An Investigation of Executive Coaching Practice: West-East Integration

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Abstract: The purpose of this research study was to investigate the executive coaching practices and also to analyze the West-East integration by a coaching organization to a Corporate Setting in the Eastern Seaboard of Thailand. A qualitative case study research approach was applied to study this topic. The key participants were identified by the following criteria: 1) Being an engineering manager of the company and 2) Being a manager who attended the executive coaching practice. Observation, document review and in-depth interview were employed in data collection in order to answer the research questions. Data was collected from in-depth and semi-structured interviews from participants who was a coach from a coaching organization and the engineering managers who were coached as the key participants. The investigator used the concepts of psychology in terms of leadership development by self-development or individual competency and coach-training to generate the interview guide. Data was categorized into codes and the researcher used manual coding and interpretation. The findings were supported by the theory of HRD behavior performance assessment recommendation from Kirkpatrick's 4 Level learning evaluation model. The trustworthiness of this study was established by demonstrating the creditability of the methods and the findings. The researcher applied the triangulation method to discuss the findings from the executive coach and coachees of key participants; as well as the engineering managers and their subordinates to check against the data collected in order to ensure the credibility of the research study. The transferability of the data was established by providing the results of this research that would be useful for leaders or executives who are considering the implementation of an executive coaching program. The study will help leaders gain a vision and apply the knowledge of practice for developing individual competency and clearly see the way to their leadership development and job performance.

Keywords: Executive Coaching, Coach, Coachee, Coaching Organization, Coaching Practice, the West, the East, West-East integration, Effectiveness

Introduction

Believe it or not 'Coaching' can make things different. Coaching was established on both sides of the world, the eastern world and the western world. For the eastern world, coaching was first initiated over 2,500 years ago by 'the Lord Buddha', the founder of one of the sacred religions in this world, Buddhism. Buddha was a true coach because he never made people believe by the act of teaching; he has never forced people to believe in his words. Conversely, he advised in the Kalamasutta; the Buddhist doctrine on how to investigate things for the seekers of the truth (Soma, 1981). He advised us not to believe after we have

listened to things from someone, but to believe after observation and analysis. It could be agreed with reasons, it is conducive to the good and is beneficial to all, and then you could accept it and live up to it. Buddha just pointed the way, and people are the ones to find their own outcomes. He instructed people to realize by their own experiences and achievements. This relied on the Buddha quoted, "The mind is everything, what you think you become" (Buddha quotes, 2015) which is a similar way of coaching.

Nowadays, people from both sides of the world, the western world and the eastern world can see many successful coaching stories in terms of human resource development. Coaching is one of the training aspects, particularly for a good coach and the effectiveness of coaching. In summary, the aim of conducting this research study was to investigate the strategy of coaching of a coaching organization. Additionally, this research study also examined the essential features of executive coaching practice that reflect West-East integration. Lastly, the effectiveness of the executive coaching practice was discovered by assessing the triangulated feedback and learning evaluation.

Research Questions

To guide the investigation and subsequent data analysis in a corporate setting in the Eastern Seaboard of Thailand, the following research questions are postulated:

1. What is the coaching practice of a coaching organization?

2. What are the essential features of the executive coaching practice that reflects to West-East approaches?

3. How effective is the executive coaching practice?

Purposes of the Study

The purposes of this research was to investigate the coaching practice of the coaching organization in Thailand, specifically, the Western coaching practice and Eastern practice as well as assessing the coaching practice achievement, with three objectives as follows:

1. Explore executive coaching practice by a coaching organization to a corporate setting in the Eastern Seaboard of Thailand.

2. Examine the executive coaching practice West-East integration and process dimensions.

3. Evaluate the effectiveness of the executive coaching practice.

Literature Review

The literature related to the executive coaching practice for the purpose of exploring this executive coaching practice of a coaching organization. Before further study about the executive coaching practice of West-East integration, the primary differences and similarities must be distinguished between West-East cultures, life concepts and philosophies. Leadership was defined as the influencing processes of leaders and followers to achieve organizational performance (Wongprasit, 2013) regarding a West-East context for more understanding of both differences. The differences of Western and Eastern influences that reflect the coaching practice related to the integrated West-East approaches are covered.

