and its focus on applicability, the research makes a valuable contribution both in academia, by expanding knowledge in the field of executive coaching, and in industry, by providing practical tools and recommendations for improving organizational communication in Romanian companies.

1.3. Thesis structure

The paper is structured in ten chapters, each one addressing an essential aspect of the topic and contributing to the understanding of the role of executive coaching in improving managerial communication in Romanian organizations.

The introduction sets the general context of the research, highlighting the importance of managerial communication and executive coaching in the contemporary organizational environment. It also presents the objectives of the paper, the relevance of the study and the methodology used.

The first chapter examines the dynamics of change in organizations and its impact on organizational communication. The trends brought about by digitalization and artificial intelligence, the challenges and opportunities for organizations in the context of Industry 4.0, and the influence of these factors on managerial communication are discussed. The role of transformational leadership in shaping communication and the importance of coaching in overcoming resistance to change are discussed.

The second chapter explores communication in organizations and its challenges, examining the importance of effective communication in the workplace. Linear and circular communication models are compared, and the study expands on the communication techniques used in organizations, the types of organizational communication and the specificity of managerial communication in the age of digitalization.

The third chapter introduces the concept of executive coaching in organizations, providing a clear definition and an analysis of its evolution. The principles and objectives of executive coaching are detailed, highlighting the differences between coaching, mentoring and consulting. The main types of coaching used in organizations are presented, and two models relevant to communication, the GROW model and the SMART goal formulation theory, are analyzed in depth.

The fourth chapter examines the impact of executive coaching on organizational communication. It discusses how coaching supports the development of communication skills, improving the clarity and effectiveness of feedback, promoting constructive feedback, and strengthening an organizational culture based on motivation and interpersonal communication.

The fifth chapter details the research methodology, including study design, research problem, research aim, objectives and research questions. The research variables, methods and instruments used, characteristics of the subjects and ethical issues involved in the data collection and analysis process are described.

The sixth chapter presents the results of a quantitative study on executive coaches' perceptions of the role of coaching in improving employee communication. The data collected are analyzed and interpreted, and the conclusions highlight trends and implications of coaching on organizational performance.

The seventh chapter provides a detailed overview of the two research companies, analyzing their background, business scope and organizational structure. These two case studies allow a comparative understanding of the implementation of executive coaching in different industries

The eighth chapter explores the results of a comparative qualitative study based on in-depth interviews with employees from the two organizations, investigating their perspectives on the impact of executive coaching in their organizations.

The ninth chapter analyzes the effectiveness of individual executive coaching and peer coaching through a qualitative study based on focus groups. It examines how these methods help to improve communication and collaboration in teams

The tenth chapter proposes a model for developing executive coaching to improve communication in organizations, integrating the findings and recommendations from the research.

The paper concludes with sections devoted to conclusions and recommendations, highlighting personal contributions to the field, research limitations and possible future directions of investigation. Aspects of the practical usefulness of the study for academia and industry are also included. The bibliography and appendices provide additional resources for further study.

CHAPTER 2. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The first chapter of the paper examines the dynamics of change in organizations and its impact on organizational communication.

A number of international reports have been reviewed in the paper that provide a forecast of the technological changes that organizations will face. They suggest that in the future the economy will be based on computerized data and most new jobs will be based on data management.

By 2030, the entire global economy is expected to be connected to technology, 6G internet, and cloud services (McKinsey Global Institut, 2017), and Europe and the United States will face shifts in labor demand driven not only by AI and automation but also by other trends, including efforts to achieve net-zero emissions, an aging population, infrastructure spending, technology investment, and the growth of e-commerce (McKinsey Global Institut, 2024).

As a result organizations will need a major skills upgrade. The demand for technological, social and emotional skills is likely to increase as the demand for higher physical, manual and cognitive skills stabilizes. To meet skill needs, companies plan to focus on reskilling employees rather than hiring or outsourcing (World Economic Forum, 2023).

The rapid evolution of technology and new business models are fundamentally transforming organizational structures, breaking the boundaries of traditional models. The gig economy, smart factories, smart factories, innovation hubs and hyper-connected organizations are just some of the examples that demonstrate that flexibility and adaptability are essential in today's landscape. These changes affect not only private companies, but also the public sector, which needs to rethink its strategies to integrate emerging technologies and respond more effectively to citizens' needs.

In a constantly evolving environment, the ability to learn and adopt new forms of organization becomes a key factor for individual and organizational success. Thus, the future of organizations will be marked by an ever closer interconnection between technology, innovation and societal needs, shaping a fundamentally different economic and organizational ecosystem from the traditional one.

In the Romanian business environment there are both the benefits and the challenges generated by the increasingly widespread introduction of new technologies. Curta identifies the benefits brought by the implementation of digital technologies in organizational

communication, which facilitate real-time communication between different departments and hierarchical levels, reduce traditional barriers and improve information flow (Curta, 2021).

Constantinescu and Gîrboveanu emphasize the impact of communication on organizational image and its positive or negative influence in shaping the organizational image in the business environment. They are visible on the job market through communication channels and the main medium in which an organization seeks to make itself visible now is online (Constantinescu and Gîrboveanu, 2021). Hosu et al. tracking the incidence of online media use at that time in Romanian organizations, found that despite the fact that the concern for technologization was placed in a secondary place, there was a high incidence of online media use. (Hosu et al., 2014)

Baltac draws attention to the fact that the changes that organizations are currently going through are also influencing managerial roles, thus organizations are flattening and the manager is losing his position in the hierarchy of managerial levels, the author suggesting that the team will become more important. These changes are considered beneficial as they help organizations become more flexible, adaptable and efficient (Baltac, 2024).

The paper details the complexity of the roles a manager plays in today's organizations and how much the traditional understanding of managerial communication has changed. This fact, puts managers in front of a radical change of attitude in communication that goes more in the direction of leadership rather than a rational managerial approach and challenges them to acquire new skills in communicating with employees.

In the digital world, companies and organizations need to be agile, adaptable and resilient to survive and thrive, and managers must possess: the ability to manage change (Kotter, 2012), strategic thinking and foresight (Schoemaker, 1995), flexibility and agility (Bennis and Nanus, 1985), the ability to make decisions under ambiguity (Robbins and Judge, 2021), resilience (Coutu, 2002), and clear and transparent communication skills (Harris and Nelson, 2008

Leadership styles in 4.0 organizations are shaped more on the leadership role than the managerial role. The leadership style most promoted in organizations today is *transformational leadership*. This style focuses on inspiring and motivating employees to achieve high performance through change and innovation. Transformational managers develop long-term visions and engage subordinates in realizing these visions (Northouse, 2018). This is intensifying as technology takes over activities that can be automated, with employees being directed to activities that involve more leadership, coordination, creativity, critical thinking, and decision making (Hackman and Johnson, 2018).

The second chapter of the paper explores communication in organizations and its challenges, examining the importance of effective communication in the workplace. Communication effectiveness has been perceived differently through the prism of classical models of communication.

According to the Shannon-Weaver model of communication as a linear process, effective communication involves the transmission of a message without distortion (noise) and with adequate feedback (Shannon and Weaver, 1949). According to Berlo's S-M-M-C-R (Source-Message-Channel-Receiver) model, effective communication depends on the credibility of the source, the clarity of the message, the channel used and the ability of the receiver to decode the message (Berlo, 1960). In the model of communication as an interactive process, Schramm introduces the concept of "field of experience", emphasizing that the effectiveness of communication depends on the shared experiences of the interlocutors (Schramm, 1954).

From a digitization perspective, effective communication involves managing new technologies and online interactions. In this context, avoiding information overload is crucial to maintain focus and clarity of messages. Netiquette and clarity in e-mails and digital messages are essential for effective online communication, and the concept of *media richness* introduced by Daft and Lenghel indicates that media differ in the 'richness' of the information they can convey and that the choice of an appropriate communication channel depends on the nature of the message. (Daft and Lengel, 1986).

The paper comparatively describes the best-known unidirectional model of communication created by Shannon-Weaver in 1949, on the basis of which other communication models have been developed, such as Berlo's SMCR (Source - Message - Channel - Receiver) model and Schramm's interactive communication model.

Schramm's model is one of the most influential interactive models of communication, particularly used in relational and influencing activities such as coaching and managerial communication, as it adds complexity to one-way models by introducing feedback and the concept of a frame of reference.

The paper details the types of communication that are present in managerial communication and the techniques through which they are exercised. It also addresses the specifics of organizational communication and the transformations that are required in managerial communication.

In organizational settings, effective communication is crucial for collaboration, decision making, and employee motivation. Robbins and Judge emphasize that effective organizations have clear channels of communication, and leaders must provide constant feedback (Robbins

and Judge, 2021). Luthans emphasizes the importance of emotional intelligence in managerial communication (Luthans, 2011). Drucker states that the success of an organization depends on the ability of leaders to communicate the vision clearly and persuasively (Drucker, 2008).

The types of organizational communication are detailed by Argenti, who distinguishes between formal and informal communication (Argenti, 2015). Kreps explains vertical and horizontal information flows and their influence on organizational dynamics. In vertical communication, information is passed top-down (from management to employees) or bottom-up (from employees to management) and facilitates the implementation of decisions and provides the possibility to collect feedback (Kreps, 1990).

In managerial communication, various channels are used, such as team meetings, emails, written reports and collaboration platforms. Robbins and Judge emphasize the importance of tailoring communication channels according to the nature of the message and its urgency e.g. complex and strategic information is best communicated face-to-face to avoid misunderstandings (Robbins and Judge, 2021).

There are two main directions in managerial communication: *upward communication*, which allows employees to provide feedback to managers and communicate problems encountered. Schein emphasizes the importance of this type of communication in maintaining a free flow of information and an open atmosphere (Schein, 2017) and *top-down communication* (Tourish and Hargie, 2004), which is used to convey organizational instructions, goals and values from managers to employees.

Managerial communication can be *unidirectional*, from manager to employee without including a feedback component. It is preferable, however, that most communication interactions are *two-way*, with information flowing back and forth between manager and employees to increase efficiency and to obtain feedback on how the message is perceived by the interlocutor. At the same time managers by the specificity of their role is important to communicate on all four levels of communication: intra-personal, interpersonal, organizational and public (Constantinescu and Gîrboveanu, 2021).

