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Understanding the Managerial Coaching Practice in The Kingdom Of Bahrain

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Abstract: Since the 1880's, coaching has been associated with Sports yet it has been used in organizations and transformed overtime to extend to focus more on directing, instructing and training either individuals or groups of people to attain certain goals and objectives. While coaching is becoming popular and widely used in practice, scholarly investigation into coaching showed that it is still in its infancy comprising a knowledge gap. The aim of this research is to address this knowledge gap and to overview Coaching programs and practices in Bahrain, understand the perception of coaching and identity challenge. This research presents an understanding of the coaching practices in Bahrain and also discusses practical implications for coach training. In-Depth Interviews were conducted with HR managers, practitioners and Coaches. In addition to a survey which was conducted with 51 employees working in Bahrain to assess their perception of training in general and coaching in specific. The results indicated that the majority of employees have high self-awareness resulting in clear objectives and goals with an emphasis on the significance of coaching and mentoring in today's workplace. The main findings were that coaching programs are in demand as coaching has the potential to substantially improve employees' and organizational performance. This research identifies key issues faced by either internal and/or external coaches in professional developing individuals. Recognizes the importance of adequate training of managers in coaching skills as an important issue for organizations to tackle. Furthermore the development of a supportive coaching culture should not be underestimated in facilitating managers to apply their coaching skills on a daily basis.

Keywords: *Coaching, Coaching Effectiveness, Executive Coaching, Coaching Perception, Leadership Development, Coaching in Bahrain*

Introduction

Coaching is a binding relationship that has to be initiated from the individual or the coachee seeing the assistance and guidance of the coach. Individuals have to be willing and able to get coached and to have ownership of the situation and a free will to decide for himself or herself. As described by Hanft et al. (2004), there are five critical components of coaching: (1) initiation or joint planning, (2) observation, (3) action/practice, (4) reflection, and (5) evaluation or feedback. In each step, the goals of coaching are determined where coaches are given opportunities to observe, practice skills, reflect on those activities, and coachees receive feedback on their progress toward planned goals. Each step is intended to support the achievement of specific outcomes and goals.

Over the past few years, coaching has increased organizational effectiveness as a tool of organization development serving various objectives as talent management, Employees retention, Reinforcement of desired leadership behaviors, and improving organizational morale.

Managers and practitioners have come to realize the role of coaching in solving several organizational challenges; the ability to train, coach others, and share experience and knowledge has become one of the required skills in managers and team.

According to the 2013 Executive Coaching Survey, conducted by the Conference Board, 63% of organizations use some form of internal coaching, and half of the rest plan to. Yet, still coaching is a small part of managers' activities where- according to the survey- half of them spend less than 10% of their time coaching others.

Overviewing on Coaching

Rush and Sheldon (2005) defined coaching as “an adult learning strategy that is used to build the capacity of a parent or colleague to improve existing abilities, develop new skills, and gain a better understanding of his or her practices for use in current and future situations.” Coaching approaches vary in form, duration, and setting; where it can be delivered formally, informally, individually, in-groups, face-to-face and nowadays online or distantly using technology-based methods and platforms.

Online training or e-training is an emerging trend extending to remote coaching. In a study on the effects of remote versus on-site delivery of the professional development intervention, Powell, Diamond, and Koehler (2010) found no differential effects of remote delivery. Other research suggests, however, that web-only approaches may be insufficient without additional support. Some studies assessing the impact of web-only video demos versus video consultation proved that video learning is more effective with children interactions which required further investigations on various age groups. (Mashburn and Pianta 2007; Pianta et al. 2008b).

Executive coaching has been proposed as an intervention aimed toward helping executives improve their performance and consequently the performance of the overall organization (R. R. Kilburg, 2001). While employee and executive coaching are popular and widely used in practice, scholarly investigation into coaching is still in its infancy comprising a knowledge gap. Even more surprising, coaching seems to remain a valuable tool for developing individuals at all levels and even more with the economic conditions and the budget cuts forced on organizations.

According to Burke and Hutchins (2007) the trainees' perception of the utility of trainings can be influenced by trainees' evaluation of: (1) the credibility of the new skills for improving performance, (2) a recognized need to improve their job performance, (3) a belief that applying new learning will improve performance, and (4) the practicality of the new skills for ease of transfer. Based on the available literature the survey questions were developed to measure the employees' perception of coaching.