Research Design & Strategy

This research used the case study as its research strategy, by selecting a typical case of executives at the line management level to be representatives of other cases. Moreover, Stake (1995) stated that the cases of interest in education and social service are people and programs particularly when each one was similar to other persons and programs in many ways and unique in other ways. From this perspective, this research conducted a case study by hearing the stories of the coach and his coaches, having reservations about something that they said and learning how they functioned in their ordinary pursuits and with a willingness to put aside her assumptions, while learning by observing this group of participants undertaking executive coaching practice.

A qualitative method was used to answer the research questions based on evidence drawn from the key participants who were the executive coach from a Coaching Organization and the engineering managers who attended the executive coaching program. The setting was at a Thai-Japanese Auto-Parts Engineering Corporation in the Eastern Seaboard of Thailand. The main research instrument was a semi-structured interview that started from developing the proposed interview guide based on advice from the coach of the Coaching Organization, and interview questions were obtained by reviewing the literature in the field.

Selection of Participants

The research process was similar to Creswell's (2003) practice. Begin with selecting the line managers to investigate the executive coaching practices and also to analyze the West-East integration by a coaching organization to a Corporate Setting in the Eastern Seaboard of Thailand. The key participants were identified by the following criteria: 1) Being an engineering manager of the company and 2) Being a manager who attended the executive coaching practice. Observation, document review and in-depth interview were employed in data collection in order to answer the research questions. The individual participants were:

1) West – East Coaching expert who was a coach from a coaching organization

2) Engineering line managers who were the engineering managers who were coached as the key participants.

The Study Setting

The setting of this study was a Thai-Japanese Auto-Parts Engineering Corporation in the Eastern Seaboard of Thailand and allowed the researcher to participate as well as observe the evidence for this executive coaching practice. The main reason to collect data from this Coaching Organization was the ethical consideration prior to the researcher studying about the strong business coaching experience specifically this Coaching Organization.

Data Collection

Data collected from the executive coaching practices of West-East integration were identified by: 1) reviewing documents by analytical synthesized coaching practices from the West approach and coaching from the East approach that mostly were from the Coaching Organization which created and provided the executive coaching practice process, assignment and activity, and 2) semi-structured interviews from both the Western and Eastern coaching experts. After that, the results from the data analysis from this activity were developed into a West-East coaching integration approaches framework, and used for further data analysis to answer the set of research questions.

Furthermore, the research findings are of a typical case study investigated by observing a group of line managers who were coached in a class to infer the details of executive coaching, complemented by in-depth interviews and using open-ended questions. This research used a group observation technique of the engineering line management level executives' coaching practice which was accepted as a case study by the permission of each engineering line manager of a Thai-Japanese Auto Parts Engineering Corporate Setting which was as a client of the Coaching Organization. From this point of view, the researcher chose the most appropriate method due to the participants by conducting a group observation rather than individual observations. Therefore, the researcher transcribed and coded the data into categories, using coding into computer files.

Data Analysis

The researcher managed the data by creating and organizing files of data, and identifying them with initial codes. She classified the selective executive coaching and development of executive coaching stories to interpret them, and then represented them by applying a conceptual model or theory. The researcher identified the investigation of this executive coaching practice based on the document review of why, and the similarities and differences of the Western and Eastern leaders due to the executive coaching practice that was related to the Coaching Organization that provided the research with the key participants – engineering line managers. After that, the researcher applied the results as evidence based on criticizing the executive coaching practice. By theories and practices from various research and ideas as the evidence based data analysis according to how the West and East contexts are different and the approach to their both effective integrated appropriateness. It is necessary to respond to the combination of both West and East perspectives due to the current situation with the world of diversity. Finally, once the assessment of the instrument or process was determined and implemented, the process of analyzing the results and reporting was carried out.

Ethical Issues

Before going into the field, the researcher had permission from the participants by an informed consent form which was developed for the participants to sign before they engaged in the research. The consent form acknowledges that participants' rights have been protected during data collection (Creswell, 2003). Nevertheless, this researcher's arrangements for storage of data needs to be specified, including that the participants were willing to give information and to be interviewed. All executive coaching practice interviews, as well as the related documents were kept in a locked cabinet. The researcher did not publish any information to identify the participants and kept a personal log whilst doing the research. Participants were given an identifying code and the names of participants will be kept confidential. The ethical issues in data collection, as well as the ethical strategies employed for use in this study strictly followed Burapha University's regulations.