The paper states that it is important for managers to take into account both *intra-personal communication* (the manager's inner monologue through which he organizes the information received from the external environment, analyzes it, judges it through the filter of personal values and, based on this, makes decisions, plans, communications, presentations, strategies) and *interpersonal communication* (the dialogue that takes place between managers and other members of the organization with the predominant purpose of influencing behavior and attitude to help achieve the organization's goals)

At the organizational level, managers must ensure an efficient flow of information in order to coordinate activities and achieve organizational goals. The effectiveness of communication greatly determines the quality of all the work carried out within an institution.

The third chapter introduces the concept of executive coaching in organizations, providing a clear definition and an analysis of its evolution. According to Goldsmith and Lyons (Goldsmith and Lyons, 2006), coaching has become a key tool for leadership development in organizations, being used to support managers in achieving more ambitious goals. In the 1990s and 2000s, according to Stober and Grandt (Stober and Grant, 2006) coaching underwent a significant expansion and formalized as a profession.

The most relevant definitions of coaching emphasize the partnership relationship between the coach and the client, aimed at fostering self-awareness and the achievement of goals set by the client. Coaching is defined by Whitmore as a method of achieving organizational and personal goals, of manifesting potential in order to achieve desired performance that involves "learning rather than being taught" (Whitmore, 2009a). The principles and objectives of executive coaching are also detailed in the paper, highlighting the differences between coaching, mentoring and consulting.

There are several types of coaching, each with specific goals, approaches and techniques. Depending on the needs of the coachee (the person being coached) and the professional or personal context, these types of coaching may vary. The paper discusses the main types of coaching used in organizations, distinguishes 1-to-1 executive coaching from *peer* coaching and internal coaching from external coaching.

Executive coaching is aimed at high-level leaders and managers to develop leadership skills, strategic decision-making and improve organizational performance (Kilburg, 2000). According to Goldsmith and Lyons, this type of coaching focuses on improving leadership performance and effectively managing challenges in the organizational environment. Executive coaching is results-oriented, helping leaders achieve their strategic goals and support organizational change (Goldsmith and Lyons, 2006).

Peer coaching is a mutual learning process between two or more colleagues (*peers*), based on support, reflection and exchange of experiences for performance improvement and professional development. There is no authority relationship and both parties play the role of coach and coachee (Ladyshewsky, 2017

Based on the literature reviewed, Table 1.1 compares coaching with peer coaching.

Table 1.1. Comparison coaching / peer coaching

Defining aspects	Coaching	Peer Coaching
Level of expertise	It involves an experienced coach with specialized training.	Based on peer collaboration, without an expert.
Structure	Well-defined sessions, clear methodology.	More informal and flexible.
Costs	It can be costly, especially in an organizational environment.	Free or at low cost.
Efficiency	Very effective for specific goals and individual development.	Good for collaborative learning and reflection.
Objectivity	The coach provides an external and impartial perspective.	Possible subjectivity due to pre-existing relationships.

Internal coaching (the coach is part of the organization) is more appropriate for frequent needs and limited resources, while external coaching (the coach comes from outside the organization) brings valuable benefits in situations requiring specialized expertise and impartiality. Based on the literature reviewed, Table 1.2 compares internal and external coaching.

Table 1.2. Internal / external coaching comparison

Defining aspects	Coaching Intern	External Coaching
Knowledge of the organization	Very good	Limited (needs time to adapt)
Costs	Lower	Higher
Neutrality	Potentially affected by internal dynamics	Increased objectivity
Accessibility	Readily available	Limited by external coach program
Privacy	May be compromised	Retrieved

A wide range of communication techniques are applied in coaching, from active listening to asking powerful questions, giving constructive feedback and assertive communication, and last but not least emotional communication and empathy. In addition to these techniques the paper details two specific coaching techniques: the GROW model and the SMART goal setting technique.

The GROW model is a tool commonly used in coaching to structure conversations and help people achieve their goals. This model was originally developed in the 1980's by Graham Alexander, Alan Fine and Sir John Whitmore, and further detailed by Whitmore (Whitmore, 2009a). GROW is an acronym representing the four fundamental stages of the coaching process: *Goal, Reality, Options and Will.* The GROW model is extremely valuable in managerial communication, providing a clear and effective structure for interactions aimed at improving performance, problem solving and employee development.

Goal setting is an essential element in coaching as it provides clarity, direction and a structured framework for personal and professional development. One of the most widely used methods for defining goals in coaching is the SMART method. According to Doran this acronym stands for the characteristics of a well formulated goal: Specific (S), Measurable (M), Tangible (A), Relevant (R) and Time (T) (Doran, 1981).

SMART is widely used in coaching because of its effectiveness in clarifying and structuring goals. Studies show that setting precise goals increases motivation, performance and the likelihood of success (Locke and Latham, 2002). The method provides a clear framework for the client, reducing uncertainty. SMART goals are easier to track and provide satisfaction once achieved. By setting clear benchmarks, the client is more aware of their progress and allows for regular evaluation and adaptation of the goal if necessary.

The fourth chapter details the impact of coaching on managerial and organizational communication. It describes ways to develop communication and soft skills in organizations. Industry 4.0 is bringing major changes in the labor market and in this context, employees need to develop technical and soft skills that allow them to adapt quickly to the new demands of the work environment. Soft skills refer to cognitive, social and emotional competencies necessary for effective interaction in the work environment (Robles, 2012).

In order to develop soft skills, modern organizations need to invest in continuous training programs that combine traditional methods with new digital technologies (Kolb and Kolb, 2009). Experiential learning is an effective method that allows employees to develop interpersonal and leadership skills through simulations and case studies (Argyris and Schön, 1996).

Implementation methods can include virtual reality (VR) and augmented reality (AR) based trainings to develop decision-making skills in complex scenarios (Pfeiffer, 2017), gamification in learning processes to stimulate interactivity and motivation (Werbach and Hunter, 2012), coaching and mentoring programs to develop emotional intelligence and leadership skills (Goleman et al., 2002).

An organizational culture based on constructive feedback and continuous learning fosters the development of interpersonal skills (Ashford and DeRue, 2012). Employees should be encouraged to give and receive constructive feedback, which improves communication and team trust (Edmondson, 2018). Tools to implement a feedback culture are digital real-time feedback platforms (OfficeVibe, Culture Amp) for continuous performance assessment (Deloitte, 2020), regular *retrospective meetings* where teams analyze strengths and areas for

improvement (Schein, 2017), workshops to develop assertive communication and negotiation skills (Rosenberg, 2003).

Transformational leadership is another essential element in 4.0 organizations, where leaders need to inspire teams and promote creativity and innovation (Bass and Riggio, 2006). Effective strategies for developing transformational leadership are leadership trainings based on case studies and real-life scenarios (Kirkpatrick, 2016), shadowing and reverse mentoring programs, where leaders learn from younger employees about new digital trends (Goleman, 1998), developing resilience and emotional intelligence through mindfulness and stress management techniques (Luthans, 2002).

CHAPTER 3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. Research design

This research employs a *quantitative, cross-sectional design* aimed at exploring the impact of managerial coaching on leadership style, team and organizational performance. The study was based on *questionnaire survey*, an effective method for collecting data from a large number of respondents in a limited period of time. The questionnaire was administered online and was structured to include both closed-ended questions for precise quantitative measures and open-ended questions to capture the individual perspectives and experiences of managers who participated in coaching programs.

The cross-sectional design was chosen because it allows us to analyze the perceptions and experiences of participants at a specific point in time, without tracking their evolution over an extended period. Also, the quantitative approach offers the possibility to identify patterns and correlations between the variables investigated, such as the relationship between coaching and improved team communication or the impact of coaching on employee motivation.

Also, this research adopts an *action research design*, as it aims not only to analyze executive coaching, but also to actually implement it in two Romanian companies. Through this method, we aimed to actively intervene in the managerial development process, evaluating the impact of coaching in real time. Action research is appropriate in this context, as it allows strategies to be adjusted along the way, based on the feedback received from participants. *The case studies* resulting from the action research are complemented with qualitative research methods through the application of *in-depth interviews*, *focus groups* and *direct observation method*.

3.2. Research problem

The central problem of this research is to determine the impact of executive coaching on managers' leadership style and on the performance of the teams and organizations in which they work. Executive coaching is often touted as an effective tool for developing managerial skills, but outcomes vary depending on the context, managers' involvement, and organizational support (Ribeiro et al., 2021). Thus, a detailed analysis of how managers perceive the usefulness of executive   coaching and how it influences communication, team motivation and decision making   is needed.

Another dimension of the research problem is to identify factors that may influence the success of executive coaching, including barriers to applying the techniques learned. Among

commonly encountered challenges are lack of time for implementation, team resistance to change, and insufficient organizational support (Maware and Parsley, 2022; Rushton et al., 2023). These issues can limit the effectiveness of coaching and reduce its long-term impact.

There is also the question of whether the benefits of executive coaching are sustainable or whether managers revert to their previous leadership styles after completing the program. This research aims to analyze the long-term effects of coaching by identifying concrete changes that managers observe in their own and their team's performance.

3.3. Research aims and objectives

The aim of this research is to identify the perceptions of the study participants regarding the contribution of executive coaching in improving managerial communication and leadership style in Romanian organizations.

The overall objective of this research is to analyze the perceptions of the study participants on how executive coaching influences the development of managerial communication skills, contributes to change leadership style and improve communication, conflict management and increase team motivation. The study aims to provide a clear insight into the benefits and challenges of executive coaching and to identify the factors that contribute to its success or failure in the business environment.

Specific objectives:

O1. Assess managers' perception of the usefulness of executive coaching for their professional development.

O2. To identify the effects of executive coaching on the team, analyzing aspects such as communication, motivation and conflict management.

O3. Determine obstacles and challenges encountered in applying the strategies and techniques discussed in executive coaching.

O4. To analyze the long-term effect of executive coaching, investigating the extent to which changes in leadership and management are sustainable.

3.4. Research questions

1. How do managers perceive the usefulness of executive coaching in improving managerial communication skills and developing their own leadership style?
2. How do managers perceive the effect of executive coaching on team communication, motivation, collaboration and performance?
3. What are the main challenges for managers in applying executive coaching techniques?