Methodology

This research relied on mixed methods in data collection where the relevant literature has been reviewed and data has been collected through In-depth Interviews and Survey methods as explained below:

Sample and Data Collection

This is a dyadic research where it shows two sides of coaching represented by coaches and managers versus employees' understanding about coaching and its perceived

benefits. In-Depth Interviews were conducted with 5 experts represented by HR managers, practitioners and Coaches based on a judgmental and snowballing sampling techniques and using networking to encourage experts and managers to participate in this research. A survey has been conducted with 51 employees working in Bahrain to assess their perception of training in general and coaching in specific. Data has been collected from four organizations; one large Public organization dealing with training and development with the majority of the companies and organizations in the Kingdom of Bahrain, the second organizations is considered one of the most prominent real estate companies in Bahrain, the third and fourth organizations are leading professional services organization in management consultancy and training and development. The survey questions were sent electronically by email as a link to HR managers to be sent to all employees in all four organizations with a total of 340 employees as targeted sample, however, the initial response was 203 responses with only 51 valid responses representing 15% response rate.

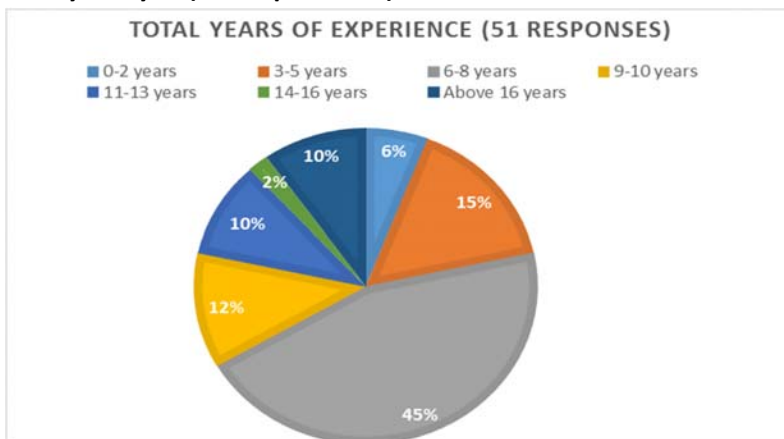
Data Analysis

Interview Analysis with The Experts

The First interview with a Senior Director of Professional Development indicated the importance of guidance to develop and empower leaders and staff members to improve their performance, increase their personal awareness, motivate employees, enhance communication and moreover to establish concepts of modern administration and change or better emphasize institutional culture. The 1st interviewee explained that the guidance is a participatory process between two people; the coach and the coachee and is carried out on multiple sessions with the aim to achieve agreed upon goals that might lead the coachee to reach his/her highest professional and personal capabilities. The Second Interview with a Training Coordinator in an HR department revealed the general objective behind coaching courses to senior managers that is to explain the concept of coaching, its process and how to coaching techniques to influence others in a positive way. The interview revealed that Directors, Department Heads and Senior Managers are the main target group to be trained on coaching; Senior managers are required nowadays to develop, guide and coach their subordinates and teams if necessary. The Third interview with a Senior Coach indicated that there is a challenge in people resisting coaching and not committing to the whole coaching plan. This definitely affects the quality of the outcomes and the perception of Coaching as a strong tool in development. However, effective coaches challenge limiting beliefs and reinforce positive beliefs by providing clear guidelines followed by feedback. The Fourth Interview with an HR Director and a professional coach who added that Coaching is utilized by organizations to improve corporate performance through employees' self-awareness, motivation and more importantly retention, problem solving especially relational issues. Coaching focuses on coachees' needs and desires as it is a collaborative relationship between coaches and coachees yet it is somewhat challenges for both internal and external coaches; In the middle of the coaching relationship some employees feel that the process is taking more time than they expected especially when they feel that they are exposed a lot of information about themselves and this is even more heightened in case of internal coach. The Fifth Interview with a Senior Management Consultant and a Career Coach stated that On-the-job coaching helps individuals gain a broader perspective and address particular issues and challenges. It allows individuals with the support of their coaches to look back

