

ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY

MIDDLE MANAGEMENT: EXPLORING THE PRACTICE OF WORKPLACE  
COACHING – A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY

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## **Approval of Dissertation**

The undersigned certify that they have read the dissertation entitled

### **MIDDLE MANAGEMENT: EXPLORING THE PRACTICE OF WORKPLACE COACHING – A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY**

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## **Abstract**

The purpose of this interpretivist grounded theory study was to understand how Canadian middle managers are coaching in today's disrupted organizational environments. The traditional genre of inductive grounded theory guided this research. The author conducted twenty semi-structured interviews with Canadian middle managers who conduct workplace coaching in cross-industry service organizations of varying sizes. Utilizing constant comparison data analysis central to grounded theory methodology, ten dominant study themes are outlined of which three are central to the resulting grounded theory implying a need to reposition the focus of workplace coaching. This requires a mindset shift and addition of mental health and wellness emphasis to the conventional performance, development, and growth focus in business coaching. The purpose of doing so is to influence middle management coaching practice to better achieve positive organizational outcomes and wellbeing within constant disruption.

Several important findings of how middle managers coach in constant disruption emerged from this study. Given constant disruption middle managers are engaged in increasing levels of complex emotional work. They do not feel well prepared skill wise to coach in disruption. Findings suggest conventional leadership and coaching theories are not aligned with addressing emotional work and constant disruption. Coaching tools and frameworks are not adequate to address organizational wellness nor integrated with mental health tools and resources. Lastly, participants expressed a need for boundary delineation between workplace coaching, workplace counseling, and clinical counseling in determining where their competence ends and the need for referral begins.

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This study contributes to extending leadership and workplace coaching bodies of knowledge by providing a grounded theory implying the need to reposition the focus of workplace coaching. Using lived experiences and presenting practical evidence of the challenges in addressing workplace emotions and stress offers an updated view of middle manager coaching practice within modern organizations. Findings contribute to advancing middle management coach training and development through the recommendation to integrate non-psychological counseling skills into workplace coaching to address boundary delineation between workplace coaching, workplace counseling, and clinical counseling. The purpose of doing so in a business coaching context is critical in framing transparency, expectation, and safeguarding professional conduct.

*Keywords:* workplace coaching, workplace counseling, middle management, middle management coaching, positive psychological coaching

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## **Definition of Terms**

### **Adaptive Leadership**

Adaptive leadership is a leadership style. It is defined by the leader's behaviors and relationship with followers which is central to leadership style, and is focused on motivating, mobilizing, and engaging followers to positively adapt (Arthur-Mensah & Zimmerman, 2017). Also defined as leaders changing their behavior as the situation before them is changing (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010).

### **Adaptive Work**

Adaptive work “requires determining what currently requires change while rethinking how organizations will adapt and thrive in a new environment” (Bagwell, 2020, p. 31) or in other words, adapting to needed change (Bagwell, 2020).

### **Compassionate Leadership**

Compassionate leadership is a leadership style defined as leading with the intention of being of benefit to others, having the wisdom to know what the right thing is, and having the courage to follow through doing it (Hougaard & Carter, 2022).

### **Covid-19 Pandemic**

The Covid-19 Pandemic was an ongoing, global coronavirus pandemic. The pandemic began in 2019 and was discovered in Wuhan, China.

### **Flourishing**

Flourishing is “a construct that encompasses the increase of positive emotion, engagement, meaning, positive relationships and accomplishment, involving an existence provided of a greater meaning” (Scorsolini-Comin, Fontaine, Koller & Santos, 2013, p. 664).

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## **Leadership**

Leadership is “the ability of an individual to influence, motivate, and enable others to contribute toward the effectiveness and success of the organization of which they are members” (House et al., 2004, as cited by Henderikx & Stoffers, 2022, p. 15).

## **Middle Managers**

Middle managers in this study are defined as managers within the middle layer of an organizational hierarchy, situated between top level management and front-line manager and employees. Their function is to translate organizational strategy into day-to-day actions and tangible results. They execute multiple roles within their diverse mandate, including leader, coach, and employee. Some are people leaders; some are individual contributors who coach horizontally with their peers and one-up with their senior leaders. (Lescano-Duncan, 2019).

## **Non-clinical Psychological Counseling Skills**

For this study, non-clinical psychological counseling skills are defined as soft skills required to deal with and support workplace related emotions, stress and the psychological wellbeing of self and others in context of business coaching in the workplace. Non-clinical refers to not providing diagnosis, treatment or care of mental health or physical health undertaken by trained medical practitioners in a clinical context.

## **Positive Emotions**

Positive emotions “. . . relate to past, present, and future events” (Seligman, 2004, as seen in Scorsolini-Comin et al., 2013, p. 667). Positive emotions linked to past events are “feelings of satisfaction, contentment, accomplishment, pride and serenity” (p. 667).

Emotions that connect to the present are, “calm, plenitude, joy, ecstasy, excitement and

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pleasure.” (p. 667). The positive emotions linked to the future are, “optimism, faith and hope” (p. 667).

### **Situational Leadership**

Situational leadership is a leadership style in which a leader adapts their behaviors (moves between task-oriented and relationship-oriented styles) to changing situations to influence followers (Ahmed Khan, Nawaz, & Khan, 2016).

### **Suffering**

Suffering refers to a “deeply existential issue that fundamentally changes people in indelible ways and for which there are no easy solutions” (Van Tongeren et al., 2021, p. 1).

### **Transformational Leadership**

Transformational leadership is a leadership style that focuses on change in individuals, in social systems and on creating “valuable and positive change in followers with the end goal of developing followers into leaders” (Langston.edu, n.d.).

### **Wellbeing**

Wellbeing broadly refers to feelings of satisfaction and happiness (Armitage, Wang, Davis, Bowes, & Haworth, 2021).

### **Workplace Coaching**

In context of this study, workplace coaching is defined as the coaching routines and activities middle management research participants currently execute in their workplaces to support their team members and peers in getting organizational work done. Further, my definition borrows from Wang, Lai, Xu, & McDowall’s (2021) study of psychologically informed coaching approaches, in which workplace coaching was framed as a focus on the coachees’ learning and development and psychological wellbeing, through facilitated, interpersonal interactions led by their coach.

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### **VUCA**

VUCA is an acronym created by the US Army War College in the late 1990's to describe the *volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous* multilateral world following the Cold War (Roslan, Syukri, & Zulhansi, 2020). It is commonly utilized in business as a term to reflect an increasingly unstable and rapidly changing business world with influential impact on organizational performance (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014; see also Iqbal, 2021; Roslan, Syukri, & Zulhansi, 2020).

### **Workplace Disruption or Disruption**

Workplace disruption or disruption refers to the uncertainty and impact of continuous and volatile change being experienced in organizations today.



## **Chapter 1. Study Introduction**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this study is to explore, understand, describe, and interpret the coaching practice of a select group of middle managers across Canada in a cross-section of organizations and service industry. Middle managers are defined in this study as vice presidents, senior directors, directors, senior managers, and managers who are situated between top level executives and front-line managers and employees in the middle of the organizational hierarchy and may lead organizational units or teams and who conduct workplace coaching as part of their role with their teams, peers, and one-up managers. Research reflects an emerging opinion that traditional management theory and leadership theory may no longer be adequate in addressing the volatility and complexity that organizations are facing in current disruptive environments. Coaching, which involves the concepts of guiding and advising employees in their performance, development, and growth (Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011; see also Chan & Burgess, 2015), plays a major role in the success of individuals and organizations (Quantic.edu, 2021, November 15). While the importance of coaching is evident in extant literature, such literature is prescriptive to what coaching should be (coaching constructs; skills and behaviors). Outside an existing large body of knowledge related to executive or professional coaching, little is written about how middle managers enact coaching practice in-situ (i.e., about coaching models deployed; patterns of skill and behaviors applied; how coaching effectiveness is assessed and measured). While it is acknowledged that coaching occupies/plays a critical role in individual and organizational success

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(Quantic.edu, 2021, November 15), literature on middle managers or more specifically, Canadian middle manager lived, in-situ coaching experiences is not abundant.

Further, concerns related to the psychological wellbeing of organizations and society in the context of exogenous shocks hitting the core of humanity, like the Covid-19 pandemic and global social movements (Van Tongeren et al, 2021), are evidenced in the literature, where impacts are still manifesting with unknown outcomes (Bussin & Swart-Opperman, 2021). For example, the potential for long-term impact on the psychological wellbeing of organizations and society due to the Covid pandemic fallout and disruption is thought to manifest 7-10 years into the future (American Psychological Association, 2022). Thus, the concern for the potential of long-term impact on the psychological wellbeing of organizations invites inquiry as to whether a need exists for non-clinical psychological counseling skills in a business coaching context. Such skills are defined as those enabling middle managers to deal with workplace related emotions, stress and the psychological wellbeing of self and others and does not include the diagnosis, treatment or care of mental health or physical health undertaken by trained medical practitioners in a clinical context.

This study is guided by the research question, “how do middle managers coach in today’s disrupted organizational environments?” To fulfill the purpose of this study, middle managers were selected from large Canadian service organizations as participants. Interviews, field notes, and analytic memos were used in data collection methods. Grounded theory methodology with its continuous comparative analysis (Glaser & Strauss, 2017) is used to focus on the participants’ lived, subjective

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experiences of how they deliver/enact their coaching practice in-situ in today's disruptive organizational environments.

Study outcomes are anticipated to have importance to middle management practice, theory, and policy. Findings are expected to illuminate an explanatory theory anchored in underlying research data related to how select middle managers are coaching (i.e., applying skills and behaviors, type of coaching) in today's disruption and whether there is a need to integrate non-psychological counseling skills into business coaching. Study findings may be utilized to shape or reshape middle management coaching practice to help leaders, employees and organizations thrive in today's disrupted organizational environments and support leader led workplace (psychological) wellness.

### **Background Context**

More than three years have passed since the global Covid-19 pandemic and the world continues to struggle with conditions characterized by volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA). VUCA is one way to explain and set the context to the environmental background in which organizations operate. The VUCA acronym was created by the US Army War College and from a business perspective came into use in the late 1990's to describe the volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous multilateral world following the Cold War (Roslan, Syukri, & Zulhansi, 2020, also see Kraaijenbrink, 2022, June 22). It is used in business as a term to reflect an increasingly unstable and rapidly changing business world with influential impact on organizational performance (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014; see also Iqbal, 2021; Roslan, Syukri, & Zulhansi, 2020).

An alternative perspective that can be used to explain and set the context to the environmental background in which organizations operate is represented in the literature

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by the work of Jamais Cascio, a futurist (Cascio, 2020, April 29, also see Kraajienkbrink, 2022, June 22). Cascio suggests that the VUCA model is obsolete in understanding the disruptive world as the very things described by the VUCA model, have always been in the world (Cascio, 2020, April 29). He suggests BANI, which means Brittle, Anxious, Non-Linear, and Incomprehensible, is a model to understand the reality of our world in context of disruption versus how it may be perceived. In other words, the world has always been in a state of fragility (brittle), uncontrollable, (anxious), unpredictable (non-linear), with little to no understanding of what is happening (incomprehensible) (Cascio, 2020, April 29). The author suggests people may now be realizing because of continued disruption that their perception of the world has been the opposite. The world may have been perceived as being strong, as people having a level of control, there being some predictability, and having some level of understanding of what is happening. The BANI model shifts the focus from the continued state of the world to recognizing the perception one may have had about the world does not align with its longstanding reality (Cascio, 2020, April 29; also see Kraajienkbrink, 2022, June 22). Cascio (2020, April 29) suggests that we have always been presented with and dealt with disruption, however in recent times how disruption is presenting, consuming all that we know, and the stress impact it is having is in ways we have never comprehended before.

Environmental factors like globalization, economic recession, emerging and proliferating technology, changing world demographics (Iqbal, 2021), and increasing climate change anxiety (Abd-El-Aal & Corkett, 2022) continue to create the VUCA context, an “unpredictable change” that presents organizational challenges and opportunities for leaders (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014, p. 312). There are two views on this

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concept offered by Bennett and Lemoine (2014); first, a dominant view of chaos and unpredictability and second, a view that looks for the opportunities amongst the chaos. These authors suggest how leaders identify and respond to problems can influence organizational performance if they do not fully understand the problem and its unpredictable nature. For example, trying to solve complex problems by addressing the challenge of ambiguity can result in misusing precious resources (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014).

Further, there is evidence that volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity may impact strategy processes. For example, Roslan, Syukri and Zulhansi (2020) suggest substantial challenges exist for organizations related to leadership, strategy, and planning. Raghuramapatrani and Kosuri (2017) describe core activities essential to driving organizational performance like strategic planning as “exercises in futility” (p. 1), perhaps because the underpinning assumptions of strategic planning are based on static future environments, which do not align to the rapidly changing reality of the actual business environment (Sparks & McCann, 2021).

Lawrence (2013) suggests the focus and leadership development processes need to change to support leader effectiveness in a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous world. There is a suggestion that organizational adaptation is vital for preserving and enhancing organizational performance during environmental change as suggested in the work of Bennet and Lemoine (2014). These authors assert that “research has consistently shown organizations that adapt themselves to ‘match’ environmental change perform at substantively higher levels, whereas firms that maintain past structures and processes in the face of a changing business environment are less effective” (p. 315).

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Further compounding the organizational world of volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity are conditions related to the Covid-19 pandemic. The pandemic caused a global health crisis and economic distress, resulting in severe impacts our world had not seen since the 2008 financial crisis (Iqbal, 2021) or even further, the Second World War (Gurbuz & Ozkan, 2020). Its constraints and unpredictability hyper-accelerated the volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous organizational environment. For example, organizations globally changed their operating models to digitally adapt, executing multi-year business strategy within weeks of the onset of the pandemic (Gurbuz & Ozkan, 2020). The pandemic pushed new ways of working, flexible organizational structures, and challenged leaders to deal with problems in new ways (Gurbuz & Ozkan, 2020).