Trustworthiness

This research's trustworthiness was established by demonstrating the credibility of the research methods, the investigator, and the findings because the validity and reliability of the qualitative research established by its trustworthiness (Lincoln & Guba, 1985). To carry out this qualitative research, the researcher kept a personal log and detailed reflexive notes throughout the study to increase the creditability of the research study. Again, to ensure trustworthiness the researcher checked all data to establish confidence in the findings by triangulating data from participants of the executive coaching practice with the views

of coaches and other company representatives on its effectiveness, such as in-class self-assessment based on objective assessment approaches.

Research Results and Interpretation

The executive coaching practice was clearly perceived as being effective for the engineering line managers' leadership development, but it is not an easy process, nor are results guaranteed. Although, coaching had been used successfully for its purposes, as perceived by the various stakeholders, particularly the organization benefits ultimately through the individual development of management, therefore, the researcher adapted this exploratory study to focus on Kirkpatrick's Level 1 evaluation or the reaction level of three Key Participants. However, it remains for future studies to investigate the other three levels of the executive coaching practice's effectiveness. The results, nevertheless, are remarkable, as indicated by the commitment of the managerial participants in this study to the future use of coaching. Finally, the effectiveness of the executive coaching practice is about people addressing fundamental and personal aspects of themselves. If it were easy, then they would have already done it. Giving attention to the range of factors that can influence the executive coaching practice's success improved the chances of achieving positive outcomes in the future.

From the results of the analysis, the researcher describes the investigation of the executive coaching practice of West-East integration as shown.
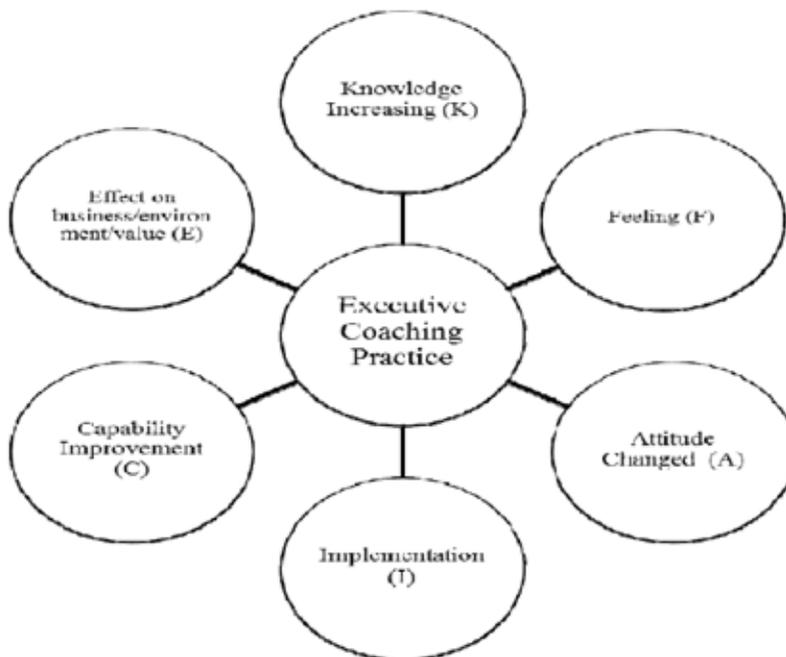

Figure1: Components of the Executive Coaching Practice West-East Integration Learning Evaluation

Source: Generated by the researcher (2015)