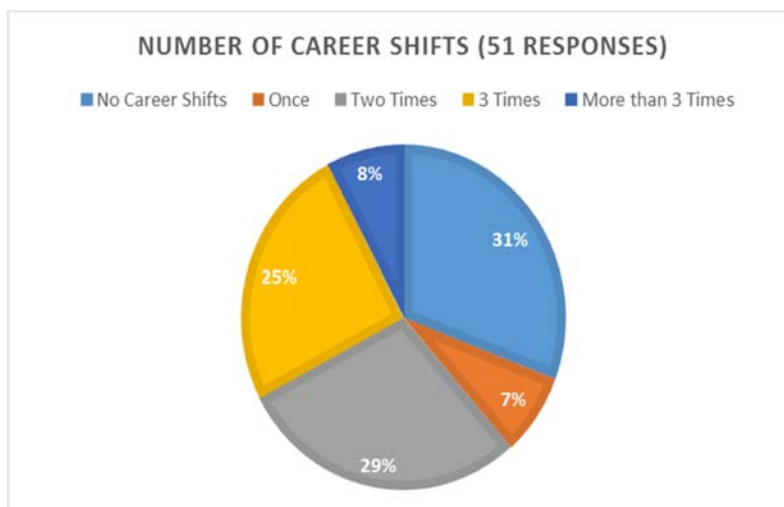
and evaluate previous and current performance by considering multiple views. Career development in general and coaching in specific challenges individuals to explore their interests, aspirations, needs and options. It also creates meaningful goals — both from an annual and a longer-term perspective. Coaching provides support, insights and practical advice on a variety of professional development and career topics. Most of the respondent experts agreed that coaching is introduced in organizations initially to address a performance gap and that executive coaching impacts positively business performance. Most of the experts mentioned that individuals are reluctant to seek assistance or help especially on a senior level and most of the individuals don't know the real value of coaching as they think it's a fad and just another training programs. The Majority of experts agreed on the importance of coaching and they emphasized on the importance of raising awareness of coaching need and benefits to all employees on various managerial levels. Most respondents felt that while coaching skills are highly developed, yet the profession itself is not. This might be due to the low awareness about coaching and its benefits; Experts stressed on the importance of coaching especially in the time of dynamic changes as it facilitates the acceptance and adoption to changes.

Survey analysis (51 Respondents)



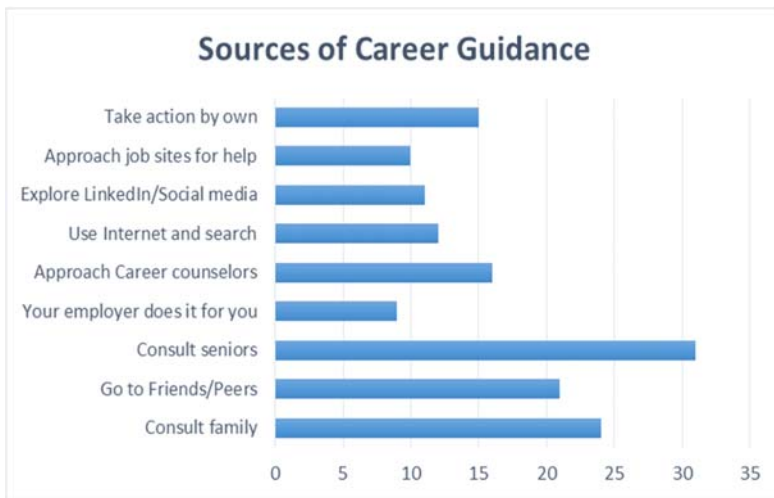
1- What is the Total Years of Experience? Based on the survey as the second stage of data collection, the majority of the employees' working experience is between 6-8 years representing 45%, while 12% of the respondents have worked an average of

9 years. 15% worked an average of 4 years.



2- Number of Career Shifts 31% of the respondents made no career shifts, 29% changed career twice, 25% shifted three time, while only 7% made one career shift and 8% didn't change careers which might indicate few working years or high

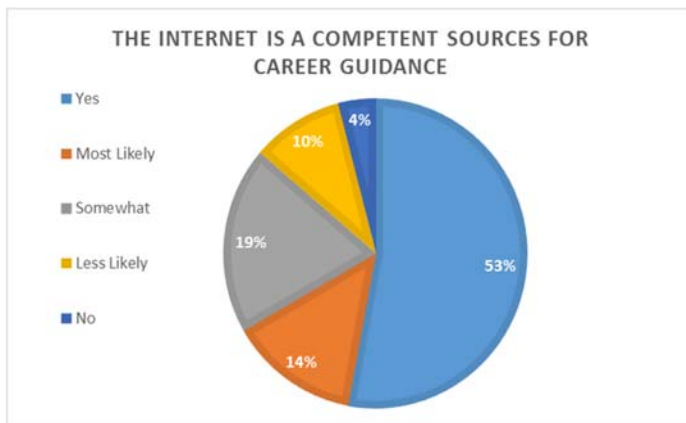
satisfaction and retention rate.