Couple the pandemic fallout with other external environmental factors, such as global social movements (e.g., Black Lives Matter; Indigenous Issues), continued technology proliferation (e.g., digital technology platforms, chatbots, GPTchat, data usage), climate change anxiety (Abd-El-Aal et al., 2022) and a hybrid work environment, and the collective impact continues to create unprecedented internal organizational turmoil including increased workplace stress along with emotional and adaptive challenges for both leaders and followers (Chong, 2022). Further, climate change has become a critically important concern inside and outside of organizations and can be a contributor to stress as Abd-El-Aal et al. (2022) suggest through study findings on climate change anxiety. The authors define climate anxiety as “. . . excessive stress and worry about one’s ability to survive amid climate change” (p. 610) and discuss how it can result in individual’s experiencing climate anxiety related mental health issues (Abd-

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El-Aal et al., 2022).

Increasing stress and mental health impacts incurred by both leaders and employees is evident at work and in our personal lives, which are no longer delineated by clear boundaries. Thinking of stress and mental wellbeing in the work context of middle managers' coaching practice, has/have such conditions influenced the evolution of coaching to encompass a thread of non-clinical psychological counseling (i.e., managers dealing with the emotions, psychological wellbeing of self and others) given the stress and impact of the accelerated environmental disruption in which we are currently living and working? There appears to be a trend that places emotions at the center of coaching issues and realization that one's emotional state can influence the view of self and others (Bowman et al., 2013). The role middle managers play and the skills they utilize in this role to support and coach employees in navigating ongoing disruption seems of critical importance to organizational success.

Given the potential emotional and stress related challenges employees may encounter, in the context of today's disruptive organizational environments and the subsequent potential long-term impact on the psychological wellbeing of organizations and society (American Psychological Association, 2022) , this study focuses on three specific objectives: 1) understanding how select Canadian middle managers are coaching in today's disrupted organizational environments; 2) exploring the role emotional intelligence competence and the increasing need of non-clinical psychological counseling has within a business coaching model context; and 3) identifying the boundary between business coaching and non-clinical psychological counseling.

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### **Statement of Problem**

Concerns related to the psychological wellbeing of organizations and society in the context of exogenous shocks hitting the core of humanity like the Covid-19 pandemic and global social movements (Van Tongeren et al., 2021) are evident in the literature. Impacts continue to manifest with unknown outcomes (Bussin & Swart-Opperman, 2021). The potential for long-term impact on the psychological wellbeing of organizations and society because of the Covid pandemic fallout and disruption is thought to potentially manifest for 7- 10 years into the future (American Psychological Association, 2022). This is a concerning and critical societal problem and serves as the compelling driver of this research study. Also compelling is the potential to fill literature gaps, refresh management theory, and shape or reshape business coaching models relative to this phenomenon with an intent to influence positive future outcomes such as middle managers being enabled to effectively address increased workplace stress, nurture positive adaptability of self and others and foster organizational psychological wellbeing within the disrupted world we find ourselves in.

Notably, research reflects an emerging opinion that traditional management theory and leadership theory may no longer be adequate in addressing the volatility and complexity organizations are facing in current disruptive environments. Sparks and McCann (2021) note that “traditional management theory may not address the volatile change caused by a rare event such as the pandemic, which affects the future of work” (p. 23). Yukl and Mahsud (2010) assert that prescriptive universal leadership theory such as transformational leadership fails “. . . to capture the complexity of leadership processes in modern organizations” (p. 83). Oduol (2021) writes that “leader-centric strategies



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designed for the industrial age are unsuited to dealing with the turbulence in 21st-century organizations, where uncertainty and ambiguity are the norms” (p. 19). Oduol offers an opinion that adaptive leadership serves as “. . . an alternative approach for responding to the turbulence associated with the Covid-19 pandemic” (on teaching and learning within university contexts in Kenya) (Oduol, 2021, p. 19).

### **Purpose**

The purpose of this study is to explore, understand, describe, and interpret the coaching practice of 20 Canadian middle managers working in varying sizes of companies in the service industry (cross-industry). The study focuses on the lived, subjective experiences of how select Canadian middle managers of select service organizations deliver their coaching practice in-situ in today’s disruptive organizational environments. Given the complex and dynamic nature of the organizational middle layer and its uniqueness to each organization, I define my middle management coaching focus as follows.

### **Middle Management Coaching**

In this research I explore middle managers’ practice of workplace coaching in today’s disrupted organizational environments. I examine the experience of middle managers in varying sizes of Canadian service organizations, defined as vice presidents, senior directors, directors, senior managers, and managers who are situated between top level executives and front-line managers and employees and lead organizational units or teams (Lescano-Duncan, 2019). Their function is to translate organizational strategy into day-to-day actions and tangible results. They execute multiple roles within their diverse mandates, including leader, coach, and employee (Lescano-Duncan, 2019).

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Coaching in the workplace is a core part of a middle manager's responsibility (Misiukonis, 2018), covering many different topics (see Table 1 Types of Coaching, pp. 21-22) and depending on the role of the coachee, many different coaching topics/discussions will arise. Instead of examining specific coaching topics, I examine the workplace coaching practice of my middle management participants defined by the perspective of the coaching routines and activities they currently lead and facilitate (or not) to support their team members in getting organizational work done and in guiding and advising employees in their performance, development, and growth (Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011; see also Chan & Burgess 2015).

I also examine workplace emotions/emotional work that middle managers enact when leading, coaching, and navigating change (Lescano-Duncan, 2019) in a disrupted environment. Izard (2001) suggests that emotions can affect adaptive behavior. Leaders deal with adaptive change in disruptive environments and are “asking and expecting individuals to change their mindset and behaviors to align with new operating models, new ways of working, in new environments where boundaries between work and personal no longer exist” (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Research also shows having positive emotions and hope helps humans thrive (Boniwell et al., 2014; Kaufmann, 2006).

Furthermore, I examine the role emotional intelligence competence (using emotions of self and others to inform positive action) (Goleman, 1995) within coaching and whether there is a need to integrate non-clinical psychological counseling within a business coaching model context. My interest in doing so is related to understanding the potential emotional and stress related challenges employees may encounter, in the context of today's disruptive organizational environments and the subsequent potential

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long-term impact on the psychological wellbeing of organizations and society (American Psychological Association, 2022; Bussin & Swart-Opperman, 2021; Van Tongeren et al., 2021).

Definitions of coaching versus counseling are clearly outlined in the literature. Rosha (2013) describes coaching as focusing on “mental growth” (p. 124) and on present and future achievements, whereas “counseling deals with an individual’s remedial problems and mental health” (p. 124). Hence the need to define what it means for middle managers to be involved in counseling in a business coaching context is critical in framing transparency, expectation, and safeguarding professional conduct. I define this agency as having counseling skills that would enable middle managers to deal with workplace related emotions, stress and the psychological wellbeing of self and others. This practice does not include the diagnosis, treatment or care of mental health or physical health undertaken by trained medical practitioners in a clinical context. Further managers should know and understand their own coaching competence to effectively recognize when to refer their coachee to other support resources, people, and interventions (Bachkirova et al., 2018). Identifying or elucidating the boundary between workplace coaching and counseling (non-clinical, clinical) through my research I assert, is critical to the effective and appropriate application of each in a workplace coaching context.

This study uses an inductive, qualitative research design and grounded theory methodology to focus attention on participants’ coaching practice and how their “subjective experiences can be abstracted into theoretical statements about causal relations between the actors” (Suddaby, 2006, p. 635). The grounded theory

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methodology provides “practical guidelines that would enable the rigorous construction of theories relating to social process from raw data” (Dunne, 2011, p. 112).

I discuss my exploration, analysis, and interpretation of rich, in-depth descriptions of select Canadian middle manager lived coaching practice experiences. Findings elaborate on the role of emotional intelligence and the increasing need of non-clinical psychological counseling within managers’ coaching practice, given the emotional and stress related challenges employees are encountering in the context of a disruptive organizational environment. There are many opportunities for future research related to middle management workplace coaching practice based on feedback from study participants and the data collection of this study (this is discussed further in Chapter 5, Future Research, pp. 186-189).

The data collection regarding the middle manager lived coaching practice experience, is defined with the following boundaries and perspectives of the middle manager participants:

- How middle managers have been conducting and experiencing coaching within their organizational disruptive environments.
- How middle managers are making sense of their experiences related to enacting their coaching role in relationship to work contexts characterized by disruption.
- How middle managers relate on the role of emotional intelligence and the need for non-clinical psychological counseling within a business coaching model to support self and others in successfully navigating the disruption.

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### **Researcher Claims and Research Importance**

I believe in the primacy of emotions in the workplace. The primacy of leading with emotion, the reading of emotion in others and the harnessing of emotional productivity (Goleman, 1995) as means to nurturing workplace psychological wellness. I assert the prevalence of increasing workplace disruption and workplace stress demands a shift in coaching awareness, the acquisition of non-clinical psychological counseling skills and a greater capability need for emotional intelligence competence. I also assert middle managers require a combination of non-clinical psychological counseling skills and business coaching skills to effectively enable employee adaptability to positive change in today's disrupted workplace and to effectively lead workplace psychological wellness. Coaching, counseling, emotional intelligence, and existential positive psychology, defined as utilizing personal growth from life's joy and suffering (Sanchez-Ruiz et al., 2021), are key anchors in nurturing workplace resilience and psychological wellness, supporting positive outcomes, and in building a positive human future.

This research is a crucial step towards advancing academic and practitioner knowledge and literature related to middle management coaching and in potentially mitigating knock-on effects from disruption to middle manager coaching practice, as well as to individual and organizational performance and psychological wellness. In conducting this research, I will potentially "make discoveries contributing to the development of empirical knowledge" (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 14) related to business coaching in today's disrupted organizational environments.

I will uncover potential opportunities to incorporate lived coaching experience and non-clinical psychological counseling skills into future management theory and

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frameworks for coaching intervention and practical implementation. Further, findings of this study will bear future research implications important for practice, theory, and scholarly research, discussed further in Chapter 4. Grounded Theory Findings and Discussion, and in Chapter 5. Study Limitations and Implications to Practice and Theory.

### **Research Study Context and Research Question**

Exogenic shocks such as the Covid-19 pandemic have exacerbated and accelerated environmental disruption in organizations around the globe. Coupled with other external disruptive factors such as global social movements, continued technology proliferation, hybrid work (Iqbal, 2021) and climate change (Abd-El-Aal et al., 2022) these factors pose emotional and adaptive challenges for leaders and followers at work and in their personal lives (Chong, 2022). As such, I have interest in exploring the research question that guides this study, which is, “how are middle managers coaching in today’s disrupted organizational environments?” and thus, the following.

First, I have interest in exploring the lived experiences of how middle managers are coaching in today’s disrupted organizational environments, how they make meaning of, and act related to their workplace coaching practices. Second, I have interest in exploring the role of emotional intelligence and the need for non-clinical psychological counseling in business coaching, given the dynamic challenges managers and employees experience in context of disruption. Finally, I have interest in the role middle managers play in enacting emotional and adaptive work through their coaching practices to support employees and organization wellness. Through my guiding research question, I aim to seek answers to the following:

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1. How has middle management business coaching practice and the coaching soft skills in today's disrupted work environments shifted from conventional views in the literature?
2. Is there a need for non-clinical psychological counseling skills to be integrated within a business coaching context, given employees' experience of emotional challenges in today's disrupted workplace?
3. How substantial/effective is emotional intelligence in current business coaching practice at addressing middle management coaching competence and organizational wellness? Is a higher level of emotional intelligence required? Do Canadian middle managers require development of a higher level of emotional intelligence? What is needed to ensure Canadian middle managers develop such emotional intelligence?

### **Organization of Dissertation**

I organize and discuss this dissertation in the following sections. Chapter 2 provides a literature review. Chapter 3 describes the research methodology, research design, and data analysis. Chapter 4 details the study findings illustrated with lived experience quotes from participants, discussion of what the findings mean in context to existing research and literature, and my resulting grounded theory development. Implications of study findings to practice and theory along with a future research agenda follow in Chapter 5. Study Limitations and Implications to Practice and Theory, pp. 182-192.

## **Chapter 2. Literature Review**

### **Introduction**

This chapter provides an overview of the literature that underpins this research proposal and is organized as follows. The chapter begins with an explanation of the role, placement, and use of the literature review in context of my chosen research design of grounded theory, which will be discussed in further detail in Chapter 3. Methodology. The approach I use to conduct the supporting literature review is then next examined, followed by an examination of literature that provides context for the study, along with examples of relatable extant grounded theory studies. These sections led me to my guiding research question. To close this chapter, I discuss relevant literature gaps and supporting theoretical perspectives and conceptual frameworks considered and supporting rationale for this study.

### **Role and Placement of Literature Review in Grounded Theory**

While a full discussion and rationale for my methodological choice is contained in Section 3, Methodology, I start this chapter by noting the role, place, and use of the literature review in grounded theory research (Dunne, 2011). The research methodology of grounded theory can be defined as, “. . . developing sociological theory from textual data to explain social phenomena” (Hennink & Kaiser, 2021, p. 1).

The objective of a grounded theory study is “to generate theory from the data or modify or extend existing theory” (Bloomberg & Velope, 2019, p. 101). Typical engagement with literature prior to data collection is characteristic of most inquiry strategies; however, in their foundational work in 1967, Glaser and Strauss were adamant that a literature review is not undertaken in the early stages of grounded theory study,



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given ... grounded theory data collection processes, “. . . the desire to allow categories to emerge naturally from the empirical data during analysis, uninhibited by extant theoretical frameworks and associated hypotheses” (p. 114). Glaser and Strauss’s 1967 views caused tension however, with traditional views of literature review being conducted early in the research process (Dunne, 2011).

While over time, Glaser continued to hold his original position on the subject, it is important to note that he was not suggesting a literature review was not required. Rather, he was positioning it as a better, pragmatic fit found later in the grounded theory research process to ensure efficient use of the researcher’s time and effort and in better support of the actual research conducted. In other words, conducting the literature review later in the research process was thought to create less distraction for the researcher in attending to the study’s data collection processes. As grounded theory became popularized in qualitative research, the debate turns from being about whether existing literature should be consulted, to the timing of when it should be, and the degree of comprehensiveness required. Strauss eventually parts from Glaser with collaborating fellow scholar Juliet Corbin, and Strauss’s view shifts toward supporting a more traditional view of the researcher’s early engagement of the literature review when using the grounded theory methodology. (Dunne, 2011)

Two fundamental points from Dunne (2011) are utilized in my grounded theory study. A first is to be mindful of how to “. . . make proper use of previous knowledge” (p. 117); and a second point is to “. . . be mindful of how extant ideas may be informing” research (p. 117). I align with the consensus in the literature, as noted by Dunne (2011), that researchers can conduct an early literature review without imposing external

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frameworks and theories on data collection processes. Benefits of doing so include providing an initial understanding of both historical and current conversations in the literature; and supporting reflexive preparation to join the scholarly conversation (Dunne, 2011).