4. What long-term changes have managers noticed in their leadership style as a result of executive coaching?

3.5. Research methods and instruments

The first research method we opted for is the *sociological survey method* applied by means of an online questionnaire, given the advantages that this approach offers in terms of quick and efficient data collection. The choice of this method was based on the need to obtain relevant information about the impact of coaching on managers and organizations in an accessible and easy to administer way. The questionnaire was designed in such a way as to allow objective and subjective data to be collected, providing a clear insight into participants' experiences and perceptions.

The research instrument used was an *opinion questionnaire* built in **Google Forms** https://forms.gle/EFecfYjtK3JMrxV28 a platform that allows the creation, distribution and collection of responses in a centralized and automated way. This technological solution was chosen due to its ease of use for both the researcher and the respondents. SPSS specific statistical methods were used to analyze the collected data: absolute frequencies, percentages and cumulative percentages.

The second research method used in this study is the **qualitative survey** based on *in-depth interview*. This method was chosen because of its ability to explore in detail the experiences, perceptions and impact of executive coaching on management style and communication in the organization. Unlike quantitative methods, which focus on the collection of statistical and generalizable data, qualitative research allows for a more nuanced understanding of the phenomenon under study, providing rich and detailed insights into how managers perceive and apply coaching principles in their work (Eppich et al., 2019).

The main tool used in this research was the semi-structured, face-to-face interview guide. The choice of this type of interview was based on the need to elicit detailed and well-argued responses that reflect the authenticity of the participants' experiences. The in-depth interview provides flexibility and allows the interviewer to tailor the discussion based on the responses received, ask additional questions for clarification, and delve deeper into topics relevant to each respondent (DiCicco-Bloom and Crabtree, 2006).

The third research method used is the qualitative *focus group* survey. This method was chosen because it allows for in-depth exploration of the experiences, perceptions and impact of executive coaching on management style and organizational dynamics. Unlike individual data collection methods, the focus group facilitates interaction between participants, generating a

dynamic discussion that can bring to the fore varied perspectives and relevant details about the effectiveness of coaching in the organization.

The main tool used was the face-to-face focus group interview guide. The choice of this method was based on the desire to stimulate a genuine dialog between the participants, allowing them to express their opinions freely and to argue their points of view. Through face-to-face interaction, participants can discover new perspectives on coaching and analyze its impact from different angles, which contributes to a more detailed understanding of the topic under study.

The method of data analysis for the interviews and focus groups was the thematic analysis method, which involves identifying, organizing and interpreting the main themes that appear in the participants' answers (**Annex 4**).

3.6. Description of how the research - action will be carried out

The research follows an **action research** design, an interactive approach that combines direct intervention in the managerial process with the analysis of the impact of coaching on leaders in two Romanian companies, identified in the paper as *Organization A* and *Organization B*. This method was chosen because it allows not only to observe the phenomenon under study, but also to apply solutions in real time, thus facilitating the improvement of leadership style and organizational dynamics.

The research process was conducted in several stages. The first stage consisted of an initial assessment of the managers through questionnaires and semi-structured interviews, which aimed to identify their main challenges and development needs. The second phase of coaching implementation involved both individual and group sessions, with each manager participating in a structured program of six sessions. The last stage consisted in evaluation of the impact of the coaching, realized through a final questionnaire and post-coaching interviews.

For data collection and analysis, mixed methods were used, combining the questionnaire survey with semi-structured interviews, focus groups and direct observation. Data analysis was conducted using both statistical methods for the interpretation of the questionnaire results and thematic analysis for the qualitative data obtained from interviews and focus groups. Through this complex approach, the research was able to highlight both the benefits of executive coaching in leadership development and the challenges of its implementation in the business environment.

CHAPTER 4. MAIN RESULTS AND CONTRIBUTIONS OF THE STUDY

4.1. Results of the quantitative research

The analysis of the profile of the respondents to this research shows that there are no significant differences in terms of gender and that over 77.6% of them belong to the age groups 30-39 and 40-49, age groups that include employees with sufficient work experience to hold a managerial position and who are in the middle of their professional career. But there is also openness from participants in the 50+ age group. The under 30 age group is the most under-represented as there are most likely to be few who have progressed to management positions.

In terms of the level of management they hold 65.6% fall into the top and middle management categories, and the difference of 34.4% of respondents are team leaders or project managers. From this we can deduce that coaching is more accessible in organizations to the top and middle management levels and it is addressed in smaller percentage to team leaders and project managers.

Related to the number of coaching sessions attended 42.3% of the participants experienced more than 6 sessions, which designates longer lasting development processes, and 18.4% went through a coaching program limited to 4-6 coaching sessions. But 39.3% of the participants had access to only 1-3 coaching sessions, which means that they only had the opportunity to contextually experience the method in more complex programs without going through a dedicated process, therefore their perceptions are reduced to a limited experience and do not describe a lasting effect, but only a first impression of coaching.

In relation to the involvement in the development process 72.6% of the respondents stated that the initiative to participate was recommended or imposed by the organization and only 27.4% voluntarily opted for such a process. What this means is that managers predominantly make contact with the method through the organization, which comes with specific development requirements, and quite a few actively seek this form of development on their own initiative. Nevertheless out of the total number of participants in the study 88.6% of the respondents rated the experience as useful and very useful.

In terms of the extent to which coaching has helped to improve their leadership style, 42.3% of the respondents believe that it has helped to a great extent and 55.2% that it has helped to some extent, which means that 97.5% of the respondents have observed improvements in their leadership style after participating in coaching sessions. Thus the respondents confirmed

Goleman's view that coaching helps to develop a participative leadership style. The author argues that coaching helps to adopt a leadership style that encourages collaboration and the active involvement of employees in the decision-making process, which builds trust between managers and teams and creates a culture based on openness and accountability (Goleman, 2000).

Concerning the frequency of application of coaching techniques and strategies in the managerial activity, 47.3% responded that they apply them frequently and 52.2% that they apply them occasionally, which means that 99.5% of the respondents have taken coaching techniques and applied them in their communication with their teams, even though they most probably did not have formal coaching sessions.

This can be correlated with the impact participants perceived in improving their leadership style. Thus, in the context where managers improve their managerial communication by applying more frequently the communication techniques experienced in coaching: active listening, asking open-ended questions and giving feedback, definitely this mode of communication has an impact in shaping their leadership style.

The change in leadership style can also be correlated with the impact of coaching on team communication, and here 67.7% of the participants in the study perceived a high and very high impact. Whitmore reinforces the conclusion that the main benefits of coaching include improving managers' communication skills, including active listening, clarity of messages and giving constructive feedback, which improves working relationships and helps to reduce conflict (Whitmore, 2009b).

Another benefit of coaching is to increase employee motivation and commitment (Goleman et al., 2002) and intrinsic motivation (Kehr, 2004a). 54.7% of the respondents stated that the impact of coaching on team motivation was high and very high. From this it can be understood that there is a visible impact in the application of coaching in Romanian organizations, but it is an aspect that can still be improved.

In particular, the segment related to the activation of intrinsic motivation if we were to correlate it with the percentage of only 27.4% of respondents who voluntarily opted for a coaching process. We can conclude that the participation in coaching for a high percentage of the respondents is not due to intrinsic motivation, but to the impetus coming from the organization.

Boyatzis emphasizes that the process of coaching stimulates collaboration and teamwork due to specific communication techniques such as active listening and asking open-ended questions, and facilitates closer collaboration between team members and reduces unhealthy

competition (Boyatzis et al., 2013). Goleman also argues that it influences and the development of emotional intelligence by helping to understand and manage one's own emotions and the team's emotions (Goleman, 2000).

On this aspect, the respondents estimated the perceived impact of coaching on team conflict management in a cumulative percentage of 68.2%, that it had a high and very high impact. Thus the answers to the questionnaire subscribe to the benefits identified by the authors mentioned above.

In terms of the perceived impact of coaching on increased productivity 52.7% of the respondents answered that it had a high and very high impact and if we correlate this result with the 17.9% of the participants who answered that the most important benefit of coaching is increased personal performance, we can conclude that the respondents moderately correlated coaching sessions with increased productivity.

Regarding the most important benefit of coaching 31.3% of the respondents answered that it is increased confidence and clarification of goals. This result converges with Locke and Lathman's view that coaching facilitates managers and employees' ability to set clear and relevant goals, create action plans and monitor progress, leading to better performance (Locke and Latham, 2002)

In addition, 34.3% of the respondents answered that the most important benefit of coaching is managing challenges more effectively. This converges with Bass's view that coaching promotes change and innovation, enables managers to manage organizational transitions and change through clear communication and personalized support, helping employees to adopt new perspectives and overcome resistance (Bass, 1990). Other authors believe that coaching provides adaptability and resilience because it helps to increase managers' ability to respond quickly and effectively to change by helping them to develop adaptive and resilient strategies, especially in dynamic environments (Passmore and Fillery-Travis, 2011).

The main challenges that participants believe they have encountered in applying the concepts discussed in coaching are mainly represented by the difficulty in maintaining the new behaviors 61.4% and team resistance to change 52.5%, and 43.6% mentioned the lack of time for implementation. Thus we can conclude, that besides resistance to change and lack of time, the main challenge is the difficulty in maintaining new behaviors.

Regarding the support of the organization in applying coaching, only 12.4% answered that they felt very supported, the remaining 38.8% answered that they felt supported and 37.8% answered that they felt moderately supported. Adding the first two answers together we find that 50.2% felt supported and very supported, which means that half of the respondents feel the need

for support from the organization. However, only 14.9% highlight the lack of support from management as a challenge.

Whitmore emphasizes the importance of routinizing coaching in managerial conversations and encouraging reflection, taking ownership, and unlocking potential (Whitmore, 2017). In line with the literature, the improvements participants would like to see in the development programs they attended 60.4% mentioned the need for more one-on-one sessions, followed by 53.5% the need for *follow-up* sessions after the coaching was completed, and only 27.7% specified more involvement from the organization.

It is noteworthy that both respondents to the questionnaire and respondents to the in-depth interviews and focus groups emphasize the need for supervision and *follow-up* after the program. This means that they want to apply in practice techniques learned in coaching and on this aspect they need more support from the organization.