3- Sources of Career Guidance

The majority of employees seek career guidance from senior consultants representing 32%, in contrast 24% prefer to consult family members, with an average of 20% seek friends' advice.

On the other hand 15% of respondents prefer to take actions and decisions by themselves.

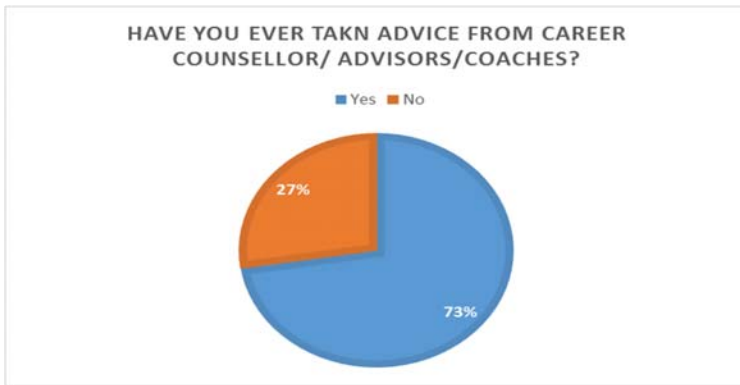


4- Is the Internet a Competent Source for Career Guidance?

53% of the employees agreed on the competency of the internet to be an efficient guide for career change or career advancement of a new job or occupation. 14% most likely perceived the internet as a source of career guidance.

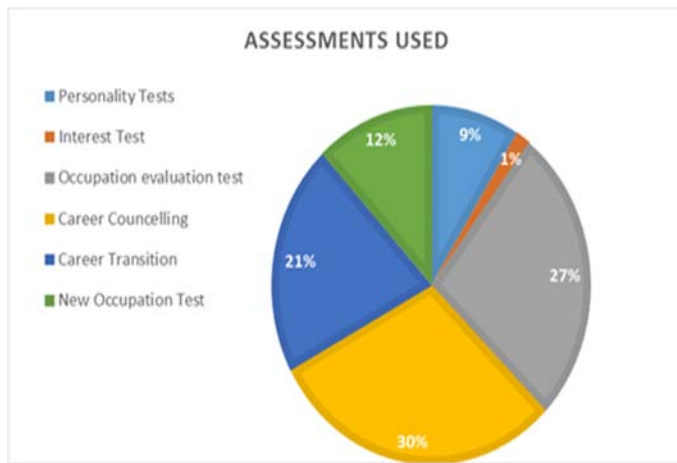


5- Have you ever felt the need for Professional Career Guidance? 39% of respondents always need of professional career guidance, while planning career switch or career advancement. Furthermore, 56.7% of the employees had one to one advice from career counselors for career advancement or career change, as well as 46.7% for career transition plan and coaching.

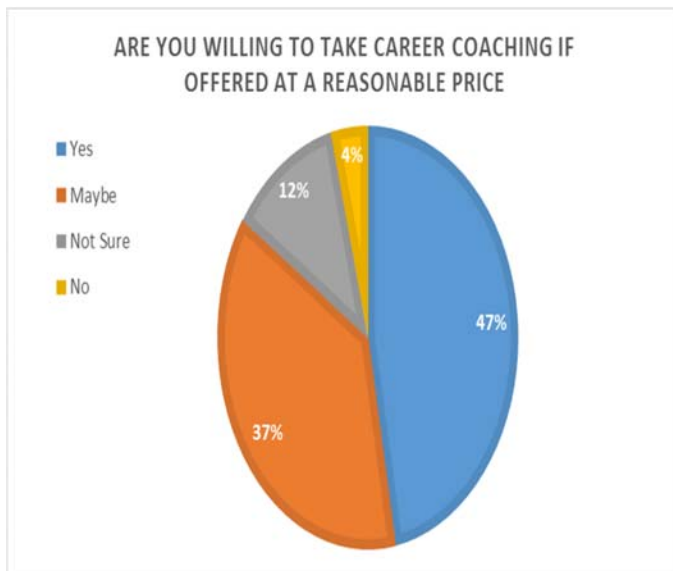


6- Have you ever taken advice from Career Counsellors/Advisors/Coaches?