The coaching practice from a coaching organization

The executive coaching practice was designed to be a self-developmental tool to produce benefits for developing leadership and for facilitating organizational outcomes. The researcher analyzed the details of each activity then synthesized for the coaching model and came up with the synthesizing model that was grouped by 8 activity components as below.
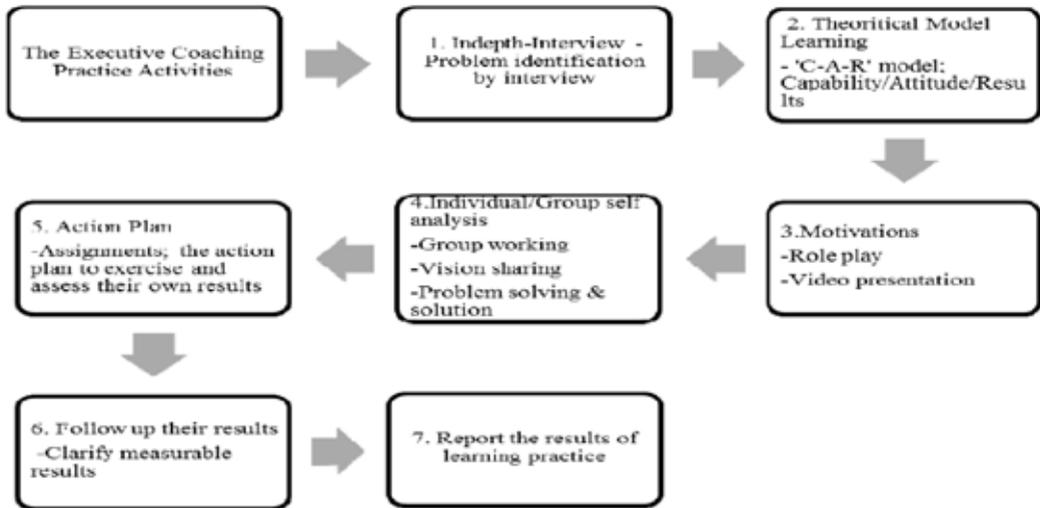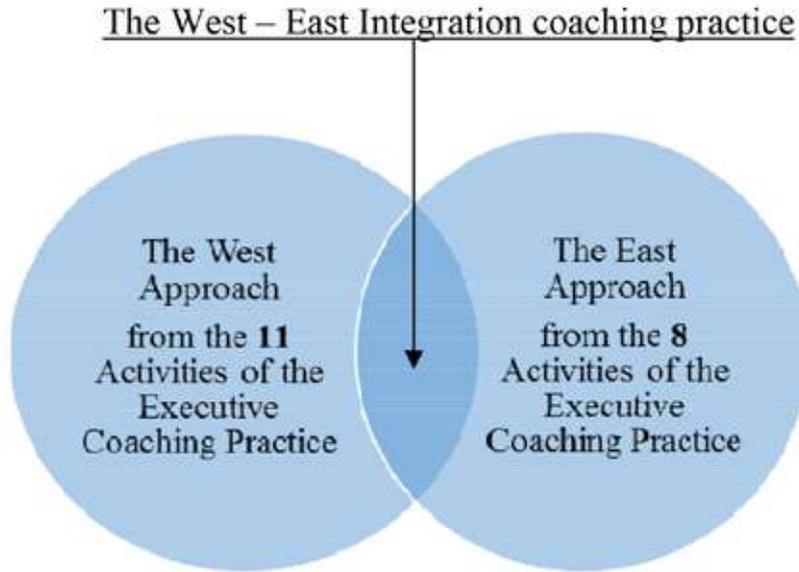

Figure 2: Coaching Practice Activity Synthesizing Model

Source: Generated by the researcher (2015)

Therefore, all key participants confirmed that the executive coaching practice may benefit and enhanced the opportunity for the engineering managers to increase and develop their leadership competencies. Their experience benefited from the professional coach who gave them insights from their leadership engineering background to their real work life in which they could get feedback and comments from their coach, peers and their subordinates to achieve leadership development success.

The essential features of the executive coaching practice that reflects the West-East approach

The research defined the East regarding to Nisbett (2003) who included China and the East Asian countries with strong Chinese influence; the West includes Western Europe. For our purposes here, America is included in the West and, because of similarities between Buddhist and Confucian philosophy, India is included in the East. Likewise, the researcher answered research question three by describing the results of the analysis from the research participants' activities of the executive coaching practice regarding the comparisons between East and West cultures. It was concluded with the West and East Coaching Integration visible figure that integrated the 11 West dominant coaching practice activities and the 8 East dominant coaching practice activities then the West-East Integration of 8 dominant coaching practice activities to be the center of both West and East approaches as shown below.

The West – East Integration coaching practice

Figure 3: The model of The West-East Integration coaching practice activities

Source: Generated by the researcher (2015)

The effectiveness of the executive coaching practice

The researcher applied the triangulation strategic method to measure the feedback from three groups of stakeholders: 1) Coach, 2) Coachees, and 3) Coachees' subordinates to check the answers and the results of the engineering line managers' executive coaching learning perceptions. At this step, this research study adapted Kirkpatrick's (1994) model of training evaluation for this executive coaching practice. It is currently the most widely used evaluation approach in organization training evaluations. It is also simple, flexible, and comprehensive, using four levels, reaction, learning, transfer of learning into the workplace and work results, to evaluate a training program's effectiveness. Recently, a fifth level emphasizing return on training investment (ROI) has been added by Philips (2002). Kirkpatrick's (1994) model was used as a theoretical tool to investigate the study's fourth research question as shown below in Table 1.