Regarding the identification of lasting improvements in leadership style after the coaching program, 31.3% responded that they had significantly identified improvements, 64.2% responded that they had identified improvements to some extent, so 95.5% of the participants noticed lasting improvements in their leadership style and this percentage can be positively correlated with the 97.5% of the participants who claim to have frequently or occasionally applied coaching techniques in their current work.

Related to the observed changes in management style after coaching, clearer communication is the improvement that was mentioned by 66.3% as a long-term effect of coaching sessions, followed by increased confidence in one's own abilities by 55.4% and more strategic decision making by 41.6%. As a result, we can state that participants perceive long-term improvements of coaching sessions and the main improvement is clearer communication.

4.2. Results of the action research

The analysis shows that the participants involved in the study of Organization A were able to become aware of the need for a new way of communication and were receptive to the change proposed by the organization. They were actively involved in the running of the program and experienced new ways of development, both personal and team members, which made possible the implementation of the second development program.

Following the evaluation of the development programs, the development objectives identified by the organization for the participants were achieved: developmental support of the collaborators and development of communication skills. The challenge for the organization is

now to sustain the changes initiated over the two years in the long term and to expand the number of employees involved in supporting organizational culture change.

The organization will need to make the transition from a traditional, hierarchical structure (Jones, 2013) to more flexible organizational structures, such as the matrix organizational structure, which combines elements of the hierarchical structure with the specific requirements of project work. According to the literature in such a system, employees have dual reporting lines (both to a functional manager and to a project manager) and allows for more efficient use of resources and better collaboration between departments (Larson and Gray, 2017).

The organization has already started actions in this direction by initiating mini projects in some departments. This can also be seen in the list of coaching objectives proposed in the program, where there were participants who developed their team members in project leadership. In support of this change also comes the experience of participants in *peer coaching* discussions, the literature emphasizes the contribution of this method in encouraging team communication (Robbins, 1991) and stimulating collaborative learning processes, which emphasizes the exchange of ideas and experiences and leads to collective performance improvement and increased team cohesion (Showers and Joyce, 1996)

The methods of 1-to-1 coaching and *peer coaching* have been experimented, adopted and used by the participants in their current work and it can be said that they have played a central role in activating their interest in development and in implementing constructive communication in the organization.

Unlike in Organization A where the intention of the development program was to provide managers with tools for self-development and employee development, in Organization B the intention of the initiated programs was to integrate managers into the organizational culture, to develop unified management and leadership skills in the organization and to prepare them for the future changes towards digitalization.

The novel way in which Organization B implemented coaching in the organization, by hiring/skilling employees to take on a dedicated coaching role, allowed the organization to run a large number of coaching sessions both one-on-one and group coaching sessions and to use a wide variety of development tools. However, due to the dispersed structure of the organization's participants across the country, the use of peer coaching in pairs or one-to-one proved more difficult.

Organization B experimented with the mentoring programme described in the previous chapters, but it was not long-lasting. It involved a small number of meetings with a senior

manager who was more intended to become a personal role model for the participants and less to provide longer-term mentoring and advice as the method is described in the literature, as it involved 3-4 discussions, mostly conducted by telephone with the mentor and one face-to-face meeting (Garvey et al., 2017).

Both organizations had the intention to internalize the method and use it recurrently for development, except that Organization A trained its managers to use it with employees, while Organization B hired people specialized in using the method to implement it in long-term managerial development. Despite the different approach, both organizations were able to orient managers towards a growth, development and awareness mindset.

According to Dweck, a development-oriented mindset and taking responsibility for one's own development is essential for employees to be able to adapt to current changes in the labour market (Dweck, 2006), therefore both organizations used this strategy to prepare managers to manage future changes.

Heslin and Keating add that a subsequent consequence of appropriating a growth and development mindset is the activation of employees' intrinsic motivation (Heslin and Keating, 2017). This was made possible in the case of Organization A, as a result of the development programs carried out in the organization, by creating a framework for practice and an accessible structure to guide participants in implementing a new way of thinking and acting, and was reflected in awakening employees' curiosity for learning.

In the case of Organization B, the activation of managers' intrinsic motivation as a result of the coaching processes is found in the lifting of the obligation to attend coaching sessions and offering the possibility to voluntarily access the development platform (Coaching App), thus managers became autonomous in taking their own development steps.

The evaluation of the programme shows that the participants from both organizations were very interested in learning a new way of communication, more efficient in relation to the current changes in the organization, being aware that it is necessary to change the traditional way of relating in the organization.

The participants in Organization A were aware of the disadvantages of the mathematical, linear, one-way, manager-centered communication style (Shannon and Weaver, 1949) and the high risk of creating confusion and erroneous decisions due to the lack of feedback coming through the official channels of bottom-up communication (McQuail, 2010), but they lacked the knowledge and the means to initiate change. The coaching method gave them the way forward and they had the openness to adopt it a new way of communicating in line with the circular

message model that emphasizes giving feedback and adapting communication according to the interlocutor's field of experience or frame of reference (Osgood and Schramm, 1954).

From the same perspective Organization B wanted to transform through development and coaching the one-way communication mode and directive communication style into two-way, motivational and inspirational communication. In this sense, the coaching initiative in this organization allowed coaches to get directly involved in managerial processes (meetings, interviews, discussions) and to guide communication towards a dialogue with employees.

The concern of the participants for the appropriation of this communication model in Organization B is evidenced by the particular interest in the techniques of giving constructive feedback and the constant concern in adapting their communication to the context and to the specificity and experience of the interlocutor. This concern denotes an openness to a different kind of relationship and collaboration in the organization.

Among the most applied coaching techniques by the participants in Organization A are the allocation of time for active listening and asking questions in discussions with employees to guide them to find solutions on their own, identifying the benefits in giving constructive feedback in performing tasks correctly and in smoothing the information flow. According to Whitmore active listening is the foundation of an effective coaching relationship (Whitmore, 2017). This idea was understood and appropriated by the participants due to the focus on active listening, creating a space of trust in the coaching discussion and replacing the imposition of solutions on the employees with guiding its discovery through questions.

Thus, managers in both organizations experienced the benefits of circular, interactive communication that actively involves all relevant parties and leads to decentralization of information from the manager to all team members (Schramm, 1954). They surprisingly found that employees are more responsive, motivated and perform better when they are involved as an active party in the conversation.

The GROW coaching method, which brings its contribution in structuring solution-oriented thinking and problem-solving according to Whitmore (Whitmore, 2009a), was mentioned among the preferences of the participants in Organization A. Even though the method is likely to be used less frequently by managers in its structured form, the main idea it brings, that of formulating guiding questions to encourage employees to solve problems themselves, was adopted and implemented by participants.

In the case of Organization B, managers received information about this method in training, but were not required to apply coaching methods and tools. However, they have integrated a new way of communicating by using more frequently in their communication with

employees active listening techniques, asking open questions (even if not using a specific model) and giving constructive feedback.

The participants in Organization A managed to find a solution to the problem of conveying implicit, confusing and vague information to employees about the organization's work tasks, strategy and change actions by adopting the coaching technique in their daily work, which involves setting SMART goals, and the main advantage of this method is to increase motivation, performance and the likelihood of achieving the desired results. (Locke and Latham, 2002) Last but not least, their effort to use assertive communication adds clarity and conciseness to the message and removes ambiguities, reducing the risk of misunderstandings as indicated in the literature (Ellis, 2009).

Organization B participants have also made changes in the way they convey information by being open to dialogue and receptive to bottom-up feedback. In addition, they experimented with and used analogies, metaphors and storytelling in their communication with the team in order to motivate and inspire employees to adopt change.

Organization A's initiative to create a learning community by running *peer* group meetings had less impact for participants. The method requires good organizational and self-organization skills and greater autonomy in generating contexts for development. Individual study and peer group meetings presuppose a greater experience in guiding one's own development process, which the participants have not yet managed to acquire.

However, their receptivity to use electronic tools for interaction, such as the What's Up group, which is also useful and validated in the literature as a practiced means of supporting development (Anderson, 2008), was high. A greater openness to technological tools can also be identified in the case of employees in Organization B, who used various digital platforms and tools in the development program carried out.

In Organization A it was easier for participants to follow a structured and much more procedural development process, similar to 1 to 1 coaching meetings, as a result this method proved to be more appropriate and was also more valued by participants compared to *peer* coaching. Working in an organization with a production profile, which has a procedural and standardized work structure, the 1-to-1 coaching method responds to the way employees are used to and was easier to implement.

The adherence of the participants of this organization to concrete rules and procedures also helped them to master the rules for applying constructive feedback as described by authors Goldsmith and Lyons (Goldsmith and Lyons, 2006), and their experimentation with it in

coaching sessions with their team members proved Downey's assertion that the role of feedback in the coaching discussion is for growth and development (Downey, 2003).

In the case of Organization B, the use of constructive feedback techniques was strongly encouraged by the visible improvement in employees' sales performance. This impact encouraged managers to change the way they communicate and become much more receptive to dialog and to giving and receiving feedback. . Their participants' experience in using feedback confirmed the theory that open and honest feedback improves communication and relationships between team members and between employees and leaders (Stone and Heen, 2015). Added to this is the fact that they were repeatedly exposed to receiving feedback related to their communication in coaching sessions

Empathetic communication was also of interest to the participants of both organizations, along with the importance of active listening, they also understood the importance of expressing emotions in communication and leadership, in managing conflicts and creating a climate of trust, of emotional connection in the team. According to the theory of emotional intelligence, this technique is essential in interpersonal relationships, conflict mediation and leadership (Goleman, 1995), and the challenge for managers was to learn to overcome their reservations about communicating emotions and managing them, both in terms of managing their own emotions and the emotions of those who initiated a communication approach.

Given the receptivity of the participants in Organization A, both in implementing coaching in their daily work and in participating in such a developmental approach, it paves the way in the organization to continue and encourage this practice, which has proven beneficial during the two years of running the development programs. It is desirable that the organization adopts, at all levels of management, this new way of communicating and relating, encouraging pro-activity and information sharing.