73% of respondents seek professional advice from career counselors for career advancement or career change. While 27% never had this experience.



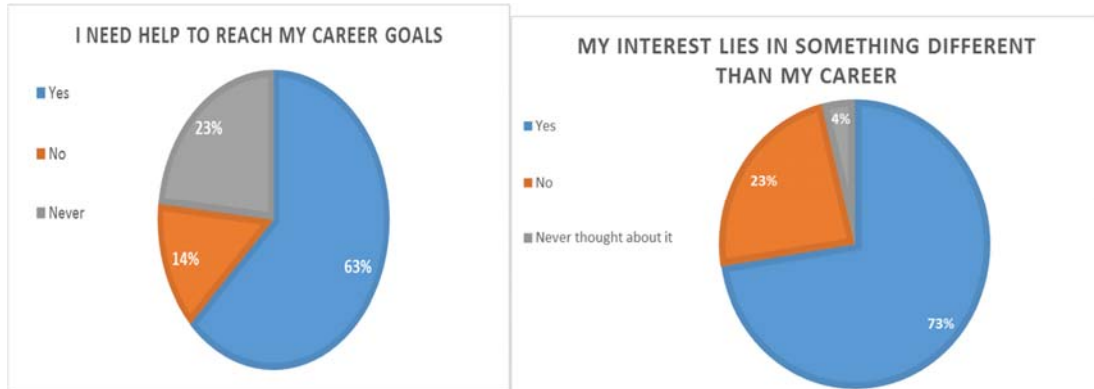
7- Assessments Used 30% of respondents used career counselling, 27% went through occupation evaluation test, 21% went through career transition, 12% had an assessment in their new occupation, 9% tried the personality assessment tests and 1% took other interest assessment tests.



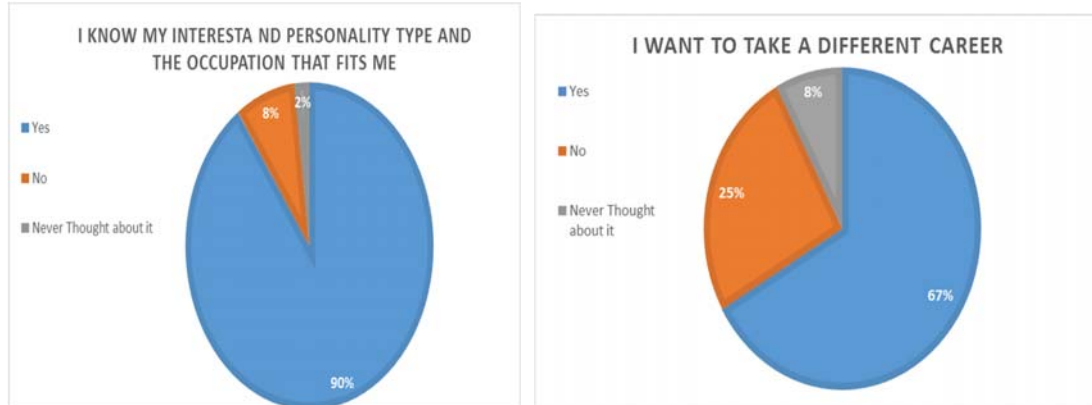
8- Are you willing to take a Career Coaching if offered at a reasonable Price?

47% are willing to take career coaching if offered at a reasonable price to be able to check its usefulness and impact with a minimal investment. 37% of the respondents may try, while 12% were not sure and 4% are not willing to try, this may be due a lack of awareness about coaching and its benefits and self-limiting beliefs.