Table 1: Kirkpatrick's four-level model of training evaluation

Reaction/Satisfaction	Evaluate Reaction: Participants are happy with the training inputs.
Level 1 (Kirkpatrick)	
Did they like it?	

Learning Level 2 (Kirkpatrick) Did they learn?	Evaluate Learning: Participants remember the conceptual framework of leadership style and willing to change their behavior from this executive coaching West – East integration training practice.
Behavior/Transfer of learning Level 3 (Kirkpatrick) Did they use it?	Evaluate Behavior: People use what they know at work.
Work Results Level 4 (Kirkpatrick) Did it impact the bottom line?	Evaluate Results: Better leadership behaviors from the participants are the outcomes on the job over a period of time.

Source: Adopted from Kirkpatrick's four-level model of training evaluation (1994).

Specifically, the researcher adapted the six resources of the executive coaching West-East integration practice effectiveness to fit in with Kirkpatrick's four- levels of training and learning evaluation. The proposed six categories of reactions are as follows: 1) Knowledge increasing, 2) Feelings, 3) Attitude changes, 4) Implementation, 5) Capability improvement, and 6) Effect on business, environment and value.

Conclusion and Discussions

The conclusion of An Investigation of Executive Coaching Practice West – East Integration was considered to answer three research questions as follows:

A coaching organization designed the executive coaching practice to be a self-developmental tool to produce benefits for improving Managerial leadership competency to achieve the organizational objectives and goals by the analysis of each activity's details regarding to the synthesizing coaching model. Moreover, the research participants confirmed that the executive coaching practice West –East Integration developed their leadership competency from their executive coaching experiences that benefited from feedback and comments from their coach, peers and subordinates.

The essential features of the executive coaching practice that reflects the West – East approach were described from the research activities of the executive coaching practice regarding the comparisons' participants between West and East cultures that integrated the 11 West and the 8 dominant coaching to become the model of the West – East Integration Coaching Practice Activities.

The Effectiveness of the executive coaching practice was applied the triangulation strategic method to measure the feedback for the results. This research study, an investigation of Executive Coaching Practice: West-East Integration, focused on interpreting the

findings of previous and additional literature reviews to fit Kirkpatrick's theory of training and learning evaluation. According to Kirkpatrick (1994), there are six resources to be evaluated: Increasing Knowledge, Feelings, Changed Attitudes, Implementation, Capability Improvement, and Effect on the Business/Environment/Value.

The research evidence might or might not fit the theoretical model or the model might have to be modified to apply it to this context of the executive coaching practice in the Thai-Japanese Auto-Parts Engineering Corporate Setting in the Eastern Seaboard of Thailand. Additional factors or components, arising from the interview data, might be added to support the research questions or they might not be supported by the interview evidence. Comparison of the different factors influencing the six resources of the executive coaching practice evaluation was made according to the interpretations of the interviews in the research study. More details or informative categories of each of the six resources were added and explained with the support of additional references.

The researcher concludes the executive coaching practice in the following positive ways: 1) their attitudes were changed, 2) their leadership skills improved, 3) they implemented the coaching strategy in their company, 4) they had sound knowledge and understanding of coaching and leadership, and 5) they demonstrated their willingness to participate in this study and were willing to share their problems and challenges in the executive coaching practice. The researcher claimed that her study was a pioneering one, which serves a leading role in the research on professional executive coaching practice, specifically in a Thai engineering setting. Hopefully, this will be an impressive or inspired origin to other new coming researchers to further their interest in exploring executive coaching practice in other aspects or domains. Therefore, the researcher considers that this research study is a good start or example to increase our academic and professional knowledge of executive coaching practice West-East integration. Finally, the researcher accomplishes her study which has left her with a remarkable thoughtfulness about what are the influential features reflects the West and the East approach for the Thai context. Her findings were interpreted with the assistance of Kirkpatrick's (1976) theory of training and learning evaluation, which has given her new insights into the need for thorough evaluation of all training programs.

The Implications

Theoretical Implications: The results of the study have added to the theory of coaching approaches. In the past, there was the western approach that has been practiced among the human resource development practitioners. However, this study has introduced two other approaches, namely the Eastern approach and the West-East integration approach. It is expected that these two new approaches will catch the attention of HR practitioners in the future.

Implications for Practitioners*:* This study offers two new approaches to coaching for practitioners to apply and use accordingly.

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