This author suggests given the complex debate and multiple perspectives of the role and placement of the literature review in grounded theory, that “. . . each researcher must make an informed and justifiable decision regarding how and when extant literature will be employed in a grounded theory study” (Dunne, 2011, p. 118). A best practice in making this decision is through a complete review of both grounded theory methodology and how other researchers have accomplished the methodology (Dunne, 2011).

As such, for my grounded theory study, I propose an early literature review prior to data collection for the following reasons. First, in positioning a limited literature review at the start of the research study, I support my dissertation by illuminating the research background context, the importance of my research problem, and compelling reasons to conduct my study. Second, conducting an early literature review is an effective way to bracket researcher biases. Borrowing from Dunne’s (2011) approach, as they explain and take in their own grounded theory study, I undertake deeper engagement with extant literature when and where needed throughout the research study to ensure my research progress maintains appropriate development and pace as guided by the application of my research methodology.

### **Literature Review Approach**

The research literature review for this dissertation was initiated with a broad, open-ended search for relevant sources including academic papers, practitioner articles

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and web-based materials. I use several data bases to select relevant articles, including Google Scholar and the Athabasca University Library and its licensed data bases including ABI Inform Global, EBSCO, and ProQuest. Examples of the broad array of search terms I use in my literature search include *middle management business coaching, counseling, emotional intelligence, workplace wellness, grounded theory, VUCA, resilience, HERO, positive psychology, existential positive psychology, workplace emotions*. I retrieve additional articles and books through an extensive review of reference lists of relevant articles I select and through recommendations made by all members of my Supervisory Committee. I also use and analyze related secondary data, such as extant grounded theory studies on related topics, as appropriate.

I review select materials and a wide variety of theory from across management, leadership, and psychology disciplines of study. I analyze the literature with several criteria. First, the literature chosen needs to align with the nature and context of my research question. Second, the literature needs to be published in credible academic journals, rated A\*, A, B, or combination thereof, according to The Australian Business Deans Council's (ABDC) Journal Quality List (2019). Given the long history of middle management literature, I isolate publication dates for supporting literature to the past 60 years, capturing both researchers' foundational work and well-known disciplinary scholars (Balogun, 2003; Corbin & Strauss, 1995; Floyd & Wooldridge, 1992, 1997; Glaser & Strauss, 2017; Goleman, 1995; Mantere, 2008; Rouleau & Balogun, 2011; Seligman, 2007, 2010, 2018, 2019; Wooldridge & Floyd, 1990; Wooldridge, Schmid, & Floyd, 2008). Given the nature of the background context to my research of the continual disruption in organizational environments and the emerging narrative of the future

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impact on psychological wellness (American Psychological Association, 2022), I isolate publication dates of 2020-onward, to capture the most recent, relevant articles to complete this literature review.

### **Literature Review**

The following literature review is critical in understanding why coaching is an important task within management practice. There is a strong consensus in the literature that reinforces the importance of coaching; that managers must continuously develop and perform coaching in their everyday management practice; and that coaching is the responsibility of managers across the hierarchy levels (Misiukonis, 2011).

For this research, I focus on the context of workplace coaching. I define workplace coaching as the coaching routines and activities my middle management research participants currently execute in their workplaces to support their team members and peers in getting organizational work done and in guiding and advising employees in their performance, development, and growth (Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011; see also Chan & Burgess 2015). Further, I borrow from Wang et al.'s (2021) study of psychologically informed coaching approaches, in framing workplace coaching as coach led and facilitated interpersonal interactions with a focus on the coachees' personal and professional learning and development and psychological wellbeing. Also, given coaching is a social process, I remain mindful during research of the organizational dynamics and the relationship between the coachee, the coach, and the organization which can influence the coaching approach, process, and coaching outcomes (Wang et al., 2021; also see Mills & Murgatroyd, 1991). This is further discussed in Organizational Rules, pp. 62-65.

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## **Coaching, Mentoring, Counseling and Therapy: Differences and Boundaries?**

Workplace coaching is a young area of academic study with coaching research studies documented as starting in 1937; however, research progress has been slow, being documented up to the 1990's, where the majority of the documented studies are completed through to 1999 (Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011; also see Schutte & Steyn, 2015). There are many types of coaching in organizations and mainstream society and yet no agreed upon coaching definition exists in the academic literature.

There are different approaches and types of coaching discussed in the literature and practiced in organizations. For example, coaching can be applied to individuals, peers, teams, and groups of people (Wang et al., 2021). Types of coaching common in the literature and practice, include life coaching, workplace coaching, psychological coaching (Wang et al., 2021) and sport coaching (Carson et al., 2019). More specifically, within organizations workplace coaching can focus on topics such as, but not limited to, employee learning, career development, risk management, performance management and regulatory compliance (see below, Table 1 Types of Coaching). Coaching can be performed internally by leaders or peers within the organizational hierarchy and by external coaches hired to coach top line or developing executives (Wang et al., 2021).

**Table 1**

### *Types of Coaching*

<b>Type of Coaching</b>	<b>Description</b>
Life Coaching	Coaching that addresses skill and capability in life.
Workplace Coaching	Coaching that addresses employee learning, development, and work life (Wang et al., 2021).
Psychological Coaching	Coaching that addresses psychological wellbeing (Wang et al., 2021).
Wellness Coaching	Coaching that addresses mental and physical wellness.

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Sport Coaching	Coaching utilized to build skill and capability related to playing sports, the performance of both individuals and the team (Carson et al., 2019)
Employee Learning	Coaching to build skill, capability, and enablement related to employee’s role and development in role.
Career Development	Coaching to build skill, capability, and career path.
Risk Management	Coaching to ensure employees adhere and comply with organizational risk policies (manage, reduce, mitigate organizational risk).
Performance Management	Coaching to improve employee performance within their role.
Regulatory Compliance	Coaching to ensure employees adhere and comply to the policy and organizational processes guided by government or regulatory bodies.

Adapted from Wang et al. (2021) and my professional coaching experience

Broad definitions offered in the literature describe coaching as a relationship-based interaction between a coach and a coachee, with a coach’s focus on the coachee setting and achieving goals and on their performance, growth, and development (Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011; see also Chan & Burgess 2015). Coaching is a combination of activities focused on discussion, feedback, advice, and development between the coach and coachee (Chan & Burgess, 2015).

Many scholars question the difference between coaching, mentoring, counseling and therapeutic intervention or therapy. In research investigating coaching in contrast to other interventions, Rosha (2013) described coaching as being focused on “mental growth” (p.124) and on present and future achievements. Rosha described mentoring as like coaching, but typically focused on role modelling and experiential advice provided by a senior mentor, whereas “counseling deals with an individual’s remedial problems and mental health” (p. 124). According to Rosha (2013), therapy differs from coaching, counseling, and mentoring in that therapy “deals with individuals’ remedial problems and

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mental health” (p. 124), who seek “relief from psychological and physical symptoms” (p. 124).

There is also a distinction needed between the boundaries of coaching and counseling. An articulated difference does exist between coaching and counseling; however, in practice it is difficult to delineate the boundaries and as evidenced in research, these boundaries are blurred (Bachkirova & Baker, 2018). Some researchers call for clear boundaries to be defined, while others suggest that in a trusted relationship as that between coach and coachee, boundaries might be contextual and based on the coach’s ability and knowledge to help with a coachees’ issue being discussed or problem being solved (Bachkirova et al., 2018).

In their article focused on exploring boundaries between coaching and counseling, Bachkirova et al. (2018) illuminated that in coaching work within organizations, coaches deal with “the whole person” (p. 2). In other words, the coach is not focused just on work-related issues, as some coaching issues are effects of personal problems outside the workplace (Bachkirova et al., 2018, see also Walton, 2021). These authors highlight that mental health issues are hard to diagnose and strongly suggest business coaches focus on their own coaching competencies so they will know their own limits which will help them to effectively recognize when they need to refer their coachee(s) to other support resources, people, and interventions (Bachkirova et al., 2018). Further, in their critical review of coaching research, Passmore & Fillery-Travis (2011) reinforced when working with others intimately as you do in coaching, the coach has ethical obligations to ensure all parties are not exposed or harmed in any way. Moreover, the coach must be trained to effectively identify and manage their boundaries

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between coaching intervention (Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011) and the need for referral to medical and/or therapeutic intervention.

In their leadership research focused on creating adaptive leaders in turbulent times, DeRue, Spreitzer, Flanagan, and Allen (2013) created The Michigan Model of Leadership, anchored with a core purpose of making a positive difference in others' lives. They argued that in turbulent times, in which we experience unprecedented challenges of intense complexity and scale, “. . . the need for leaders . . . who can mobilise collective action in service of bringing about positive change has never been greater . . . we need leaders with empathy, drive, integrity, and courage – across society and throughout organisational hierarchies . . .” (DeRue et al., 2013, p. 57). The need for coaching competence within leadership development is of critical importance in helping leaders and followers thrive in “today’s global, dynamic, and complex environments” (DeRue et al., 2013, p. 58). Further, Walton (2021) shared a perspective on listening, which he suggests is “. . . at the very core of what it means to exercise ‘soft skills’” (p. 7). The author suggests that listening is of the most important yet neglected areas of soft skill training, in particular, “. . . developing the capacity to listen, to appreciate and to try and understand the priorities, tensions, and anxieties of one’s colleagues and to resist imposing cosmetic solutions” (p. 7). Moreover, he shared a perspective that focuses on listening and understanding as the keys to getting to the heart of coaching issues, stating:

“. . . that the workplace is a potentially explosive cauldron of, often unexpressed, emotional dynamics . . . a ripe environment within which a wide range of ‘people issues’ will be generated. It is precisely because of this intensity within the workplace that when issues do arise that they need to be listed to with care and understanding in order to try and clarify the likely underlying issues of concern to that client ... and to the organization as a whole” (Walton, 2021, p. 9).



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Within the coaching literature, Passmore and Fillery-Travis suggest that having knowledge and practice of psychology is important within coaching, as it helps the coach to “. . . consider the behavior, cognition and emotion of the client, and use this information to help in the process of learning and change” (Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011, p. 73). Understanding the difference between coaching, mentoring, counseling, and therapy aids me in motivating my research question in exploring and understanding how middle managers are coaching in today’s disrupted environments and in determining whether non-clinical psychological counseling is required in a business coaching context.

### **Business Coaching and its Value Proposition During Organizational Disruption**

I explore academic literature related to what has been studied related to business coaching in a broad context, its theoretical application and empirical validation, and connection to psychological wellbeing and organizational disruption through the decades. Coaching research reaches back to the late 1930’s (Passmore et al., 2011) yet there seems to be no consensus on the definition of coaching however, nor any “unified and integrated approach to the nature and scope of coaching” (Rosha, 2013, p. 125).

In their research of the use of neuroscience in coaching, Bowman et al. (2013, p. 96) defined coaching as “. . . a process to facilitate the learning (and remembering) of new behaviours” and as requiring “. . . acknowledging feelings as a crucial component in facilitating change behaviours.” The authors also assert that trends in neuroscience have placed emotions at the centre of coaching issues and that one’s emotional state can influence the view of self and others. The application of neuroscience to coaching can be of help in explaining how emotion and behaviour influences an individual’s actions,

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responses, and performance as well as assist in exploring the potential links between cognitive wellness and performance (Bowman et al., 2013). There is an opportunity evident in the literature for further coaching theory and coaching model development to further integrate neuroscience into coaching (Bowman et al., 2013).

Turesky and Gallagher (2011) acknowledged the changing organizational landscape has been demanding coaches in the workplace to help solve resulting leadership challenges. They suggest an effective way of doing so relates to coaches, leaders, and employees understanding their preferred learning styles and leveraging Kolb's (1984) experiential learning theory which embraces and transforms experiences, assists us in understanding four distinct learning styles (accommodator, diverger, assimilator, converger). I agree with the coachee-centred approach and the concept of knowing one's own learning style and that of others as inputs to building coaching capability, competence, and performance in others.

Similarly, in their literature review of executive coaching research, Passmore et al. (2011) highlighted “. . . the coach needs to consider the behaviour, cognition and emotion of the client, and use this information to help in the process of learning and change” (p. 73). They further highlighted that the quality of the relationship between the coach and the coachee is the most consistently identified success factor in a coaching engagement (p. 76). Passmore et al. (2011) called for many areas of opportunity in future coaching research and in particular coaching of the coach, “whether coaching affects leadership competence, resilience, and emotional intelligence as we suspect” (p. 82).

Boniwell et al. (2014) discussed the concept of a positive psychology approach to coaching. This coaching approach is underpinned with positive psychology science (see

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positive psychology below) and is concerned with focusing on the coachee from a positive emotion perspective. The coach uses positive emotion and the coachees' strengths, positive behaviours, and purpose as building blocks to coach their development and performance. The aim of positive psychological coaching is the enhancement of positive mental health. (Boniwell et al., 2014, see also Kauffman, 2006). Kauffman (2006) is known for her research and theoretical work related to how positive emotion helps us thrive. Studies in positive psychology have also reinforced the critical role that hope plays in one's life and has demonstrated that high-hope individuals experience physical health and mental health benefits including “. . . capacity for emotional self-regulation and superior abilities to face and overcome obstacles” (Kauffman, 2006, p. 229).

Further, an example of a positive psychology coaching model (theoretically grounded and empirically supported) is the “authentic happiness coaching model” created by Martin Seligman (Kauffman, 2006, p. 234). From a theory perspective, positive psychology is based on positive emotion, engagement and meaning (Seligman, 2007), which are connected to what Seligman identified scientifically as the three paths to happiness: through emotions, connection with internal or external activity, and through personal meaning (Kauffman, 2006). These three pathways are meant to be coached in combination. Furthermore, Van Tongeren et al., (2021, p. 4) assert, “meaning is a central feature of human flourishing; by building meaning across all domains (of life) should lead people to a fuller, richer, and more healthy life.” In a study focused on exploring the relationship of manager orientation to happiness (pleasure, engagement, meaning) and connection to organizational outcomes, meaning is connected to psychological well

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being and resilience (Swart & Rothmann, 2012). Meaning in the study is positioned as “. . . an important component of psychological wellbeing and is regarded as a predictor of subjective wellbeing” (Swart & Rothmann, 2012, p. 493), where one’s “creating meaning is an important component of resilience when work or living conditions are stressful” (p. 494).