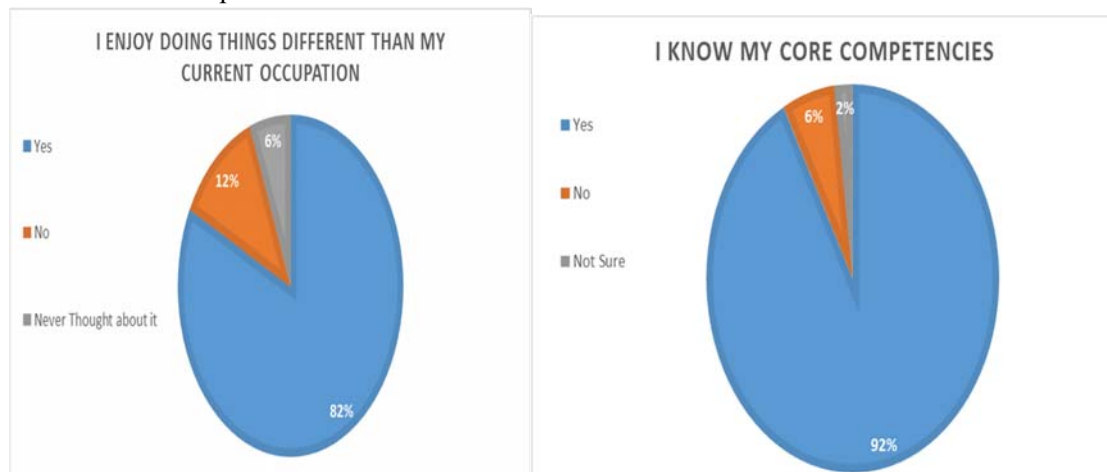
9- Do any of the below internal manifestations comes to your mind while planning your career?



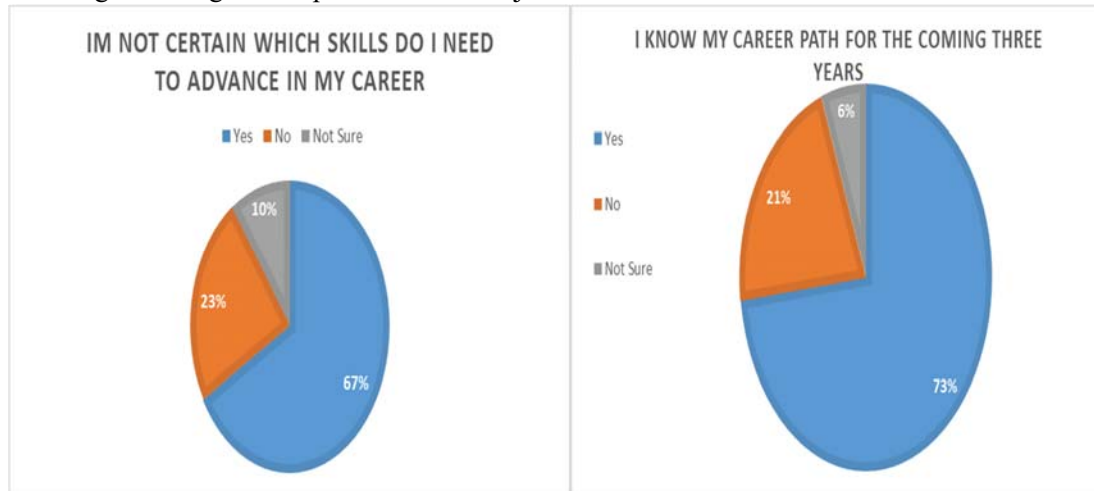
63% of respondents mentioned that they need help to identify and reach their career goals. While, 73% agreed that they have passion on something different than their current occupation.



90 % of the employees responded agreed that they have interest on their current job. Furthermore, 67% of the employees have high self-awareness by which they know their specific interests and personality type and what occupations are fits them. 67% of employees would like to take a different path in work.