The next step in the implementation of the new values of Organization A is to move out of the limiting pattern of thinking framed by standards and procedures and to open up to creativity, innovation, flexibility and autonomy. A first step towards a decentralized way of communicating has been made through peer coaching meetings in small groups, and the organization will encourage more cross-functional project work, so employees will have the opportunity to solve problems and make decisions as a group, and this will foster creativity, innovation, flexibility and autonomy. Of note is the expectation that participants will learn to moderate group discussions as a new skill they will need to generate meaningful change in the organization.

As it appears in the literature, an adaptive organization needs to develop communication systems also horizontally, not only vertically (hierarchical communication). According to the literature horizontal communication takes place between employees on the same hierarchical level and is essential for coordination and problem solving at the operational level and for cross-functional project work, where employees from all departments are involved (Schein, 2017).

Organization B did not place particular emphasis on encouraging horizontal communication; this was only a priority in the organization, as a matrix organization structure was already in place that worked both vertically and horizontally. This organization instead focused on developing the skills to use motivational language (Mayfield and Mayfield, 2018), inspirational communication, direction and meaning-giving similar to that described in the study by Yue et al. (Yue et al., 2021). Also in this ca it was confirmed that there is a positive relationship between the use of motivational language and the achievement of organizational outcomes, job satisfaction (Sharbrough, 2006).

According to the authors Tushman and O'Reilly, organizational culture should support experimentation, calculated risk-taking, and reward innovative initiatives (Tushman and O'Reilly, 2006). As a result, the future course of action for Organization A is to include and support experimentation and application of 1-on-1 coaching meetings in the organization's existing systems such as performance management processes, encourage a digitized learning network, similar to social media, whereby it stimulates employees to continue development, individual study, knowledge sharing and best practices.

Organization B continued the use of coaching in employee development processes, constantly offering managers the possibility to access the coaching method for development purposes through the Coaching App platform. The difference lies in the fact that the use of the method has become voluntary and it is up to managers to decide their preference in the use of different development methods.

The two organizations analysed are two successful examples that prove the beneficial use of executive coaching in 1-on-1 meetings for managers' development and as a managerial tool for developing team communication. They also provide relevant examples related to the complementary use of other types of coaching such as group coaching and *peer* coaching, which they have successfully integrated into the complex development programs described in the previous chapters.

4.3. Findings from the in-depth interview analysis

Contextualizing the interview data in relation to the research questions, it can be seen that managers perceive executive coaching (1 to 1 coaching) as useful in developing their communication skills and leadership style.

Managers from both organizations interviewed stated that executive coaching brought added value to their work by helping them to develop a more constructive way of communicating, to better understand themselves and their team members and to define a participative management style, to change their mindset in their interactions with others, to create a clearer vision of their own work and their role in the organization.

These are the first steps that participants took towards developing a participative and transformational leadership style. They began by shaping a clearer vision related to the company's direction, continuing with a focus on using techniques to clearly communicate the organization's intentions to employees, by shaping a common purpose and language in team leadership, and by fostering a collaborative and open team environment (Robbins and Coulter, 2016),

The literature notes that it can be difficult to implement transformational leadership styles in highly bureaucratic organizations (Northouse, 2018). However, in both organizations, despite rigid and hierarchical organizational structures and a tradition of directive management, change has begun to be observed. The responses from the participants of both organizations confirmed the researchers' opinion that executive coaching helps to develop leadership competencies, strategic decision making and improve organizational performance (Kilburg, 2000).

Among the first changes that participants noted were improvements in their own communication skills. Managers in both organizations say they are spending more time listening to employees and asking guiding questions to invite dialogue, facilitating circular, two-way communication. This approach is different from the one-way, command-and-execute communication practiced in the old style of leadership in both organizations.

Hirokawa and Barge emphasize the importance of communication skills that a transformational leader needs to possess. Some of these are also beginning to emerge in the behaviors of the participants in the two organizations analyzed, such as: clearer and more concise communication, achieved according to the literature through the use of assertive communication (Ellis, 2009), better mastery and transmission of the group task through the benefits of SMART formulation of objectives (Locke and Latham, 2002), better information dynamics facilitated by a two-way flow of communication, expressing one's own opinions in a

way that leaves room for the expression of any other ideas from employees, respecting the expression of others and communicating appreciation of the effort of group members (Hirokawa and Poole, 1996).

An important change that the managers interviewed in Organization A noticed in their leadership style is the SMART formulation of objectives, which brings clarity to the communication of work tasks, specificity and concreteness and orients employees towards the achievement of objectives and the goal.

In Organization B less emphasis was put on this aspect due to the fact that being sales specific, the practice of SMART formulation of objectives to employees has been implemented for a longer time and has become a common practice.

According to Whitmore, solution orientation and problem solving can be achieved through the use of guiding questions and the structure of questions that make up the GROW method (Whitmore, 2009a). This was one of the main novelties brought by coaching into the managerial practice of the two organizations. Given their previous practice of a directive leadership style, managers were accustomed to finding solutions to problems faced by employees and now, by applying the open and guiding questions in the GROW model, they found that employees could be helped to find the right solutions themselves, which brought relief to managers.

The participants considered active listening and guiding questions as a major change in their leadership style, in the context that the belief in the past was that the leader must know it all and that he/she has all the answers to the problems arising in the organization. They were surprised to find that their team members are keen to get involved in solving workplace problems and this increases their autonomy and self-confidence. Consequently, another relevant impact observed by the participants as a result of coaching was the increase in employee engagement. Inspiring others to take action to achieve goals is one of the leadership qualities (Pânișoară, 2015).

The communication technique that particularly appealed to participants from both organizations was giving constructive feedback and assertive communication with employees. The willingness to provide constructive feedback facilitated trust building between employees and manager, a better flow of information from the bottom up in the organization and an increase in performance, because employees understand more clearly what is expected of them and receiving constant guidance and fine-tuning of work through feedback develops their skills and leads to better performance. According to Weick, effective leadership helps to reduce ambiguity and guide the team in difficult situations (Weick, 1979).

Even more, improving the manager-employee relationship has paved the way for bottom-up feedback from employees to managers. This mode of communication has been encouraged by managers by asking for feedback from employees themselves in 1 to 1 meetings or in meetings, experiencing the feedback being received. Employees are now more open in expressing their opinion to the manager.

The opening up of upward two-way and circular communication channels between employees and managers provides more precise and accurate data for decision making, thus improving the quality of managerial decisions. Managers report that they now ask more questions before making a decision. The literature also states that the use of assertive communication and constructive feedback in managerial work helps to increase efficiency and clarity in managerial decisions (Covey, 1989).

The middle managers in Organization A have successfully applied communication and coaching techniques in dealing with people, some of them even report that they have done coaching sessions with all team members, even though initially a development program asked them to apply coaching with 2-3 participants. Similarly, the middle managers in Organization B voluntarily took the initiative to hold coaching sessions with their employees, even though they did not have an explicit request to do so.

An important fact to emphasize here is the open, receptive attitude of employees in both organizations to participate in the coaching process, whether it is internal coaching, external coaching or guided by the manager in the role of coach. Robbins and Judge emphasize that a climate based on assertive communication encourages employees to express their ideas and concerns, increasing their motivation and commitment, thus we can conclude that the change in managers' communication and leadership style facilitated the openness to coaching of their team members (Robbins and Judge, 2020).

Managers in both teams believe that communication is now more open in the team, a climate of trust has been created, they help each other and manage to *speak the same language*. Managers believe that the communication techniques used help them to prevent conflict, particularly because they manage their emotions better and communicate more constructively. The literature also mentions the importance of *emotional control*, which excludes raising one's voice or impulsively expressing negative emotions in relations with employees. (Peneva and Mavrodiev, 2013) For most participants of coaching programs in both organizations gaining emotional control was an important step in development.

 According to managers in both organizations, the team has become more dynamic, more goal-oriented and more autonomous, enabling more effective delegation. Team members

perform their tasks better, organize themselves better, collaborate with each other and start coming up with solutions. The literature emphasizes that effective communication is crucial for collaboration, decision-making and employee motivation. The importance of constant feedback (Robbins and Judge, 2021), the importance of emotional intelligence in managerial communication (Luthans, 2011) and the ability of leaders to communicate vision clearly and persuasively (Drucker, 2008) is emphasized.

According to Bass's theory, transformational leaders not only motivate their people to achieve superior performance, but also help them to develop their skills and capabilities, thus contributing to the growth and development of the organization (Bass and Riggio, 2006). We can observe a change in the participants' mindset in this regard as well, due to the consistent effort made in implementing 1-on-1 coaching sessions with their employees.

A particular aspect related to the application of coaching in managerial communication is the openness shown by managers in both organizations to make an effort in carrying out professional and personal development processes. While both organizations initially started this process by obligatorily involving managers in development and coaching programmes, it can be seen in the case of Organization B that after the obligation was dropped, a large number of managers voluntarily continued to develop themselves by using external coaching sessions. Those who did not have access to the Coaching App platform state that they want to continue to develop and miss the internal coaching sessions.

As a result it can be said that a significant impact of coaching in the organization is to change the *fixed* mindset as described by Dweck and to acquire a growth *mindset*, a change that facilitates a constructive attitude towards the challenges brought by Industry 4.0.

A proof of this is the opinion expressed by many of the interview respondents that there is no need to adapt coaching to Romanian organizations, but it is more important to accept the challenge for them to adapt to the changes in the market. From this perspective, coaching proves to be a useful tool to facilitate adaptation to the new technological era.

This confirms Bridges' assertion that coaching helps individuals and organizations to manage major changes and organizational restructuring more effectively (Bridges, 2009). We can see that both organizations studied in their intention to initiate major changes have taken the example of organizations in the international market (Google, Amazon, Netflix, etc.) and have used complex and long-term programs (minimum two years) that include various forms of coaching (internal, external, executive or team coaching, peer coaching) to develop leadership skills (Goldsmith and Lyons, 2006).

Another benefit of coaching evidenced by the experience of managers in Organization B who have engaged in internal and external coaching programs is the encouragement of intra-personal communication by practicing self-reflection, self-monitoring, visualization and vision-building exercises, meditation, *mindfulness*, and building a positive inner dialogue. Organization A managers were introduced to these techniques through the training module on Self-Management and Emotional Intelligence. Pânișoară emphasized that intra-personal communication is the foundation for building high self-esteem and self-control by directing self-communication towards success and positive thinking (Pânișoară, 2015).