The research work undertaken to anchor the positive psychology coaching approach provides a good example of how the art of coaching may be anchored in science and reflects “evidence-based support for the utility of attending to a client’s wholeness, fostering hope and helping that client hone his vision of the future . . . increases in joy and positive emotion that we often see in coaching . . . can be reliably and validly measured, and its positive impact on fostering cognitive and social skills is very amenable to the light of scientific scrutiny” (Kauffman, 2006, p. 249). (Kauffman, 2006, see also Seligman, 2007) Further, Seligman (2007) shares a science perspective on positive psychology and who he thinks qualifies to be a positive psychology coach. With positive psychology research being firmly anchored empirically with evidenced-based interventions and established psychometric measures, Seligman suggests this can assist in setting boundaries for responsible coaching practices as well as guidelines for training and accreditation (Seligman, 2007). His perspective on who might be a positive psychology coach is rather non-clinical. He suggests,

“One need not be a licensed psychologist, or even a psychologist, to practise positive psychology or to practise coaching. Positive psychology is not intended to be an umbrella for yet another self-interested guild. People who are adequately trained in the techniques of coaching, in the theories of positive psychology, in valid measurement of the positive states and traits, in the interventions that work, and who know when to refer a client to someone who is better trained will be, by my lights, bona fide coaches of positive psychology” (pp. 266-267).

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Research has shown positive psychology as its own intervention and that certain positive psychology exercises taught and coached can drive an increase in happiness. Mongrain and Anselmo-Matthews (2012) demonstrated this notion through replicating a Seligman 2005 study of this nature. These authors define positive psychology in their research as “the study of positive experiences, positive character traits, and the institutions that help cultivate them” (p. 382). They also highlight that “positive psychology should teach people effective pathways to improved functioning and wellbeing” (p. 382). Seligman (2019) describes his personal journey in studying positive psychology and explains two landmark practical applications of positive psychology and wellbeing taught and measured within business environments with positive outcomes generated related to improved employee performance, functioning and wellbeing. The examples include the United States Army and a positive education curriculum taught around the world in primary and secondary schools (Seligman, 2019).

In a [January 2021 podcast with Kim Mills of the American Psychological Association](#), Seligman discusses positive psychology in context to the Covid-19 pandemic. He speaks of actions and feelings such as smiling and being happy which he termed as “positive affective” as being different than optimistic or “optimism forward looking,” which he terms as a “cognition about the future.” Seligman refers to this cognition as being about hope (for the future). While both “positive affective” and “optimism forward looking” are positive in nature, they have different impacts on illness. In the context of the pandemic for example, being happy had little effect while Seligman argues that being hopeful and optimistic are characteristics that make a difference. People who interpret the future as being a series of events with some good

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and some bad that comes and goes become more productive, are healthier and are better leaders. (Mills & Seligman, 2021) “After the pandemic and as it ends, it’s hope and optimism that are going to predict recovery, leadership, and our future” (Mills & Seligman, 2021).

There is ample research evidence that teaching and coaching positive psychology can lead to positive outcomes in life and in the workplace. Business coaching and positive psychology seem like a natural pairing however, Schutte and Steyn (2015) highlight findings to suggest that business coaching is a slow growing academic discipline (versus its practical side of practice and knowledge), given the small number of active researchers and perhaps only two previous comprehensive literature reviews (cf. Passmore et al. in 2011; Kampa-Koesch & Anderson in 2001). The authors further assert that coaching may have its own conceptual identity crisis, asserting “coaching struggles conceptually to find its places somewhere between therapy, training, development, mentoring, counseling, and interventions” (p. 7). They also suggest that academic researchers continue looking at coaching concepts for opportunities to theoretically investigate and continue to evolve coaching approaches (business, executive, personal, life) and concepts (personal, team, e-coaching, virtual) (Schutte & Steyn, 2015). This suggests opportunities to explore coaching from both academic and practitioner perspectives to further advance knowledge in the coaching discipline and in particular, its conceptual identity and how coaching and positive psychology can work together to support and sustain wellbeing in the workplace.

Scholars provide a clear value proposition for business coaching, as evident in extant research and even more importantly, they articulate the need for, and the value of

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coaching to organizations and individuals to help each cope and thrive in the current environmental disruption, in which we find ourselves. For example, whether it be to help solve leadership challenges (Turesky & Gallagher, 2011) because of environmental disruption, acknowledging feelings and emotions to facilitate positive change outcomes (Bowman et al., 2013, see also Passmore et al., 2011), or in building and nurturing relationships (Passmore et al., 2011) to achieve personal and organizational goals, coaching is portrayed as a critical mechanism.

I assert, the current organizational disruption raises many questions for organizational researchers. Have the soft skills required by a leader to be an effective coach (e.g., emotional intelligence, motivational skills, team building skills) (Henderikx & Stoffers, 2022) shifted from traditional views discussed in literature? Is there a need for leadership coaching development to include skills required for non-clinical psychological counseling, given the impact of the disrupted organizational environment and the anxieties (workplace and personal) followers may experience and display in the workplace? Understanding answers to these questions through research motivates my guiding research question of: “how are middle managers coaching in today’s disrupted organizational environments?”

I contemplate these questions deeply beginning with my first-hand experience of the existential anxieties (my own and of others) I experienced and continue to experience due to impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, while coaching in my organization’s disrupted environment. Moreover, I have been challenged to solve organizational challenges related to gaps that exist between employee and organizational expectations, which are emotionally heightened, as we work through

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continuous adaptation to our disrupted environment. I strongly argue that the practice of coaching makes an important difference in the lives of employees and in the achievement of personal and organizational outcomes within the current disrupted environment. Thus, I assert, leaders and individuals are dealing with a combination of personal and workplace anxieties affecting their wellbeing, due to living and coping with our accelerated disruptive world and the continuously manifesting fallout of the Covid-19 pandemic (American Psychological Association, 2022).

I also posit people have entrenched new habits (personal, work) and from a practical workplace perspective while anecdotal, there is a palpable and emotional gap in expectation between what employees want and what they are willing to commit to in relation to adapting to working in the new normal and the organizational expectation of returning to the office in a hybrid work format. This issue causes elevated stress and turbulence in the workplace (Chong, 2022). In my practical experience, while coaching and frequent communication have been the anchors in working through the gaps in expectations, there is an emotional element that requires empathy, compassion, care, and courage to address effectively. In some cases, other wellbeing interventions are required that go beyond the leader's coaching competence.

Further, I am curious if leaders require soft skills of non-clinical psychological counseling within a business coaching context, to effectively coach and navigate emotions, nurture wellbeing, and help themselves and others to focus on a possible positive future. Given that business coaches are not trained medical professionals, I inquire about the difference between coaching, mentoring, counseling, and therapeutic interventions and where boundaries between each lie, delineating coaching versus



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therapeutic interventions. These inquiries and supporting literature motivate my research question to explore and understand how middle managers are coaching within disrupted organizational service environments and dealing with the resulting emotion and stress within the workplace.

### **Why the Study of Emotions in the Workplace is Important**

Organizations are full of people. People are full of personal and work-related emotions. Thus, organizations are emotionally entangled entities as is the nature of work that is accomplished by organizations. (Kahlili, 2012) With the birth of the emotional intelligence construct in the 1990's, which describes the ability to monitor one's emotions and those of others, differentiate between them, and use them as information to guide resulting thinking and actions (Mayer & Salovey, 1993), research in this area has burgeoned for examining emotions in the workplace. Research has focused on the relationship and impact that emotional intelligence may have on leadership, organizational effectiveness, and organizational success. Further, emotions play a critical role within the social fabric of organizations. With social interactions between middle managers and their leaders, employees, peers, stakeholders, and clients being critically important to organizational success, "emotions can make or break the situation" (Sony & MeKoth, 2016, p. 23). The emotional intelligence literature underscores the "important role of emotions in social relationships. . . in leadership, and the need for leaders to be aware of and attempt to manage emotions in themselves and in their followers" (Antonakis, Ashkanasy, & Dasborough, 2009, p. 259).

Organizational effectiveness and organizational success are combinations of many dynamics including the performance of employees, individual and team

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contribution (Rathore, Chadha, & Rana, 2017). Adaptable employees are an organizational asset and influence organizational effectiveness and organizational performance through their level of job satisfaction, job performance, and customer satisfaction derived from their customer service delivery (Sony & MeKoth, 2016). Further, emotional intelligence plays a critical role in positively influencing organizational effectiveness. This is demonstrated through research that suggests the coupling of one's ability to self-assess managing emotions (own and others) with other skills like conflict management, influences increasing organizational effectiveness (Khalili, 2012).

Emotional intelligence is also an important element within the roles that leaders and employees play within the organization and in positive organizational outcomes (McCleskey, 2015). Khalili's (2012) emotional intelligence literature review found that research demonstrates emotional intelligence is important in the role that leaders play in coaching and driving employee performance, a fundamental leadership responsibility. Research thus far has shown a "positive and direct relationship between level of emotional intelligence and workplace performance (Khalili, 2012). Similarly, emotional intelligence plays an important role for employees in the emotions and behaviors they exhibit in representing the organization's brand externally to clients and stakeholders (Khalili, 2012). Perhaps this builds further support for Goleman's notion of building emotional competence in leaders and employees, which is defined as "a learned capability based on emotional intelligence that results in outstanding performance at work (Goleman, 1988 as cited in Sony & Mekoth, 2016, p. 23).

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Khalili (2012, p. 357) suggests that emotional intelligence is an “. . . important and crucial competence that leaders require to take into consideration in the current work context”, and Izard (2001) demonstrates how emotions affect adaptive behavior. Branicki et al. (2019) posit that leaders conduct a form of emotional work within organizations while Kouzes and Posner (2017) suggest that leadership work is all about change. Heifetz and Linsky (2002) discuss how leaders are faced with dealing with adaptive change in disruptive environments and are “asking and expecting individuals to change their mindset and behaviors to align with new operating models, new ways of working, in new environments where boundaries between work and personal no longer exist”. Perhaps then, we can refer to the work and coaching leaders do as dimensions of emotional work and adaptive change work.

### **Middle Management Soft Skills (Digital Era)**

The foundational role of middle management has not changed materially over the decades, as middle managers continue to connect organizations at strategic and operational levels through their work in which they enact mediation, negotiation, and interpretation (Balogun & Johnson, 2004). The technical or hard skills of the role have evolved, as the industrial revolution has morphed into the knowledge revolution and further into the digital revolution. Specific 21<sup>st</sup> century skills called out in the literature that middle managers require include critical thinking, problem solving, communication, collaboration, creativity and innovation, digital literacy skills, information, technology, and media skills (Trilling & Fadel, 2009, see also Kumar & Sharma, 2018). Over the past few years, environmental disruption has consistently been testing the soft skills of the

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middle management role, making soft skill application increasingly more critical in helping self and others thrive in this disrupted context.

Since 2019, the acceleration and exogenic impact of external environmental factors such as the Covid-19 pandemic, climate change impacts, and global social movements have left organizations and their employees around the globe reeling in their response to rapidly changing business contexts, operating models, supporting technology, and hybrid workplace evolution. As these environmental shocks happen, they accelerate the volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity of the world inside and outside the organization. In turn I assert, this rapidly changes the need and focus of the soft skills and competence required by middle managers to effectively manage their own emotional and workplace needs and those of their employees, peers, and senior leaders while at the same time, navigating and leading the way to enable the organization to adapt to disruption. In particular, the Covid-19 pandemic has tipped the social and moral consciousness of organizations and society globally, leaving leaders to struggle to address, enable, and nurture the human condition; create and sustain human-centric interactions; and navigate self and others through elevated levels of emotion, ambiguity and uncertainty, anxiety, stress, and new operating environments.

Leaders are now being challenged to address the emotions, wellbeing, development, and performance of self and others while at the same time enabling human and digital integration (i.e., digital literacy, digital intelligence, digital competence of self and others, use of information and data to drive performance and decisions), and hybrid work environments. To effectively lead, manage, coach, and support in the digital era, I suggest middle managers require emotional intelligence, digital intelligence, social

intelligence, and creative intelligence to effectively thrive in the context of organizational disruption. Further, as Trilling and Fadel (2009, p. 105) eloquently assert, “to prepare for the Age of Innovation we must all become better designers, ready to tackle brand new problems and design things and processes that never existed before. We must apply both thinking and tinkering.”

### **Adaptive Capacity and Adaptive Leadership**

Adaptive capacity is the ability to effectively respond to and cope with unexpected circumstances and then adapt and thrive in a changed environment. There are several definitions of adaptive capacity from the individual and organizational perspective. Dahlberg (2018, p. 2) asserts adaptive capacity is “broadly understood as the ability of an individual, organization, or institution to cope with uncertainty and unpredictability”. Or as a “a dynamic process of continuous learning and adjustment that permits ambiguity and complexity in dealing with unstructured events characterized by surprise and uncertainty” (Nohrstedt, 2015, p. 723; see also Staber & Sydow, 2002). McGeorge (2022, p. 1) suggests that adaptive capacity provides “the ability to take advantage of change, to respond to disruptive circumstances positively and to cope when the unexpected happens”.

Adaptability is another way of expressing adaptive capacity. Adaptability is “the apt mental, behavioral, and/or emotional modifications individuals make to deal with change, challenges, and uncertainty” (Nejad, Nejad, & Farahani, 2021, p. 4).

Adaptability is also defined as “the capacity to make appropriate responses to change or changing situations; the ability to modify or adjust one’s behavior in meeting diverse circumstances or different people” (Nejad, Nejad, & Farahani, 2021, p. 4). Or simply put,

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“adaptability is managing difficulties with resilience” (Nejad, Nejad, & Farahani, 2021, p. 9). Further, there is a link between resilience and adaptive capacity. Adaptive capacity is an important part of resilience with trust as a prerequisite (to adaptive capacity) which enables people to plan and act (Dahlberg, 2018). “Resilience provides the capacity to absorb shocks while maintaining function. When change occurs, resilience provides the components for renewal and reorganisation” (p. 2). In a resilient system, change has the potential to create opportunity for development, novelty, and innovation (Folke, Carpenter, Elmqvist, Gunderson, Holling, & Walker, 2002). “Adaptive capacity is the ability of a social-ecological system to cope with novel situations without losing options for the future, and resilience is key to enhancing adaptive capacity” (Folke et al., 2002, p. 7).