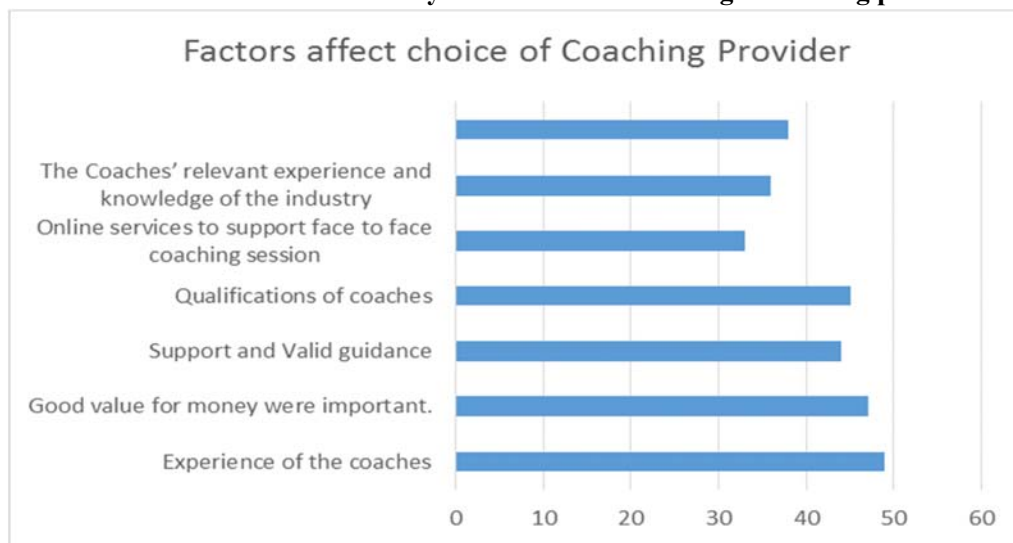


The majority of the employees 82% agreed that they enjoy doing things that are not related to their occupations representing, while 92% of the employees know their core competencies and their unique selling proposition which shows that the responded employees know where they fit resulting in having a clear path and set of objectives.

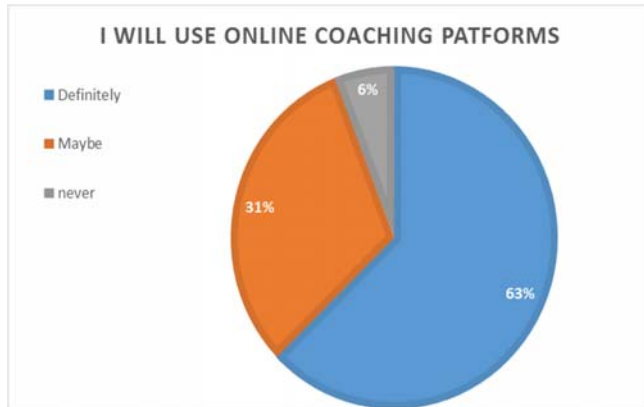


The majority of employees are not certain on what are the needed skills and learning that they must undertake to advance their career by which 67.7% agreed on that and 25.8% only agreed on the opposite. As per career path 73% of the employees are confident and aware of their career path for the next 3 years.

10- What factors would influence your decision in choosing a coaching provider?



When asked what factors would influence their decision in choosing a coaching provider, 48% of the respondents stated that the experience of the coaches and value for money were important with 47%. In addition, 48% agreed that coaches' qualifications are important. 43% stated that excellent client feedback and testimonials would be a factor that they would consider when choosing a coaching provider. Less important factors were the provision of online services to support face to face coaching session and specific knowledge of the industry.



11- If there is an online platform to guide you for personalized self-assessment, career advancement, career coaching, I feel inclined to use such services Employees agreed that they will definitely use an online career guidance and coaching platform with a response of 63% and 31% said they might use it and only 6% stated that they

will never use it. The rejection might be due to unawareness of the coaching benefits, technology platform medium, privacy issues, resistance to change and/or self-limiting beliefs and psychological barriers.

Conclusion and Future Recommendation

This research highlights the importance of coaching relationships in organizations at the Kingdom of Bahrain where it provides recommendations on how effective coaching can be established serving both individual employee requirements and organizational needs. The results indicate that some employees have high self-awareness resulting in having clear objectives and goals. It has been mostly agreed on the significance of coaching and mentoring in today's workplace yet some individuals are still resisting career guidance; especially for executive or senior employees who are certain that work and life issues cannot be kept entirely separate and hence abstain from opening up sessions with coaches and counselors.

The research suggests providing focused and specific coaching to employees and executives, where it is important to increase awareness on coaching and its benefits. It is imperative that HR managers implement a formal process of monitoring success and measuring return on investment with the development of a supportive coaching culture to facilitate managers to apply their coaching skills on a daily basis. The establishment of a common understanding of the coaching profession through shared codes of ethics and standards of practice.

There has been a limitation in access with employees and executives who actually went through coaching programs, and it was a challenge to measure effectiveness of and return on investment on coaching. Whereas the main focus of this research is measuring the employees' perception of coaching and professional development. It is suggested to conduct a longitudinal research with further investigations on coached individuals or groups including various age groups and managerial levels. Moreover, comparative analyses on the benefits, duties, challenges, perception and effectiveness of internal coaches versus external coaches can add value to the body of knowledge.

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