The respondents of Organization A through the structure of the development program implemented in the organization experienced 1-on-1 executive coaching sessions and group peer coaching meetings. It was thus proven that formal 1-on-1 executive coaching sessions with an expert coach allows for a personalized and structured approach to managers' development creating the framework for growth mindset orientation and laying the foundation for self-development.

The interview responses confirm the view that peer coaching creates a safe and open environment that strengthens professional relationships and encourages trust (Showers and Joyce, 1996), supports collaborative learning (Showers and Joyce, 1996) and encourages autonomy by helping employees to take responsibility for their own learning and development, thus contributing to increased intrinsic motivation (Swafford, 1998)

In order to successfully manage an internal peer coaching process, however, it is initially necessary to train the participants individually in 1 to 1 meetings, otherwise it is harder for participants to acquire the autonomy and intrinsic motivation that ensure the success of this type of coaching, because in peer coaching there is no authority relationship and both parties play the role of coach and coachee (Ladyshewsky, 2017

Organization B respondents had the opportunity to experience both internal and external coaching through programs offered by the organization. Their experience confirmed the advantages of internal coaching to be more financially affordable, facilitating access to a larger number of employees, and internal coaches being able to provide support more frequently and respond quickly to employee needs (Crane, 2002, Ladyshewsky, 2010). Disadvantages relate to the difficulty of maintaining neutrality, impartiality, reduced confidentiality, as employees may be reluctant to discuss sensitive issues with a colleague or leader in the organization (Brotman et al., 1998).

The analysis of the responses also confirmed the advantages of external coaching, which offers a neutral perspective, specialized expertise, and increased confidentiality. The

disadvantages of external coaching relate to the high costs, which decrease frequency and accessibility, and the additional time needed to understand the structure, values and dynamics of the organization (Goleman, 2000; Whitmore, 2009)

The main challenges encountered by managers in both organizations in applying executive coaching techniques are related to understanding, adapting and applying the method, overcoming the resistance to change of the participants to coaching sessions and involving them in the process and last but not least, the challenge of not offering solutions but having the patience to guide the employee in finding them. All these challenges are related to the lack of experience of managers in applying the method, once it is applied more often in practice these things will be able to be realized naturally.

In terms of process continuity in the organization, participants from both organizations point out that they need support from the organization. A first step would be to generalize the use of these new practices to all managerial levels and additional support coming from top managers in supporting macro-level changes in the organization.

The needs for support identified from top managers relate to support for the integration of 1-to-1 coaching processes into the company's usual management practices. The process that offers many opportunities for application is performance management, which involves 1 to 1 discussions with employees on performance and development issues that can be realized through the structured application of coaching.

At the same time, there is a need for a structured approach to employee development processes in organizations, so that managers have a framework conducive to the use of coaching skills. Given the recurrence of the performance appraisal and development process, a long-term continuity in the use of the method can be ensured, along with the use of the coaching method or its techniques in spontaneous task delegation and monitoring discussions.

SMART goal setting is already an implemented norm in both organizations, and managers remain to continue to use the technique in formulating goals, work assignments, and tasks delegated to employees. This is an already existing framework that facilitates clear communication in the organization and a result and performance orientation of the employees in the organization.

Aspects of executive coaching perceived as the most valuable are: result orientation, personalization to the needs of the coachee, overcoming resistance to change, ensuring learning through a structured and systematized process and increasing confidence in their own strengths, encouraging the use of constructive feedback and developing a growth mindset so necessary to adapt to new changes in the job market (Dweck, 2006).

The transition from one-way, centralized communication to two-way, decentralized communication, from a transactional leadership style (Burns, 1978) to transformational leadership is essential for organizations that want to adapt to changes in the labor market. Studies say that as technology takes over activities that can be automated, employees are being directed towards activities that involve leadership, coordination, creativity, critical thinking and decision-making (Hackman and Johnson, 2018).

4.4. Results of the focus groups

The information obtained in the focus group discussions validates the interview data in depth and complements the views of the junior managers, some of whom have experienced 1-to-1 coaching, but most of whom have only had access to peer coaching meetings. This can be seen in the difference in the volume and quality of information provided in the first focus group compared to the second focus group.

This analysis provides comparative data on participants' perceptions of the use of 1-to-1 and peer coaching. Managers who have experienced coaching sessions supported by an external coach perceive the process as structured, involving clearly defined objectives and action plan, not providing them with solutions and forcing them out of their comfort zone.

This description is in line with the process outlined by Whitmore in his work on coaching (Whitmore, 2009a), which is the most widely used working model in executive coaching. From the perspective of the managers in the second focus group, coaching is seen as a personalized way of development in which the manager helps them to apply in practice what they have learned in training.

Peer coaching is perceived as an easier, more relaxed coaching process, where responsibility is dissipated and does not require a high degree of ownership, and the managers in the second focus group experienced it as a scattered discussion in which they failed to address their problem and did not get to the desired outcome. Both groups recognize the role of peer coaching in facilitating the exchange of ideas, opinions, knowledge, facilitating a framework for feedback and helping participants to get closer.

The benefits mentioned by participants are also found in the literature which states that peer coaching helps to improve communication skills by providing opportunities to practice active listening, giving feedback and problem solving (Showers and Joyce, 1996). It also leads to the creation of a culture of continuous learning and contributes to the development of an organization that values knowledge sharing and continuous improvement (Robbins, 1991).

Given the lack of experience of the participants in development and self-development processes and a common practice in the organization related to interactions in multi-departmental teams, the other advantages that the literature mentions, such as improving individual and team performance, because peer coaching allows participants to improve their skills through constructive feedback and sharing of experiences (Robbins, 1991), increasing motivation and commitment, because peer coaching stimulates individual autonomy and responsibility (Swafford, 1998), failed to materialize

However, we can say that the experience in peer coaching groups has facilitated the implementation of new strategies and a new perspective of desired change in the organization (Joyce and Showers, 1982). Of course, this method remains to be further practiced by the organization, since more exposure is needed to be able to benefit from all the advantages it offers, and an important one is that it involves low implementation costs, being based on internal resources (Robbins, 1991).

The preference of all participants in relation to the two methods of development is at this point detachedly in favor of 1 to 1 coaching. From this it can be deduced that at this stage of change integration this personalized method of working is more appropriate, so that participants can acquire learning skills, intrinsic motivation (Kehr, 2004a) and a higher degree of responsibility and ownership of the learning process, and later on they can benefit from the advantages of peer coaching, which, although it seems a more relaxing process, implies a high degree of autonomy and responsibility in taking ownership of the development process.

In terms of the impact of the coaching method in developing communication skills and leadership style the participants' opinions converge with the data obtained from the in-depth interviews. In terms of the challenges they encountered in applying the coaching methods, some of them are also reflected in the interviews, such as resistance to change and the difficulty to listen without offering solutions and to keep the process documented. New difficulties identified in the focus group analysis refer in particular to difficulties in getting organized in order to succeed in peer coaching, in facilitating the process and directing it towards a constructive outcome and the difficulty to interact, to find topics for discussion with colleagues from other departments.

It is worth noting that as far as recommendations for improving coaching processes are concerned, the participants in the first focus group almost entirely took responsibility for the improvements that are needed (more practice, giving feedback more often, more emphasis on active listening and asking questions, etc.), suggesting only that they could benefit from supervision by a professional in the field to help them make the necessary adjustments.

Participants in this study confirm research that Romanian employees have a positive attitude towards change. David mentions that Romanians want change from the perspective of improving their living conditions, but they do not have the same positive attitude towards meaningful change (David, 2015).

Related to the way in which employees of Romanian organizations relate to change, we also have the data provided by Danis Consulting in which it is noted that change in the external environment actually leads to internal stability. This positive attitude towards change and the belief that change in itself is a beneficial phenomenon considerably facilitates the process and results of change concludes the research (Danis Consulting, 2010, 2011, 2012).

The positive attitude towards change among employees in Romania is also found in the organization involved in this study. The participants' recommendations regarding the desired support from the organization refer primarily to better information about the change and the methods by which the organization intends to implement the change. In their opinion, coaching as a development method needed a more careful introduction to help participants to be aware of its advantages before starting the process.

In the same idea of preparation of the participants the managers in the first focus group believe that before developing coaching skills it is necessary for the participants to acquire advanced skills in the use of communication, emotional intelligence, leadership and management techniques. This is also emphasized in the literature on the skills that a manager-coach needs to have in order to successfully apply the method (Arnold, 2009). Possessing high emotional intelligence skills has also been shown to influence positive attitudes towards change (Vakola et al., 2003)

Thus it can be argued that coaching plays a key role in facilitating organizational transitions, supporting employees and leaders in adapting to significant change. Grunzu asserts that through its specific methods, coaching contributes to the development of skills needed to successfully navigate change processes. Coaching helps employees to improve their skills and behaviors, facilitating effective communication and relationships within the organization (Grunzu, 2018).

Other authors emphasize that by developing employees' skills and stimulating creativity coaching supports organizations in successfully implementing the necessary changes (Suslenco, 2016) and through coaching, employees can be motivated to achieve their goals and contribute to the success of the organization (Popescul, 2018).

The participants of the study suggest that to embed coaching in the organization in the long term the organization needs to involve all managerial levels in the implementation of

change and implement the change down to the operator level, create the framework for applying peer coaching and 1-on-1 coaching sessions in organizational processes and provide professional supervision in applying coaching over a longer period of time.

CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

The purpose of this research is to identify the perceptions of the study participants regarding the contribution of executive coaching in improving managerial communication and leadership style in Romanian organizations. In order to emphasize the research results, the answers obtained to the four key research questions are highlighted.

Regarding research question number 1: *How do managers perceive the usefulness of executive coaching in improving communication skills and developing their own leadership style,* 66.3% of the managers who participated in the opinion survey felt that the main change identified as a result of the development and coaching programs was ***clearer and more effective communication***.

In line with the perceptions of the participants in the in-depth interview from both organizations, it can be concluded that they have managed to improve their communication skills as a result of the development programmes in the organization, they have moved from the one-way, command-and-execute communication style that they used to practice before the development programmes, to a two-way, circular communication style that facilitates the flow of information, both top-down and bottom-up.