From a scientific perspective, adaptive capacity is the ability of a “system to modify or change its characteristics or behavior in response to existing or anticipated external stresses” (McGeorge, 2022). From an organizational perspective, “it is the ability to respond to and instigate change” (Sussman, 2004, p. 12). “Organizations with adaptive capacity can reconfigure themselves quickly in changing environments rather than merely identify existing demands and then exploit the available resources” (Staber & Sydow, 2002, p. 410). In other words, adaptive capacity enables adaptation.

Adaptation is defined as “adjustments in a system’s behavior and characteristics that enhance its ability to cope with external stress” (Smit & Wandel, 2006, p. 284) and “are manifestations of adaptive capacity” (Smit & Wandel, 2006, p. 287). “Adaptability capacity is predicted by various presage factors and in turn, it predicts meaning and purpose, self-esteem, and life satisfaction that would ultimately affect performance in the

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workplace as well as in non-work-related life.” (Nejad, Nejad, & Farahani, 2021, p. 6)

Examples of “forces that influence the ability of the system to adapt are drivers of adaptive capacity such as management ability and kinship networks which research shows absorb stress” (Smit & Wandel, 2006, p. 287). Further, organizational adaptation according to Reeves and Deimler (2011) requires four key capabilities. First, the ability to anticipate, read, and act on change signals. Second, the ability to experiment and of being tolerant to and learning from failure. Third, the ability to manage complex multicompany systems and create adaptive networks and ecosystems. Finally, ability to mobilize with quick decision making and flexible operating models.

It is important to keep the distinction between adaptation and adaptive capacity. “Adaptation seeks to find optimal fit to existing contingencies, while adaptive capacity refers to the ability to cope with unknown future circumstances (Verwaal, Klein, La Falce, 2021, p. 3) Considerations for organizations and leaders related to their ability to effectively adapt and their capability for adaptive capacity include implications for both business strategy development and the skill and capability of leaders to foster and sustain adaptive capacity. Reeves and Deimler (2011) in an online Harvard Business Review article suggest traditional business strategies are written for mostly stable business environments, “. . . not created for the level of uncertainty, volatility, and change in current environment” and that competitive advantage is now tied to the need for “rapid adaptation to new things” driven by environmental factors (internal and external) rather than the traditional factors of “position, scale, product, or market share.”

Further, leadership plays a critical role in developing and nurturing adaptive capacity in organizations and in particular, “teams operating in “complex environments”

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(Randall, Resick, & DeChurch, 2011, p. 528). Team leadership is earmarked as critical in providing guidance and direction and shaping early thinking and behaviors that can enable team effectiveness (Randall et al, 2011). Further, Staber and Sydow (2002) question what managers might do to develop and sustain adaptive capacity within organizations. They suggest this will require forward looking knowledge of their future environmental states, which will provide the context for adaptive capacity to adequately evolve. In other words, they suggest that managers should reflexively review the organization and proactively create environments that nurture and build adaptive capacity through their work and coaching.

Given the accelerating pace and impact of change in organizations today flexible, and adaptive leadership is critical in leading and managing through the ambiguity, uncertainty, and complexity in today's volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous work environment (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). Flexible and adaptive leadership is described as leaders changing their behavior as the situation before them is changing (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). These authors assert that prescriptive universal leadership theory such as transformational leadership "fail to capture the complexity of leadership processes in modern organizations" (p. 83). They further favor contingency leadership theories as foundation for flexible and adaptive leadership because the contingency nature of these theories enables an avenue to diagnose a situation, identify appropriate behavior, and subsequently deliver effective leadership aligned to the situation. Further, "adaptive leadership focuses on the leader's behavior and interaction with followers as well as the ability to mobilize and motivate followers to adapt to change" (Arthur-Mensah & Zimmerman, 2017, p. 1). One of the foundational leadership behaviors underpinning an



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adaptive leadership approach is the ability to “understand the emotional toll and stress the entire process of change on followers as they are being asked to take up challenges which they may not be ready for” (Arthur-Mensah & Zimmerman, 2017, p. 3)

Today’s reality is that organizations and their leaders are dealing more frequently with crisis-like problems which is operationally becoming business as usual. These problems are defined as “. . . unusual and immediate . . . that can have serious affects” (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010, p. 86). Like the universal, prescriptive leadership theories, traditional role expectations also may not accommodate the flexible, innovative problem solving required to find solutions when dealing with the new, unexpected, and complex problems and opportunities that arise within the current volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous world or when exogenous shocks happen (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). Limited research has attempted to identify the type of leader actions and decision processes that are effective in dealing with crisis related problems and opportunities (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010, p. 86). Further, from an individual perspective, patterns of leadership behavior have not been well studied (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010, p. 89). Contributions to filling this gap is recent leadership approach research led by Hougaard and Carter (2022). The authors explore taking a compassionate, human first approach to leading (discussed further in this section, pp. 67-70). The notion of compassionate leadership means leading with the intent of being of benefit to others, possessing the wisdom of knowing what the right thing to do is, and being courageous to follow through on doing the right thing (Hougaard & Carter (2022).

Today’s workplace disruption presents the need for a different way of looking at leadership behavior and skills. Perhaps examining the patterns of leadership behaviors

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(Yukl & Mahsud, 2010) and skills leaders apply to coach and manage through complex situations (like the pandemic) versus examining skills individually, might be a more insightful approach. Researching with this perspective is a motivation to my guiding research question. Perhaps it may enable the exploration and evidence-based understanding of how to refresh leadership theory and coaching constructs to enable effective leadership that is fundamental today, “in helping organizations to adapt to new or existing realities” (Castillo, 2018, p. 100).

### **Resilience**

A large portion of the extant resilience research focuses on avoiding negative outcomes. Anchored in the 1970’s, scholar Norm Garmezy pioneered the concept of resilience and resilience research (Rutter, 2012, see also Coutu, 2002). With the focus of positive psychology since the early 1990’s, the focus of psychology has slowly shifted from “risk to resilience”, emphasizing its “positive rather than the maladaptive” side (Rutter, 2012, p. 336), looking at resilience from the perspective of personal strength and capacity.

Building resilience is a key factor in promoting health and wellbeing as suggested by Armitage et al., (2021). Wellbeing broadly refers to feelings of satisfaction and happiness (Armitage et al., 2021). Further, it is a “dynamic state that refers to a person’s ability to develop their potential, work productively and creatively, build strong and positive relationships with others, and contribute to their community” (Herrman et al., 2011, p. 263). Focusing on wellbeing in the workplace may have positive spillover affects including buffering the effects of stress through positive relationships - a protective resilience factor (Herrman et al., 2011, p. 263). Research with a focus on how

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protective resilience factors may contribute to positive outcomes is essential for advancing theory and research in the field as well as for designing appropriate prevention and intervention strategies for individuals facing adversity (Luthar et al., 2000, p. 3). While building resilience can aid in overcoming hardship, it does not build happiness (Armitage, 2021).

Interest in resilience research is on the rise. Reasons for this relate to exogenous shocks, disruptive processes, and transformational change (pandemic; ongoing digital transformation; natural and economic disasters; evolution to remote/hybrid operating models) and the subsequent influence we do not yet know or understand related to future leadership, management, and coaching practices. “High levels of uncertainty, change and disruption globally have contributed to a significant rise in scholarly, policy and practice interest in resilience” (Branicki et al., 2019). Society, organizations, and individuals are impacted by the volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity of the organizational world, which causes high levels of stress and pressure on mental health and overall wellbeing (Branicki et al., 2014). The CEO of the [American Psychological Association \(APA\)](#), Arthur C. Evans Jr., PhD, suggests that the psychological impact of the Covid-19 pandemic may not be seen for seven to ten years into the future (American Psychological Association, 2022).

There is no agreed upon definition of resilience. The biggest reason being is the reaction to adversity and stress along with the actions taken are different for each person as is their individual resilience level (Rutter, 2012, p. 341). From an individual perspective, resilience is an “individual attribute or characteristic, the developable capacity to rebound or bounce back from adversity, conflict, and failure” (Branicki et al.,

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2019, see also Ovans, 2015). Herrman et al. (2011, p. 258) in their narrative review of the definitions of resilience across select literature, defined it being understood as, “. . . positive adaptation, or the ability to maintain or regain mental health, despite experiencing adversity.” Connor and Davison (2003, p. 76) view resilience as a “measure of stress coping ability” or “the personal qualities that enable one to thrive in the face of adversity”. Resilience describes the ability to adapt successfully and experience positive functioning and adaptation following adversity (Armitage et al., 2021). From an organizational perspective, strategic resilience is not about bouncing back, it is about the capability of “continuously anticipating and adjusting to deep secular trends that can permanently impair the earning power of a core business” (Branicki et al., 2019, p. 1266).

Workplace stress and discussions of employees experiencing stress are prevalent in the resilience literature. “World Health Organization describes stress as the “global health epidemic of the 21<sup>st</sup> century” (Fernandez, 2016, p. 1). A 2015 research survey completed by two British consultants revealed the drain on employee resilience in the workplace pointed to dealing with difficult co-workers, office politics, overwork, and personal criticism versus the organizational volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous world of continuous change and environmental challenges (Ovans, 2015). Past research studies show that employees tend to draw on self versus the organization for resilience support (Ovans, 2015) and that employees feel the biggest stressor in their lives is their job (Fernandez, 2016). Further, leaders should be concerned relative to workplace stress levels given there is “a direct and adverse relationship between negative stress, wellness and productivity” (Fernandez, 2016).

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Emotions and positive feedback are involved in building resilience. Branicki et al. (2019) suggest that middle managers enact a form of emotional labour in their day-to-day tasks of helping self and others deal with stressful situations in our disrupted world. Further, the connections between lack of individual self-esteem, lack of positive feedback, and subjective wellbeing can reduce individual resilience (Branicki et al., 2019). Research confirms the important role leaders play in building resilience within their teams and suggests the sharing of positive feedback (Branicki et al., 2019, p. 1265) and teaching positive thinking towards setbacks to mitigate learned helplessness (Ovans, 2015) are two ways leaders can enable building resilience in their employees.

A common theme (mid-1960's to mid-2000's) is the notion that resilience can be learned, built, and nurtured in people. Fernandez (2016) asserts that over fifty years of research has shown that “resilience is built by attitudes, behaviors and social supports that can be adopted and cultivated by anyone. Factors that lead to resilience include optimism; the ability to stay balanced and manage strong or difficult emotions; a sense of safety and a strong social support system” (p. 2). Further, factors that support developing resilience are like those that promote mental health including a person's life, their development, and their sociocultural background (Herrman et al., 2011; p. 262).

There are three characteristics in people and organizations alike that denote resiliency, “. . . resilient people and companies face reality with staunchness, make meaning of hardship instead of crying out in despair, and improvise solutions from thin air.” (Ovans, 2016, p. 4, see also Coutu, 2002). Similarly, self awareness is discussed as the “foundation of all other resilience and emotional intelligence skills” and as being “a prerequisite for choice and control” (Blackett, n.d.). Further, scholar Martin Seligman

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argues that businesses can help employees build resilience (Ovans, 2016) by providing resilience support systems that provide prevention, intervention, and promote positive adaptation towards delivering positive outcomes (Luthar et al., 2000).

In sum, resilience is driven by biological, psychological, and social mechanisms (Herrman et al., 2011). Finding environmental meaning is a critical feature of resilience, underpinned by strong values system which “. . . provide meaning, ways to interpret and shape events” (Coutu, 2002, p. 6). Further, Coutu (2002) describes resilience as a reflex to help understand the world, and that individuals “snap or snap back” (p. 6) when faced with colossal stress. Bagwell (2020, p. 31) suggests “by building resilience and deepening social connectedness” leaders can enable others to see change as an opportunity to deepen their resilience and “as resilience deepens, individuals become more resourceful, adaptive, and develop a sense of stability” (p. 31).

A more recent academic view on utilizing uncertainty, volatility, and stressors as mechanisms to personally grow is based on work by scholar, Nassim Nicholas Taleb. In his book, *Antifragile, Things That Gain From Disorder*, he discusses the notion that personal growth is possible, even necessary through being exposed to disorder, which he defines as being “antifragile” (Taleb, 2014). He explains antifragile as being on a spectrum with fragile. At one end of the spectrum, being fragile, is when disorder negatively impacts and shuts down a person, like post traumatic stress. At another place along the spectrum, being anti-fragile, disorder positively impacts a person and enables one to grow, thrive, and flourish (Taleb, 2014), like post traumatic growth. In other words, fragility does not like disorder; anti-fragility embraces disorder; and one can learn to increase their capabilities and ability to thrive because of being exposed to disorder,

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volatility, and uncertainty (Taleb, 2014). He goes on to suggest that antifragility is beyond resilience. He positions that being resilient enables one to resist exogenous shocks like we have experienced with Covid-19 epidemic for example, but one stays the same or does not necessarily personally grow from the experience. Anti-fragility in this same scenario enables one to move beyond resilience and become better because of the exposure to the disorder of the situation (Taleb, 2014).

Workplace coaching is one of the mechanisms through which leaders can enable resilience inside their organizations. Further research is needed to understand the concept of antifragility in context of workplace coaching and its potential to capitalize on disruption to drive organizational post traumatic growth. A future research agenda can explore if workplace coaching might be a mechanism to foster anti-fragility and enhance the impact and positive outcomes of coaching in organizational disruption. This angle of future research gives motivation to my research question.

### **Empirical Literature: Extant Grounded Theory Studies in Management**

Following are three examples of extant grounded theory studies that have been completed in management studies and follow the grounded theory methodology of Glaser and Strauss (2017), the same approach I use for my research study and discuss in detail, in Chapter 3. Methodology.

The first grounded study example conducted by Carden, Passmore, and Jones (2022) focuses on creating theoretical principles to underpin coaching development for workplace coaches. The aim of the study is to, “. . . explore the lived experiences of coaches in identifying the role self-awareness has played in their development” (p. 147). While the focus is on coaching and how coaches develop self awareness, the context is

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professional coaches versus middle management coaches. In other words, workplace coaching (executive coaching) versus coaching in the workplace (organizational leaders coaching their employees and colleagues).