As a result of experiencing a development process involving a mix of methods including different types of coaching (1-to-1 executive coaching, *peer* coaching, internal coaching, external coaching), participants were able to constructively learn a set of basic communication techniques, which they later report to have applied in their day-to-day managerial communication with employees. The techniques they said they applied were: active listening, asking open questions, giving and receiving feedback, assertive communication and empathic communication.

The conclusions are underlined with some examples of statements in which managers of Organization A support this perspective: *we have improved the way of communication and message delivery, discussions were more focused on objectives and effective ways to achieve them [I5], I have become more assertive and can say NO more easily [I9], I don't always ask coaching questions, but in discussions I ask more questions to employees than I used to do before [I8], we have improved the way of giving feedback, I no longer give feedback in anger and give it between 4 eyes [I10].*

In addition, the statements given by the managers of Organization B are also relevant: *before my communication style was one-sided, now I have a dialogue with people and pass on*

information, clarify the purpose of actions and help team members understand why we do what we do [I4], I have been honest in communicating with people, which has led to approaching problems with openness and assertiveness. [I2], From being a straightforward person, I learned to build rapport with people, to listen, to ask for feedback. Communication is much more open now [I3], I became aware of the impact constructive feedback has on me and since then I started to give it to my people [I1], I have become much more sober, I analyze the situation in more detail, ask for feedback, make more scenarios and see more implications and only then make a decision [I3].

These perceptions correlate positively with the responses provided by participants in the two focus groups held with managers in Organization A. Focus group participants also mentioned that they have made changes in their communication with employees: *communication with employees is more open, effective and to the point; we have become less subjective and much more objective in our communication; the way and level at which we have discussions has improved, they are more result and goal oriented we talk less and do more; we give more importance in difficult discussions to empathy, non-verbal language, active listening.*

Following this triangulation of data, correlated with those provided by the literature, we can conclude that Romanian managers also perceive a significant effect of coaching on improving managerial communication.

According to the data provided by the managers participating in this study, executive coaching helps to ***develop a participative and transformational leadership style***. Thus 97.5% of the participants in the survey stated that coaching had improved their leadership style to a great extent or to some extent. In addition to improved communication, they also mentioned increased confidence in their own abilities (55.4%), more strategic decision making (41.6%), more effective delegation (39.6%), more effective conflict management (37.6%) and increased motivation and team involvement (35.6%) as the main changes they perceived as a result of coaching programs.

With regard to the interview participants from Organization A and Organization B, they stated that they had a directive leadership style prior to the start of the development programmes, which they say they have changed to a participative and transformational style. This is evidenced by the shift from a fixed *mindset* to a growth *mindset*, both in terms of their own development and in terms of team members' ability to acquire new skills.

The participants in the action research in Organization A had as a specific development objective in the two-year program, the experimentation and the acquisition of coaching skills, followed by the application of the coaching method systematically in the development of team

members. In the first year of the development program, coaching sessions with 2-3 employees were targeted, later, observing the beneficial effects on the employees, most of the managers involved all team members in such a development approach, which proves an openness to development and the confidence that all team members have the ability to develop (*growth mindset*).

Some statements from the respondents to the in-depth interview about their perception of the usefulness of coaching in Organization A: *it changes the total mindset in interacting with others [I7], I use active listening instead of combative, it was an important change to build on what the interlocutor says [I3], I implemented the GROW method in the leadership part, I also presented to the team the knowledge I had in the courses on all the topics discussed and otherwise the changes were received more easily [I7], I notice that I ask more questions and listen to others and that helps me in leadership [I10].*

Similar to some of the participants in the development programs initiated by Organization B, lasting about 10 years, although the organization did not expressly ask them to conduct coaching sessions with team members, they declare that they voluntarily applied coaching in managerial communication, proving in their turn a growth mindset. The literature mentions the activation of intrinsic motivation as a subsequent consequence of a growth and development mindset. We can observe this process evidenced in the experience of managers in Organization B who had the opportunity to voluntarily engage in coaching processes, and later voluntarily chose to apply the method in their teams.

Statements of interview participants from Organization B: *I consider it a useful tool to develop people's potential. [I1], [...] coaching seems to me to be an out of the ordinary tool that we all need [I2], I have changed my leadership style by listening more and going more to the root cause of problems. I've become more introspective and reflective, which gives me a clearer perspective on situations. [I6], I think I have transformed myself from a directive manager to a leader that the team follows, because before coaching I had managers as my role models and not leaders. Now we need another style and we can only make the change with coaching [I7].*

Like the participants in the opinion questionnaire, the interview participants in both organizations involved in the study perceive different leadership approaches as a result of coaching: *I notice that I ask more questions and listen to others and this helps me in leadership [I10], I have been able to orient team members more towards solutions and get their involvement [I10], I use active listening instead of combative listening, it was an important change to build on what the interlocutor says [I3], what helped me a lot to overcome blockages was active listening [I2].*

They see as a result both more effective delegation*: it is easier for me to delegate tasks and discuss problems that arise without giving solutions [I1]; we have managed in one year to have trained people who can replace important functions in the team [I2],* improvements in the decision-making process*: I make decisions after asking myself a set of questions „wearing the coach's hat" [I1], I have asked more questions in deadlock situations or in problem solving [I3]; I have become much more sober, I analyze the situation in more detail, ask for feedback, do more scenarios and see more implications and only then make a decision [I3].*

These effects are also emphasized by the focus group participants: *now I have a clearer vision; now I have more ways and methods of approach: manager, leader, coach; I delegate more and manage to monitor better; I have healthier, more conscious interactions with people; in employee appraisal I had one-way, short (maximum 10) discussions, and this year I stayed more than 30 minutes and I felt more prepared.*

In conclusion, as a result of participating in the coaching programs, the participants in the study find that they adopt a participative and transformational leadership style, develop a growth mindset that leads them to focus on their own and their employees' development, make more strategic decisions and delegate more effectively.

To research question number 2: *How do managers perceive the effect of executive coaching on team communication, motivation, collaboration and performance?* 67.7% of the participants in the opinion survey believe that coaching has a high and very high impact on team communication, 54.7% believe it has a high and very high impact on team motivation, 68.2% believe it has an impact on team conflict management and 52.7 believe it has an impact on team productivity.

Interviewees from Organization A consider that they communicate better with the team, communication is more open, a climate of trust has been created between them and the team and between team members, and they manage to speak the same language. They claim that they can observe changes in team members related to increased cohesion and communication between them, the creation of a more pleasant working environment and the development of a closer and more trust-based bond between team members. The team has become more dynamic, more interested in achieving objectives and more autonomous, enabling more effective delegation.

In-depth interview participants in Organization B point out that they have noticed changes in their team as a result of actions they have taken to prioritize 1-on-1 and face-to-face communication, hold more frequent team meetings to facilitate better connection, use more

active listening in managing conflicts with employees, and manage their own emotions, which has led to better management of challenges.

Focus group participants also report that the change in communication style has helped them to improve their relationships with team members, to get closer to people, to support them and to make decisions together with the team. They perceived healthier, more conscientious interactions with team members and a greater care for others expressed by listening more attentively to others' needs.

The beneficial effect of coaching on the team is evidenced both by the responses to the in-depth interview, the focus group and the opinion questionnaire. We can conclude that there is a visible impact that a manager involved in development processes through executive coaching has on the team

It can be concluded that the most important effect of coaching is perceived on communication and conflict management in the team and to a lesser extent influences on motivation and productivity of team members can be observed.

In terms of the extent to which executive coaching contributes to organizational success and the achievement of strategic objectives, 47.3% of the managers participating in the opinion survey estimated that there was an effect on organizational performance, while 35.8% responded that it had a positive but not significant effect. Managers interviewed from the two organizations reported successes achieved over time in terms of the results and performance of their teams, and that these results also contribute to the performance of their organization.

In line with these data we can state that there is a positive perception related to the contribution of coaching on organizational performance following the implementation of coaching programs. An essential condition is that this method is applied consistently and in the long term in the organization.

Research Question 3: *What are the main challenges managers face in applying executive coaching techniques?* Survey participants indicated as the main challenge the difficulty in maintaining new behaviours (61.4%), followed by team resistance to change (52.5%), lack of time for implementation (43.6%) and lack of support from the organization (14.9%).

In-depth interviews conducted in both organizations and focus groups identified a number of difficulties such as: Coaching participants' resistance to change and their involvement in the process, lack of interest in the development of some team members, difficulties in understanding and applying the method, lack of experience in coaching practice- ului, difficulties in adapting the method to the context of the discussion, difficulty in refraining from directly offering solutions to the problems employees come with, difficulty in maintaining

consistency in applying to prepare before the coaching meeting and make the switch between the role of manager and that of coach.

The participants in the first focus group considered the resistance to change of the people involved in the coaching process, having the patience to ask questions when they already knew the solution to the problem, keeping a documented record of the coaching process with the employees as a challenge, and for those in the second focus group the challenges were the difficulty in organizing peer coaching meetings, interacting with colleagues from other departments, applying theory into practice, allocating time and energy to the development and quantifying the results obtained through peer coaching in the short and medium term.

We can conclude that the main challenge that emerges from the analysis of the perceptions of the managers participating in the qualitative study is similar to the one mentioned by the participants in the opinion questionnaire, namely, the difficulty in maintaining new behaviors and in consistently applying new coaching methods.

As for the second difficulty, people's resistance to change, according to the reports of the managers who have applied the coaching method with the members of their teams, it can be seen that resistance to change appears at the beginning of the process, but once the process is understood and integrated, the participants overcome their reservations and develop a positive attitude, wanting to get involved and benefit more and more from the opportunity to have coaching meetings with their managers

According to the experience of the interviewees the resistance to change of employees is a stage that can be easily overcome by the manager-coach, so it remains to pay more interest from the organizations to maintain new behaviors and create favorable contexts for the application of coaching in organizational processes.

We can conclude that the main difficulty in applying coaching is learning and consistently applying the method and maintaining the new behaviors in the long term, followed by overcoming resistance to change, time dedicated to implementation and last but not least the lack of support from the organization.

When asked about the perceived support from the organization, 51.2% of the participants in the opinion survey believe that they felt supported and very supported in applying coaching in the organization, while the remaining 48.8% felt moderately supported or not supported at all by the organization.