They deployed a grounded theory methodology with semi-structured interviews designed to capture the lived experiences of how select coaches in the UK had developed. No specific sample size was outlined in the methodology however, interviews were conducted until saturation was achieved, after seventeen interviews. Analytic memos were used to capture ideas and thoughts about the data collected. Through their study findings, they created a theoretical framework of the role self-awareness can play in coach development. They propose the development of self-awareness has potential to enhance coaching effectiveness by enabling a deeper level of interaction with coaching clients.

Second, an exemplar of grounded theory study as Suddaby (2006) notes, is conducted by Isabella (1990) with forty managers employed at a medium sized financial institution. The study is noted as an exemplar based on the methodological rigor followed in the study and in the exemplary way the author's academic research paper was written (Suddaby, 2006).

This study focuses on understanding how, “. . . managers construe organizational events as a change unfolds” (p. 7). Semi-structured interviews are conducted with forty managers and Isabella (1990) follows the continuous analysis process as outlined by Glaser and Strauss (2017). The results of the study inform the development of a theoretical model enabling understanding related to how managerial interpretations “. . . evolve as an organizational change unfolds” (p. 33).



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Finally, Gersick (1988) conducts a grounded theory study of the lifespan of select project teams based on changes and development they experience over time. The aim of this study is to develop a new theory explaining group development. Gersick (1990) also uses the grounded theory methodology created by Glaser and Strauss (2017). The research participants are eight cross-industry groups (i.e., graduate students, bankers, psychiatrists and social workers, hospital workers, and university faculty), ranging in participant size of three to six individuals/group. For data collection, Gersick observes team meetings, creates handwritten notes, and conducts interviews. For data analysis, Gersick creates team histories of each group and compares the groups to determine similarities and differences, while building and refining the resulting theoretical framework. The study findings inform the development of a theoretical model for understanding group development which, “. . . encompasses the timing and mechanisms of change as well as groups’ dynamic relations with their contexts” (p. 9).

These three extant grounded theory studies in management studies are good examples of qualitative research that has utilized grounded theory as an inductive, qualitative research approach. They also demonstrate that grounded theory methodology is replicable and can be successfully utilized to create explanatory theory, anchored in the research data that was continuously collected and analyzed. Further, they each illuminate how grounded theory study can enable me through a rigorous and consistent methodology, to deeply examine and understand current state middle management coaching practice and potentially produce an explanatory theory that describes how middle managers coach in today’s disrupted environments.

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### **Literature Gaps**

Across the literature there are compelling concerns related to the psychological wellbeing of organizations and society in the context of exogenous shocks like global social movements or the Covid-19 pandemic (Van Tongeren et al, 2021) that have hit at the core of humanity. The impacts are still manifesting with unknown outcomes (Bussin & Swart-Opperman, 2021) on psychological wellbeing in the immediate decade to come.

I suspect practical implications to leaders and managers are complex with their having to adapt to potentially addressing the adaptive change and psychological wellness issues of self and others in their day-to-day interactions, tasks and in particular, coaching, which is a large, core part of the job (Misiukonis, 2018). I suggest this demands a shift in leadership coaching awareness and a greater capability need of emotional intelligence soft skills which has a direct effect on the executive functioning and leader's ability of knowing/ doing to effectively address leadership driven workplace wellness. Thus, there is opportunity to research the relationships between coaching and emotional intelligence, leadership coaching competence, employee resilience, and workplace psychological wellness (Passmore et al., 2011).

There is also evidence in the literature of a need for more research to understand the impact of coaching on performance (Passmore & Gibbes, 2007) and little research has been conducted related to how the emotional intelligence of leaders enhance workplace effectiveness (Pinos et al., 2006). Further, Wang et al. (2021) highlight a call for future coaching research to emphasize theoretical constructs built from psychotherapy or counseling to explore and investigate better articulated coaching models that have potential to drive better coaching outcomes. This research perspective has the potential to

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take coaching beyond its current mechanical organizational purpose of driving organizational efficiency and effectiveness (Chan & Burgess, 2015) to perhaps articulating a more human purpose. One that enables individual efficiency and effectiveness which in turn delivers organizational efficiency and effectiveness from a positive perspective of productivity, innovation, and building sustainable competitive advantage. While outside the scope of this study, exploring how workplace coaching may impact productivity in relation to individual and organizational efficiency and effectiveness is a topic for a future research agenda.

These noted compelling concerns and literature gaps have potential to be explored from a middle management coaching context which is currently not a deeply studied discipline. They invite interesting opportunities to study the intersection of social, behavioral, and management science by looking at the organizational psychological wellbeing and emotional side of middle management coaching practice through research. They provide opportunity to deepen the existing field of coaching literature from the middle management level of analysis and add an additional researcher to “the small number of active researchers” in this discipline (Schutte & Steyn, 2015; p. 1). Moreover, this provides utility and motivation to study my guiding research question, “how do middle managers coach in today’s disrupted organizational environments?” and provide an evidence based, informed understanding of middle management coaching practice within my research context (Passmore & Gibbes, 2007).

It is important to note, the coaching focus in my guiding research question is not about the treatment or solving of clinical, emotional, or psychological issues but the general perspective of building emotional intelligence and driving positive emotion with

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a theoretical lens of existential positive psychology (see pages 57-62). The objective is to help leaders to identify, understand, and manage emotions (own and others) to create information that can be used to positively influence thinking, responses, actions, towards a positive focused outcome for self and the organization. Ultimately, it is about influencing change in individual and organizational mindsets related to emotional management with a goal of developing and increasing individual and organizational emotional intelligence to influence positive outcomes (better leaders, better organizations, better society) to better navigate our world of disruption.

### **Theoretical Perspectives and Conceptual Frameworks**

Theoretical perspectives and conceptual frameworks can be utilized as lenses to aid in my understanding and interpretation of my research findings. Those proposed for this study include the theoretical perspectives of emotional intelligence, existential positive psychology, the conceptual framework of organizational rules, and sensemaking theory. Additionally, the leadership theories proposed as interpretation lenses include situational leadership, transformational leadership, adaptive leadership, and compassionate leadership.

### **Emotional Intelligence**

Emotional intelligence is “the ability to monitor own and other’s feelings and emotions, discriminate amongst these to effectively guide one’s thinking and actions” (Mayer & Salovey, 1993). Salovey and Mayer were the first academics in the 1990’s to conceptualize and discuss emotional intelligence (McCleskey, 2015). Further, Bratton et al. (2011) cite Mayer and Salovey (1993) as defining emotional intelligence as “the ability to advantageously deal with one’s own emotions and those of others in problem

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solving and decision making” (p. 128). Brou Fossier (2012) defines emotional intelligence as “. . . understanding the emotions of oneself and the emotions of others and how to use this information to change and improve behavior” (p. 49) and highlights that scholar, Dr. Daniel Goleman defines emotional intelligence as a different way of being smart, positing, being smart with both intellect and with emotions (Brou Fossier, 2012, p. 50). Emotional intelligence also includes “exhibiting empathy and compassion as well as maintaining hope” (Brou Fossier, 2022, p. 50).

Goleman theorized four skill areas of emotional intelligence: self awareness, self-management, social awareness, and relationship management. These four areas influence and inform individual behavior. The two main forms of emotional intelligence discussed in the literature are the ability model and the mixed model (Bratton et al., 2011).

The ability model (Mayer & Salovey, 1993) unpacks emotional intelligence as a combination of emotion and intelligence through four abilities that aids one in perceiving, understanding, managing, and utilizing the emotions of self and others (Cuddihy, n.d.). Bratton et al. (2011) discuss how the mixed model of emotional intelligence favored by Goleman, has a combination of traits across social behaviors and competencies and comments on Bar-On’s conclusion that emotional and social intelligence are a “multifactorial array of interrelated emotional personal and social abilities that influence individual ability to actively and effectively cope with daily demands and pressures” (p. 128). Emotional intelligence is linked through research to leadership skills utilized in the transformation leadership approach (Bratton et al., 2011).

Another model of emotional intelligence, trait emotional intelligence, is based on the four personality traits of “wellbeing (self-confidence, happiness, and optimism);

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sociability (social competence, assertiveness, and emotion management of others); self-control (stress management, emotion regulation, and low impulses); and emotionality (emotional perception of self and others, emotion expression, and empathy) (McCleskey, 2015; p. 275). Further, Petrides (2010) explains that “trait emotional intelligence is the only operational definition in the field that recognizes inherent subjectivity of emotional experience” (p. 137).

Trait emotional intelligence is defined as our self-perception of “how good we believe we are in terms of understanding, managing, and utilizing our own and other people’s emotions” (Petrides et al, 2018 as cited by Sanchez-Ruiz et al., 2021, p. 2) and has been cognitively and behaviorally linked in a positive way to research dealing with stressful situations, in particular the Covid-19 pandemic. Sanchez-Ruiz et al. (2021, p. 2) in their research of emotion-related personality dispositions in dealing with stressful situations related to the pandemic, explain how research participants are “seeing the situation as a personal growth opportunity, finding personal meaning in the situation, maintaining an attitude of hope and courage, and acting more responsibly with self and others during the crisis”. The cognitive link is demonstrated through individuals reworking the situation to find positivity and value and the behavioral link is demonstrated if they did so proactively (Sanchez-Ruiz et al., 2021).

The theoretical underpinning of Sanchez-Ruiz et al.’s (2021) research study was existential positive psychology (an advancement of positive psychology) that focuses on the growth that comes from both the suffering and joy in life (Sanchez-Ruiz et al., 2021, p. 2). Existential positive psychology “emphasizes the importance of effective coping with the negative aspects of living in order to achieve greater wellbeing” (Sanchez-Ruiz

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et al., 2021, p. 1). Findings from this study showed participants experienced lower psychological distress, improved mental health, and meaning-centred adaptive coping (Sanchez-Ruiz et al., 2021, p. 1).

Emotions play a positive role across individual, societal, and organizational levels (Wall et al., 2017), in leader effectiveness related to a transformational leadership approach (Bratton et al., 2011), and in employee job satisfaction (Wall et al., 2017, Lloyd et al., 2015). Leaders who have tasks with both relational and analytical reasoning will be more effective in recognizing emotions based on their ability to move between the tasks (Lambert, 2020).

There is relevance and importance associated with leaders recognizing and understanding the positive role emotions play and the impact leaders can have when recognizing the emotions of others. It can drive job satisfaction and leadership effectiveness (Wall et al., 2017, Lloyd et al., 2015); problem solving and decision making (Bratton et al., 2011); and help to “cope with the daily demands and pressures” (Bratton et al., 2011, pp. 128-129).

Further, from an academic and theoretical perspective, Sparks and McCann (2021, p. 23) note that “traditional management theory may not address the volatile change caused by a rare event such as a pandemic, which affects the future of work”. Hermkens and Romme (2020) share a similar view in context of “technology, automation, and digitization” and the impact its ongoing, rapid change might have on the middle management work environment. Hitt and Holmes (2020, p. 263) posit that in the *new normal*, organizations will be required to develop new dynamic capabilities to thrive

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which will “require harnessing the cognitive and emotional skills of the management team and critical internal and external stakeholders”.

While there has been a plethora of emotional intelligence research conducted since the 1990’s, opportunities remain to extend and deepen the understanding and practical application of the emotional intelligence construct within organizational studies. Izard (2001, p. 255) suggests while “researchers acknowledge effective adaptation requires intelligence and reason . . . researchers remain reluctant to acknowledge that the functioning of the emotion systems themselves and their compelling influence on other systems explain a significant part of our thought, our choices, and our actions”. There seems to be a lack of empirical evidence in emotional intelligence research (Sony & Mekoth, 2016, p. 21) and a call for inclusion in future research agendas. Further, it is recognized that the workplace and emotions are entangled however research of job-related emotions seems scant (Khalili, 2016). Other research suggests “emotions get in the way of effective performance” (Khalili, 2016, p. 355).

### **Emotional Intelligence: Measurement and Measurement Tools**

There are a variety of measurement tools and questionnaires referenced in the emotional intelligence literature. Emotional intelligence is measured as emotional skills and is articulated as the term, emotional quotient (EQ) (Kunnanatt, 2004). A common emotional intelligence measurement tool referenced that is utilized as an ability measure of emotional intelligence is the Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test (MSCEIT). It measures the four emotional competencies, “the abilities to perceive, use, understand, and manage emotions” (Lopes et al., 2004, p. 1020).



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Other common emotional intelligence measurement tools are: “Multifactor Emotional Intelligence Scale (MEIS), Emotional Competence Inventory (ECI), Bar-On’s EQ-I, and Seligman Attributional Style Questionnaire” (Kunnanatt, 2004, p. 492) Further, Bru-Luna et al.’s (2021) literature review of emotional intelligence measurement tools identified 40 different tools with the most common used as: “Emotional Quotient Inventory (EQ-i), Schutte Self Report-Inventory (SSRI), Mayer-Salovey-Caruso Emotional Intelligence Test 2.0 (MSCEIT 2.0), Trait Meta-Mood Scale (TMMS), Wong and Law’s Emotional Intelligence Scale (WLEIS), and Trait Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (TEIQue).

Utilizing emotional intelligence as a theoretical perspective or conceptual framework would enable me to examine my research participants’ coaching practices from an emotional perspective to understand how they use their own emotional responses to manage their emotions, actions, and/or stress, and use this information to understand the same in others (Mayer & Salovey, 1993), in a coaching context. This perspective might also provide potential input into whether non-clinical psychological counseling skills are required to elevate coaching competence in support others in navigating and flourishing in disrupted organizational environments.

### **Positive Psychology and Existential Positive Psychology**

Prior to World War II, the field of psychology had three key areas of focus, “curing mental illness, making the lives of all people more fulfilling, and identifying and nurturing high talent” (Hirtz, 1999). Since World War II, the field of psychology has largely focused on the pathology of mental illness and healing with little focus on its other side, known as positive psychology (Csikszentmihalyi & Seligman, 2000). Positive

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psychology has a focus on the healthy person and community side in terms of how they may thrive and flourish (Csikszentmihalyi & Seligman, 2000). Moreover, positive psychology focuses on “the study of the conditions and processes that contribute to the flourishing or optimal functioning of people, groups, and institutions” (Gable & Haidt, 2005, p. 104), essentially encompassing the “complete human condition”. Flourishing is defined as, “a construct that encompasses the increase of positive emotion, engagement, meaning, positive relationships and accomplishment, involving an existence provided of a greater meaning” (Scorsolini-Comin, Fontaine, Koller & Santos, 2013, p. 664).

This positive side of psychology has history dating back to 1902 with William James who completed research work related to “healthy mindedness” (Gable & Haidt, 2005, p. 104). Allport studied positive human characteristics in 1958; Maslow studied the notion of healthy people versus sick people in 1968; and in 2000, Cowan completed research related to child and adolescent resilience (Gable & Haidt, 2005). Another well known scholar and psychologist, Martin Seligman, has focused his life’s research work on psychology and has developed expertise in the topics of pessimism and depression through his work on learned helplessness, and over time has evolved his expertise and is considered one of the world’s experts in the topic of optimism, of which he has accomplished a large body of work on learned optimism (Hirtz, 1999).

In the late 1990’s, Seligman became President of the [American Psychological Association \(APA\)](#) and in this role he promotes “positive psychology as a field of scientific study”. He voices his opinion on psychology’s shortfall during the preceding 50 years linking back to World War II, in a column he wrote in an APA monthly newsletter at the time entitled, “Building Human Strength: Psychology’s Forgotten

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Mission” (Hirtz, 1999). He clearly articulates his perspective that the focus between healing mental illness and fostering human strength was out of balance in the field of psychology and he suggests there is a huge gap in research related to the latter (Hirtz, 1999):

“Fifty years later, I want to remind our field that it has been side-tracked. Psychology is not just the study of weakness and damage; it is also the study of strength and virtue. Treatment is not just fixing what is broken, it is nurturing what is best within ourselves ...

Fifty years of working in a medical model on personal weakness and on the damaged brain has left the mental-health professions ill-equipped to do effective prevention. We need massive research on human strength and virtue. We need practitioners to recognize that much of the best work they do is amplifying the strengths rather than repairing their patients’ weaknesses. We need psychologists who work with families, schools, religious communities, and corporations to emphasize their primary role of fostering strength.”

Seligman also suggests that if healthcare insurance coverage accommodated “paying for psychology as “preventative” medicine to encourage human strength, he believes, would save untold billions of health-care dollars.” (p. 109). Traditional psychotherapy is built on the notion that events people experienced and the subsequent impact to their behaviors and emotions is what drives the need for therapy. Seligman and a colleague challenged this with the argument that it was how one thought about these events to explain to oneself, whether it be in a negative or positive sense, which determined the psychological impact (Hirtz, 1999). Thus, they posited that reducing negative thoughts or in other words, thinking positively, might reduce or prevent depression in individuals that were vulnerable (Hirtz, 1999). Further, mental illness prevention researchers have since determined there are human strengths that guard against mental illness like courage, optimism, hope, perseverance, and future mindedness

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(Csikszentmihalyi & Seligman, 2000). In addition, “the major psychological theories have changed to undergird a new science of strength and resilience” (p. 8) and there is evidence in the literature of a future research agenda call to determine ways to build these strengths and virtues in our young (Csikszentmihalyi & Seligman, 2000). Similarly, Gable and Haidt (2005, p. 108) assert a perspective of the future tasks of positive psychology:

“. . . to understand the factors that build strengths, outline the contexts of resilience, ascertain the role of positive experiences, and delineate the function of positive relationships with others. Positive psychology needs to understand how all of these factors contribute to physical health, subjective wellbeing, functional groups, and flourishing institutions. Ultimately, positive psychology needs to develop effective interventions to increase and sustain these processes.”

An extension of positive psychology, known as existential positive psychology (EPP) is concerned with the human existence, how people survive, and flourish given all the challenges of life and it emphasizes the “. . . human capacities of resilience and positive change” (Wong, 2010, p. 2). Existential positive psychology focuses on growth that comes from both the suffering and joy in life (Sanchez-Ruiz et al., 2021, p. 2). It “emphasizes the importance of effective coping with the negative aspects of living in order to achieve greater wellbeing” (Sanchez-Ruiz et al., 2021, p. 1). Moreover, it emphasizes the courage and responsibility of confronting the existential anxieties of life as defined by scholar Irvin Yalom, which are “death, freedom, isolation, and meaninglessness” (Wong, 2010, p. 2).

Existential positive psychology encompasses both joy and suffering as foundational to creating wellbeing in individuals, “. . . authentic happiness necessarily grows from pain and suffering” (Wong, 2010, p. 4). Wong (2010) asserts, “existential

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positive psychology stresses that it is only through struggle and fortitude that we grow psychologically and spiritually – it is only through embracing life in totality and wrestling with ultimate concerns that we can uplift humanity and improve the human condition” (p. 8). Further, a study examining existential anxiety notes that in day-to-day life, most people have the coping or defense mechanisms to deal with existential anxieties (Davidov & Russo-Netzer, 2022). However, in times of “trouble or radical change” (p. 233), “people often experience some measure of existential anxiety” (p. 233). How we deal with these anxieties is related to our level of courage and creativity and our relationships (Wong, 2010).

Paul Wong conducts extensive research and publishing on existential positive psychology, with his research focus at the intersection of positive psychology and existential positive psychology (Van Tongeren et al., 2021, p. 2). In particular, he and his colleagues extensively study and publish how proactive and transformative coping with stress and suffering can increase one’s resilience and well being (Wong, Mayer & Arslan, 2021, p. 3). Wong (2010, p. 6) shares the perspective that “it takes, empathy, kindness, tolerance, and self sacrifice to build a positive community” and “individual lives are enriched in proportion to the vitality and harmony of the group”. Existential positive psychology inherently underscores the need for building supportive relationships and communities for greater human wellbeing (Wong, 2010).

In summary, the general approach of positive psychology is about the notion of wellbeing and the making of human lives more fulfilling (Seligman, 2010) and in doing so, consideration of all life challenges is essential in achieving wellbeing (Wong, 2010). A simple articulation of the aim of positive psychology is, “. . . to

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develop interventions that build enabling conditions of life (hope, optimism, efficacy, resilience), not just interventions that decrease misery” (Seligman, 2010, p. 233).

Seligman (2019) articulates a simple hope for a possible positive future, “. . . hope that the building of wellbeing will become a cornerstone of morality, politics, and religion” (p. 31).

Utilizing existential positive psychology as a theoretical paradigm in my research study can provide potential perspective related to how my research participants are coping with the day-to-day organizational life and how this manifests within their workplace coaching practice. In particular, how they are dealing with the existential anxieties related to disruption and how they are coaching others in the same respect (Davidov & Russo-Netzer, 2022; see also Wong, 2010). This perspective may provide insight into the coaching competence required and if there is a need for non-clinical psychological counseling skills within the context of business coaching. Further, in the section that follows, I examine from the internal perspective of organizational rules and organizational behavior workplace coaching as a means to support employees in understanding and coping with disruption.

### **Organizational Rules**

Understanding organizational disruption and related drivers is a very complicated and complex proposition. While external environmental factors such as the Covid-19 pandemic and global social movements can erupt organizational disruption, the internal dynamics of the organization can also influence disruption, as well as harmony. As evident in Mills & Murgatroyd’s (1991) work, the combination of organizational culture and organizational actors nested within the organization create a dynamic relationship that is

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guided by organizational rules and organizational behavior and guarded by boundaries and relationships. Mills and Murgatroyd's (1991) conceptual framework of organizational rules can be used as a metaphor to understand the implicit and explicit rules within an organization (the structure of actions) and how these rules can affect and reflect organizational behavior (the understandings of employees in action) of the organization, groups, and individuals. Organizational rules are defined by Mills and Murgatroyd (1991, p. 30) as “. . . steps for the conduct of action” and depending on the mix of circumstances and organizational actors, the resulting experience can be “. . . controlling, guiding, or defining” (p. 30). This framework offers practical utility in examining and understanding how organizational rules can enable or constrain organizational action and outcomes. It considers both management practice and employees. The framework provides a lens for managers to use to understand, analyze, and chart potential resolution to practical organizational problems, and as a support tool for employees in navigating and flourishing within an organization. (Mills & Murgatroyd, 1991)

Mills and Murgatroyd (1991) discuss how organizational moments of truth can be valuable in demonstrating the implicit and explicit rules of an organization. Moments of truth occur in organizations “. . . when the identity of the organization – it's very purpose and functioning – is at stake in some way” (p. 47). They are defined as, “. . . a critical incident which exemplifies for those concerned the cohesion and adaptive qualities of the organization as expressed in the performance of some particular task or action” (p. 47). The past three or four years of global disruption represents key moments of truth for organizations and from an employee perspective, how organizations respond and adapt to disruption has a potential direct affect on its employee's performance (professional and

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personal). Coaching is one potential way organizations respond to support employees. Support employees receive from their organizations is a window into how employees feel about themselves and the organization. These moments reflect the cohesion and adaptability of the organization and its employees, and provides a critical view to employees, of the organization and its dynamic complexity. (Mills & Murgatroyd, 1991)

I assert coaching is a key moment of truth for organizations and can be meaningfully examined and understood through the organizational rules (structure) and responding actions of employees (agency). Analyzing organizational rules is one way to view an organization as an organic entity rather than a mechanistic one. The notion is that organizational rules are created by actors but also sit “over and above” (p. 17) the actors. Looking at the process of coaching and organizational rules as dimensions in organizational life, it is possible to examine and understand how coaching is guided and guarded by organizational rules (structure) and actor boundaries and actions (agency). (Mills & Murgatroyd, 1991; see also Wang et al., 2021)

Examining then, coaching from a rule perspective, it is an organizational process and framework created through and bound by organizational rules (Mills & Murgatroyd, 1991, pp. 17-23):

- Created deliberately by human actors (Rule #1 and Rule #7)
- In coaching, the coach and coachee discuss issues, performance, and goals and arrive at decisions through the process of coaching or in other words, “rules of negotiated order” (p. 18) (Rule #3)
- The rules within the coaching process help employees make sense of and understand organizational life (Rule #5)



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- Coaching can be viewed as a system of behavior control (Rule #6)
- While rule bound, coaching can also be enacted because of situations within the organization as employees deal with day-to-day life in organizations (Rule #8)

The use of this construct bears implication to managers in creating and sustaining positive moments of truth for organizational actors (employees, clients) and provides a way to examine and understand the organization and its practices (Mills & Murgatroyd, 1991). For my research study, this conceptual framework is a critical tool used metaphorically in my analysis of research data to understand the lived coaching experiences of my participants. Not only from the action perspective but from an intimate view of the rules, behaviors and relationships that underpin the actions and outcomes. (Mills & Murgatroyd, 1991). This level of examination and understanding of select middle management coaching practice can provide critical insights and understanding into the theoretical development of my grounded study.

While this construct provides an avenue for understanding coaching from a structure and agency perspective, I suggest also understanding the sense that leaders make and assign to their lived experiences and subsequently the meaning they give to their employees and organizations as a result is critical to organizational performance.

### **Sensemaking Theory**

Sensemaking theory may be a theoretical paradigm I use to help me understand how participants make sense of and assign meaning to their coaching lived experiences (Weick, 1995) and subsequent actions within current disrupted organizational environments. Sensemaking is defined as “a social process of meaning construction and reconstruction through which managers understand, interpret, and create sense for

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themselves and others of their changing organizational context and surroundings” (Rouleau & Balogun, 2011, p. 955). Sensemaking is explored in length within the literature along with the role it plays within the middle manager skillset in their role supporting formation and implementation of strategic change. Gioia and Chittipeddi (1991) assert in their study of strategic change initiation, all organizational members “need to understand any intended change in a way that ‘makes sense’ or fits into some revised interpretive scheme or system of meaning” that relates to the organization’s internal and external environment (p. 434). Middle managers are acknowledged in research as the interface between organizational levels (Wooldridge, Schmid & Floyd, 2008) with “upward, downward and lateral influence” (Van Rensburg, Davis & Venter, 2014) and having capability of impacting organizational performance.

Rouleau and Balogun (2011) suggest middle managers contribute strategically to organizations through the activities they undertake to influence others. The authors suggest this is done by enacting sensemaking and sensegiving activities through their conversations, through the way they make sense of a change (sensemaking), and through subsequent shared conversations (discursive activity) with organizational members of the sense made. Further, Dutton and Ashford (1993) posit middle managers played a critical role in issue selling. In other words, in bringing issues to the attention of top-level management given the integrative role they play in strategy processes including their influence in change adaptation and change agendas. The authors also note “. . . managers who create this capability may gain adaptation advantage as they lead their organizations within increasingly complex and turbulent environments” (Dutton & Ashford, 1993, p. 423). I assert, thirty-one years on from Dutton and Ashford (1993), given the complex and

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uncertain nature of today's organizational environment of continuous change and disruption, the need for these same capabilities to strategically lead still holds true. Middle managers enact these capabilities through their daily tasks, including coaching. Further, the next section reviews extant literature related to leadership style in context of disruption.

### **Situational Leadership, Transformational Leadership, Adaptive Leadership, and Compassionate Leadership**

Research reflects an emerging opinion that traditional management theory and leadership theory may no longer be adequate in addressing the volatility, complexity, and the adaptive challenges organizations are facing in current disruptive environments as follows. Adaptive challenges or adaptive problems are defined as, “. . . difficult to identify and require changes in values, beliefs, roles, relationships, approaches to work and the underlying change are required in several areas that cross organizational boundaries. The solution to the problem lies within the people involved in the problem versus a process or technical solution” (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Sparks and McCann (2021, p. 23) note that “traditional management theory may not address the volatile change caused by a rare event such as the pandemic, which affects the future of work”. Yukl and Mahsud (2010) assert that prescriptive universal leadership theory such as transformational leadership “fail to capture the complexity of leadership processes in modern organizations” (p. 83). Similarly, Oduol (2021) suggests that “leader-centric strategies designed for the industrial age are unsuited to dealing with the turbulence in 21st-century organizations, where uncertainty and ambiguity are the norms” (p. 19). Oduol offers an opinion that “adaptive leadership as an alternative approach for

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responding to the turbulence associated with the Covid-19 pandemic (university teaching and learning contexts in Kenya) (Oduol, 2021, p. 19).

Is situational leadership, transformational leadership, adaptive leadership, or compassionate leadership as a leadership approach the way forward? While situational leadership and adaptive leadership are similar in nature whereby the focus is on leaders and followers adapting to change, a key difference lies within the focal point of the leadership approach. Situational leadership is leader centric. The approach focuses on the leader adapting their leadership approach to the changing situation to influence their followers to adapt to change. Conversely, adaptive leadership is leader-follower centric with a holistic breadth of focus. This approach focuses on the leader's behaviors and relationship with their followers and on their ability to motivate, mobilize and engage them to positively adapt to change (Arthur-Mensah & Zimmerman, 2017).