Participants in the in-depth and focus group interviews in Organization A received support from the organization during the two years of the development programme. What they perceived that would have helped them additionally relates to training all managers in the

organization in communication and coaching techniques, implementing change down to the operator level, there being continuity in the application of peer coaching in the team and 1 to 1 coaching sessions, being supervised in the application of coaching, and development being linked to individual goals and creating a framework in the organization for continuous development.

Participants in the in-depth interviews in Organization B have received support from the organization during the 10 years of implementation of coaching programs and they emphasized the importance of long-term support of coaching processes from the organization. It is worth noting, however, that the majority of the interview respondents emphasized their role in the running of the coaching processes and the personal responsibility they have in applying the method, regardless of how much support they have from the organization.

In conclusion, at the beginning of the start of the change processes the support from the organization has a particular influence on the successful implementation of the coaching method in organizations, later managers manage to assume an important role in the consistent use of the method and the coaching processes become naturally integrated into the managerial structures and culture of the organization. Managers' main need for support from the organization is the provision of *follow-up* and supervision.

Regarding research question 4: *What long-term changes have managers observed in their leadership style as a result of executive coaching?* 31.3% of respondents say that they have significantly identified long-term improvements as a result of the coaching sessions, while 64.2% say that they have perceived only some long-term improvements.

The interview participants from Organization B made a significant contribution to the study in terms of long-term impact, as the organization has supported development through coaching for 10 years. Their answers confirmed that the impact of development coaching is long-lasting. Some of the interviewees voluntarily chose to continue their development by accessing the coaching programmes they had access to in the organization and voluntarily engaged in coaching with their team members.

Managers who did not have access to coaching programs in the organization after the internal coaching was completed report that they were constantly guided in their managerial work by the coaching principles and techniques they had learned while participating in the program and that this further honed their leadership style. A relevant example of this is the testimony of one respondent, who says: *The stories and metaphors that I used in coaching have stayed with me for years and I have used them in my team meetings [I1].*

In conclusion, we can find that participants in coaching programs who have received support from the organization for a longer period of time report that they can observe long-term effects in maintaining changes in managerial communication and leadership style.

The overall perception of the coaching programs of 88.6% of the survey participants is that they are useful and very useful. As a result 27.4% responded that they participated in coaching voluntarily, 60.2% responded that it was recommended by the organization but not mandatory, and 12.4% responded that it was imposed by the organization. Following the programs run in the organizations included in the study 47.3% of the participants answered that they frequently apply coaching techniques and strategies, 50.2% answered that they apply occasionally and only 2.5% answered that they do not apply much.

In terms of the most important perceived benefit of coaching, 34.3% of the participants in the questionnaire reported more effective management of challenges, 31.3% increased confidence and clarification of goals, 17.9% increased personal performance and 16.4% improved team relationships. These results correlated with the literature underline the contribution of coaching in helping organizations to overcome the challenges posed by social and economic change and not least in adopting results-oriented and performance-oriented communication.

In-depth interview participants from the two organizations provide a detailed insight into the application of a variety of coaching methods, such as 1-to-1 executive coaching, *peer* coaching, internal coaching and external coaching.

Participants in the in-depth interview and focus group in Organization A contribute valuable information related to the implementation of 1-to-1 executive coaching in the organization compared to *peer* coaching. According to their statements most of them opt for a 1 to 1 coaching process because they consider it more structured, systematized, personalized and last but not least guided by a coaching specialist, either external or internal (manager - coach).

Peer coaching was a more difficult method to implement in the developmental stage of the program participants. Although they were able to recognize its benefits, applying this method requires good internal organization, open communication between members of different departments, the assumption of an autonomous learning process and strong intrinsic motivation. Given that these develop with the growth mindset, the program participants were not fully prepared for a peer coaching process. The experience in applying peer coaching brought instead the possibility to set new development goals.

Participants in the in-depth interview in Organization B made a relevant contribution to the comparison between internal and external coaching. On the two coaching methods the

participants' opinions were divided. Some preferred external coaching, others internal or a mix of both approaches.

The advantages of internal coaching are a good knowledge of the organization and people, a deeper understanding of the problems, greater accessibility to coaching sessions, both in terms of frequency and cost, a closer relationship between coach and coachee, immediate applicability of solutions to current practice, face-to-face meetings and greater opportunity for both leader and team development. Disadvantages perceived by respondents are lack of support from the organization, less objectivity from the coach, reluctance about the limits of confidentiality and the influence that the organization can exert on the coach.

The advantages of external coaching are the possibility to experiment with different approaches, the possibility to voluntarily participate in coaching, a more general, different and diversified perspective on the situations addressed. The external coach is perceived as being more neutral, objective and detached from the issues in the organization, which from the participants' perspective better ensures the confidentiality of the process.

Disadvantages refer to its predominantly online and less flexibility, limited access and high costs, the need to provide more details about the work in the organization, less connection with the external coach, reluctance to confidentiality, fear of possible lack of involvement and superficiality of the external coach.

Each coaching method has advantages and disadvantages, it is up to the organization to decide which combination of methods corresponds to its change objectives, specific needs and the resources at its disposal. This paper integrates the benefits identified by the study participants in creating a model for developing executive coaching to improve communication and leadership style in organizations. Chapter 10 of this paper presents a development proposal that integrates the experiences and best practices of the organizations participating in the study.

Because coaching helps the organization to successfully navigate through the challenges and changes it is subject to, it contributes to the success and adaptation of organizations in a changing labour market . This is evidenced by the answer given by the participants to the question *whether they would recommend this program to other managers*. 71.1% said yes, definitely would and 27.9% said probably would. A similar attitude was demonstrated by the participants in the interviews and focus groups. They all recommend coaching as a useful method to develop communication and leadership skills.

In the perception of the study participants, coaching has a positive role, both in enriching managerial communication and leadership style, as well as in terms of approaching organizational change and adapting them to the requirements of Industry 4.0. Even if this

method has relatively recently come to the attention of Romanian organizations, it is proving its usefulness and is increasingly making its presence felt in the development strategies of organizations.

The overall objective of this research was to analyze the perceptions of the study participants on how executive coaching influences the development of managerial communication skills, contributes to the change of leadership style and to the improvement of communication, conflict management and increase team motivation. From the data obtained from the research it can be concluded that managers perceive executive coaching to have a significant contribution in terms of also changing leadership style by improving managerial communication, better conflict management and increasing team motivation.

By aggregating the data obtained from quantitative research, action research, in-depth interviews and focus groups, it can be stated that the *specific objectives of* the research have been achieved.

RESEARCH LIMITATIONS

One of the main limitations of the study is its cross-sectional nature, which allows capturing the perceptions and effects of coaching only at a specific point in time, without analyzing the long-term evolution. Thus, the results cannot clearly indicate whether and to what extent the observed changes are sustained over a longer period. Furthermore, the sample used was a convenience sample, which limits the generalizability of the results to the entire managerial population, as the selection of participants was not based on statistical representativeness criteria.

In the case of the online questionnaire method, there is a risk that responses may be influenced by subjective factors, such as the desire to provide socially acceptable answers or different interpretations of some items. In addition, distributing the questionnaire through social networks and professional groups may favor only certain categories of respondents, excluding those who do not actively use these platforms.

Qualitative methods, such as in-depth interviews and focus groups, provide a more detailed insight into participants' experiences, but can be influenced by the subjectivity of the respondents and the researcher in analyzing and interpreting the data. Also in focus groups, social dynamics can affect the honesty of responses, as some participants may be influenced by dominant views or reluctant to express critical views.

Another limitation is related to the specificity of the organizations analyzed. The study was conducted in two companies in Romania with similar structures and leadership approaches, but in different domains (manufacturing and financial-banking services). Organizational culture and local context may influence the results, which makes the applicability of the findings to other business environments limited. Factors such as organizational structure, management support and general attitudes towards coaching can vary significantly between different industries and regions.

As for the direct observation method, it provides valuable information about managers' behaviors and interactions, but its interpretation may be affected by the subjectivity of the observer. Also, the presence of the researcher may influence the behavior of the participants, which may introduce a certain degree of artificiality into the data collected.

USEFULNESS OF RESEARCH

This research makes significant contributions to both academia and managerial practice by providing a deeper understanding of the impact of coaching on leadership, team and organizational performance. Through its comprehensive approach, based on quantitative and qualitative methods, the study provides relevant data for developing leadership strategies and optimizing managerial coaching programs.

The research extends existing knowledge by analyzing the relationship between coaching, leadership style and team performance, providing a theoretical model that explains these interactions.

Research results can be used in future studies to validate the proposed model and to extend it to other organizational contexts.

The questionnaire constructed and tested in the research can be used in future studies to evaluate the effectiveness of managerial coaching.

The research results provide concrete recommendations for improving the implementation of coaching in organizations, including its integration into the leadership development strategy.

The study shows that investing in coaching can help teams work better together, reduce conflict and increase employee motivation.

FUTURE RESEARCH DIRECTIONS

Future research directions could address several aspects to broaden and deepen our understanding of the impact of managerial coaching on leadership, team and organizational performance.

An important first direction would be to conduct a longitudinal study, tracking the impact of coaching over a longer period of time. This would allow the sustainability of changes in leadership style and team performance to be assessed, providing a clearer perspective on long-term effects.

Another possibility would be to explore the modulating factors of coaching effectiveness, such as managers' level of openness, organizational support, organizational culture or type of industry. Comparative research between organizations in different sectors could highlight variations in the applicability and success of managerial coaching.

Another aspect of interest could be to analyze the impact of coaching on emotional intelligence and decision making in order to better understand how this process influences the soft skills essential for effective leadership. Such research could involve mixed methods, combining psychometric measures with case studies and behavioral observations.

It would also be relevant to investigate the differences between individual coaching and peer coaching in leadership development. A comparative study between these two methods could highlight the advantages and limitations of each, providing recommendations for optimal application in organizations.

In addition, an emerging direction could be the analysis of virtual coaching versus face-to-face coaching, given the accelerating digitalization of the business environment. Future research could assess the effectiveness of these two approaches and their impact on the coach-manager relationship.

Last but not least, expanding research on the impact of coaching on autonomous and agile teams could provide valuable insights into how this practice contributes to team dynamics and performance growth in flexible and innovative work environments.

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