Further, while adaptive leadership more closely aligns in nature with transformational leadership, which focuses on change in individuals and in social systems and on creating “valuable and positive change in followers with the end goal of developing followers into leaders” (Langston.edu, n.d.), it extends beyond the leader and the follower. Adaptive leadership also focuses on the “internal and external factors that impact an organization” (p. 3), considers everyone impacted as stakeholders and part of “adaptive work” (Arthur-Mensah & Zimmerman, 2017, p. 3) which means working towards positive change. Adaptive work “requires determining what currently requires change while rethinking how organizations will adapt and thrive in a new environment” (Bagwell, 2020, p. 31) or in other words, adapting to needed change (Bagwell, 2020). Adaptive leadership is described as leaders changing their behavior as the situation

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before them is changing (Yukl & Mahsud, 2010). From a change management perspective, adaptive leadership focuses on “driving the human side of change by nurturing relationships, understanding reasoning and emotions, and working together to do adaptive work” (Arthur-Mensah & Zimmerman, 2017, p. 5).

An emergent topic within leadership theory is compassionate leadership. The concept of compassionate leadership according to the research work of Hougaard & Carter (2022) is the notion of leading with the intention of being of benefit to others, having the wisdom to know what the right thing to do is, and having the courage to follow through doing it. Compassionate leadership is about balancing caring with leadership wisdom and effectiveness and recognizes that people are emotional (Hougaard & Carter, 2022). As such, there is a need to do the hard work of leadership in the most human way possible. This means responding to others on an emotional level in ways that help them to overcome their challenges, failures, and pain for example, and work towards achieving their goals (Malinda & Weerasinghe, 2021).

In practicing compassionate leadership, leaders may be able to understand the reality of individuals at work including their emotions, wellbeing, and personal needs (Hougaard & Carter, 2022) and balance this understanding with the traditional organizational context of coaching individuals to achieve organizational objectives. The research results of Hougaard & Carter (2022) show that practicing compassionate leadership can foster higher levels of employee engagement, performance, loyalty, and wellbeing in employees.

Given the current level of disruption and emotional stress in today’s disrupted workplace, perhaps compassionate leadership can aid leaders in understanding and

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coaching the non-clinical psychological and physical wellbeing of employees. Meaning, seeing wellbeing in emotional ways that enable building positive responses, resilience, optimism, and achievement of goals while fostering an environment of understanding, flexibility, psychological safety, and shared problem solving (Bailey & West, 2022).

### **Other Socio-Psychological Theories and Leadership Theories Reviewed**

Additional theories I review to aid in understanding human behavior and emotions in context of my proposed research follow. While these do not form part of my initial thinking supporting my research, they may be brought to bear in the analysis of my collected research data. My study data will be the guiding factor in the final selection and fit of supporting literature, theories, and conceptual constructs.

### **Attribution Theory**

Attribution theory has evolved over time within the literature, first being conceptualized by Heider in 1958, followed by Weiner who creates an attribution paradigm (1974, 1986), and then Jones et al. using attribution theory in their social psychology research in 1972 ([InstructionalDesign.org](https://www.instructionaldesign.org), n.d.). Attribution theory focuses on how individuals interpret events and how the interpretation influences the relationship between their thinking and behavior (Thoron & Bunch, 2018, p. 1, see also Martinko & Mackey, 2019). Spitzberg and Manusov (2021) explain the theory as people tend to try and make sense of why things occur, who is responsible and cause of subsequent behavior. The theory can enable one to take a view on “explanations of behavior” (Malle & Korman, 2013, p. 1) based on potential causal factors one interprets from their environment. Further, Hopper (2018) describes attribution theory from a behavioral perspective, whether human behavior is caused by external factors (situationally caused)

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versus caused by internal characteristics (dispositionally caused). Leadership attribution as a means to explain workplace behavior is an area noted in the literature as a potential future research agenda (Martinko, Harvey, & Dasborough, 2011). Attribution theory helps us to understand that how one interprets events around them can be a casual factor or an attribution to influencing their behavior.

### **Attachment Theory**

Attachment theory is well rooted in the literature through research work conducted by Mary Ainsworth as well as John Bowlby, in the 1950's. Bowlby's notion was that there is a "lasting psychological connection between human beings and that emotional bonds are essential for development and wellbeing" (Cherry, 2022). This theory focuses on relationships and bonds between people (parent and child or romantic partners). I would argue that while relationships between leaders, managers, employees, peers, and bosses may not develop emotional bonds or last in the same way as familial relationships, their affect can have impact on behavior and long lasting psychological and wellbeing implications. Danna and Griffin (1999) suggest in their literature review on health and wellbeing in the workplace that "relationships with superiors, colleagues, and subordinates have also been identified as potential stressors" (p. 373). Of note in their review is that workplace related stress is a deep literature topic. They call for future research that creates substantial models or theories of workplace health and wellbeing with an interdisciplinary focus including medicine and psychology and mixed-method methodology to deepen understanding and research credibility in this phenomenon (Danna & Griffin, 1999). A point that resonates in Danna and Griffin (1999, p. 380) is that "health and wellbeing are clearly linked to the everyday work and life experiences of

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all organizational members . . . this is an obvious area where the concerns and agendas for managers, executives, and care-providers are closely aligned with those of scholars and researchers.” Further, Ainsworth demonstrates the impact of attachment on behavior through her research in the 1970’s (Cherry, 2022). Attachment is driven through nurturing and responsiveness (Cherry, 2022). Attachment theory helps us to understand how emotional bonds (or lack of) can affect and potentially give explanation to one’s behavior.

### **Signaling Theory**

Signaling theory is concerned with how information communicated between individuals can affect their behavior, quality of their response, and the resulting information output, particularly in uncertain, complex environments. Signaling theory is concerned with reducing information asymmetry (between two parties) and is “useful for describing behavior when two parties (individual, organizations) have access to different information” (Connelly, Certo, Ireland & Reutzel, 2011; p. 39). The key elements in the signal theory are the signaler, the signals being sent (positive, negative, strong, weak), and the receiver (Taj, 2016). It is important to understand that as one party communicates information, the other party receives it and through this exchange, they may send and receive a different understanding depending on the actions or information in the background, which can influence each ones understanding and response. This is because “actions convey information and leads people to alter their behavior and . . . this is why information imperfections have such a profound effect” (p. 62-63).

Understanding how cognitive differences are possible between communicating and receiving information helps us to understand and explain why there can be a gap in



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communication, help one to take a view on why responding behavior is as it is, and work toward reducing the gap. The authors assert, “the profundity of signaling theory lies in ascribing costs to information acquisition processes that resolve information asymmetries in a wide range of economic and social phenomena” (p. 42). Signal theory helps us to understand how parties may choose (or not) to communicate, how there can be differences in perception of the information communicated versus received, and how this can affect resulting behaviors, create potential communication gaps, and negative impact.

### **Theory of Mind**

While there are several definitions of theory of mind within the literature, they all have a central tenet connected to taking an understanding of others’ behavior relative to their mental states or their emotions. Empathy (having compassion for others) and theory of mind, which is described as “referring to cognitive representations of others’ mental states concerned with understanding others” (Schurz et al., 2021, p. 294), are entangled yet two important concepts in understanding others. Schurz et al. (2021) suggest a perspective that having empathy, empathetic concern, or compassion for others is “an affective route” to understanding others and empathizing with others is a central element in human social behavior (p. 294). While Richardson and Saxe (2020, p. 467) describe theory of mind as “understanding others’ actions in terms of their beliefs, desires, and emotions”, Firth and Firth (2005) explain theory of mind simplistically as our explanation of another’s behavior based on their mind. Or in other words, their knowledge, beliefs, and desires. They also note if there is a discrepancy between one’s belief and reality, one will tend to follow their belief to determine their behavior. Theory of Mind helps us to be aware of and understand others based on their mental state.

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### **PERMA: Theory of Elements of Wellbeing**

Martin Seligman (2018) created PERMA, a construct which can be viewed as a theory of elements of wellbeing. The five measurable elements that Seligman (2018, 2019) believes makes up wellbeing include positive emotion, engagement, relationships, meaning, and accomplishment (PERMA). He believes that psychological resources are buildable and asserts that happiness is a cause rather than a consequence of desirable outcomes that happen in life, in school, or at work (Seligman, 2019).

He acknowledges that research in this area of determining the best elements of wellbeing is in infant stages and views PERMA as “. . . a good start on the complex work-in-progress that will result in an adequate theory of the elements of wellbeing” (Seligman, 2018, p. 3). Clearly, there are common connections between some of the PERMA elements and the core tenets of existential positive psychology, namely, positive emotion, relationships, and meaning (Wong, 2010).

### **Positive Organizational Behaviour and Positive Psychological Capital**

Two interconnected concepts that link positive psychology to the workplace are positive organizational behavior and positive psychological capital. These concepts were introduced into the literature by Fred Luthans in the early 2000's (Avey, Luthans, Smith & Palmer, 2010). Positive organizational behavior (POB) is defined as, “the study and application of positively oriented human resource strengths and psychological capacities that can be measured, developed and effectively managed for performance improvement in today's workplace” (Avey et al., 2010, p. 20, see also Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017, p. 5). Further, resource strengths and psychological capacities must meet three defined inclusion criteria, “(1) must be based on theory, research, and valid

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measurement; (2) must be “state-like” (as opposed to more fixed “trait-like”) and thus be open to development; and (3) must have performance impact” (Avey et al., 2010, p. 20).

The positive psychological constructs that were selected for inclusion within positive organizational behavior by Luthans and his research partners were hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism (HERO) and they are characterized when grouped together as “psychological capital” (p. 20, see also Avey, Reichard, Luthans & Mhatre, 2011). Psychological capital (PsyCap) is defined as,

“An individual’s positive psychological state of development that is characterized by: (1) having confidence (self-efficacy) to take on and put in the necessary effort to succeed at challenging tasks; (2) making a positive attribution (optimism) about succeeding now and in the future; (3) persevering toward goals, and when necessary, redirecting paths to goals (hope) in order to succeed; and (4) when beset by problems and adversity, sustaining and bouncing back and even beyond (resilience) to attain success.” (Avey et al., 2010, pp. 20-21, see also Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017, p. 2)

The four elements of psychological capital (hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism) contribute towards the “propensity to accomplish goals and succeed” (Avey et al., 2010, p. 20) and underpin positive organizational behavior (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017). They also have positive impact on an individual’s attitudes, behaviors, performance, and wellbeing (Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017). Positive psychological capital can be used to predict desired positive outcomes in the workplace like employee performance and job satisfaction (Avey et al., 2010). The importance of employee psychological wellbeing and nurturing its development is critical in achieving personal and workplace outcomes as research findings show happy people benefit from better physical and mental health, are more resilient (Avey et al., 2010) and “show adaptive characteristics” (Swart & Rothmann, 2012, p. 493).

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There is evidence of meaningful connections between positive psychology and the workplace (Froman, 2010) through the potential integration of positive psychology, positive emotions, and positive psychological capital management into organizations as a means of supporting employees in coping with disruptive environmental turbulence and in driving positive organizational outcomes. Froman (2010) explores the role that positive emotions and psychologic processes can have in helping individuals cope with the uncertainty and impact of the United States economic downturn at the time. He is also curious how these concepts can help people “open their hearts and minds to become more receptive, productive, and creative” (Forman, 2009, p. 59). He asserts that positive psychology has the potential to help. He asserts,

“While there are no quick fixes to these complex and challenging problems, positive psychology, with its forward-looking orientation, suggests that the potential for a more helpful, productive, and satisfying future can emerge for people who are struggling to find they way through these tough times, as well as for many others who are some what more secure, but find themselves coasting along without much joy and meaning in their day-to-day work lives.” (Froman, 2010, p. 60)

Positive emotions as Seligman defines, relate to past, present, and future events (Scorsolini-Comin et al., 2013). Positive emotions linked to past events are “feelings of satisfaction, contentment, accomplishment, pride and serenity” (p. 667). Emotions that connect to the present are, “calm, plenitude, joy, ecstasy, excitement and pleasure.” (p. 667). The positive emotions linked to the future are, “optimism, faith, and hope” (p. 667). These positive emotions as positioned as enablers to envisioning and creating a more hopeful future. Tying positive emotions to the four elements of psychological capital (hope, optimism, resiliency, efficacy), Forman (2009) highlights hope (positive emotion) as “an essential ingredient in nurturing the human spirit” (p. 60), as having a critical role

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in providing “emotional strength” (p. 60), and as being foundational in helping build and sustain the capacity for resiliency. An important connection this author underscores is that hope and capacity for resiliency are “key psychologic anchors in helping people take the proactive steps necessary for them to achieve a better future” (p. 60). PsyCap also ties into achieving a better future which includes the notion of an ideal self (Froman, 2010). The notion of an ideal self has three component parts, “an image of a desired future; attributes of hope, optimism, and self-efficacy; and a person’s core identity based on strengths, traits, and other enduring dispositions” (p. 68). The PsyCap elements of hope, optimism, and self-efficacy anchor emotional strength, confidence for the future, and belief in oneself to overcome challenges. Organizations can draw out the best in their employees, build coping mechanisms and resiliency through nurturing positive psychology, positive emotions, and positive psychological capital management in the workplace (Forman, 2009).

Can leveraging psychological capital add to the competitive advantage of organizations? Traditionally, organizations leveraged their economic, human, and social capital to create competitive advantage. Luthans, Luthans, and Luthans (2004) suggest positive psychological capital is of equal importance in competitive advantage. They defined economic capital as simply what you have; human capital as what you know; social capital as who you know; and positive psychological capital as who you are (your whole self). Luthans et al. (2004) highlight the critical role hope, efficacy, resilience, and optimism can play in driving positive performance and outcomes and that human, social, and psychological capital can be developed to help organizations face current and future challenges in the turbulent marketplace. Further, Luthans and Youssef (2004) urge

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organizations of the critical need to treat human resources as a capital investment considering the continuous economic challenges and disrupted environment, we are operating in. Studies have also suggested that the investment cost to integrate PsyCap into the workplace is minimal (Avey et al., 2010, see also Luthans & Youssef-Morgan, 2017) in contrast to the potential positive performance outcomes gained including competitive advantage.

Luthans and Youssef (2004) urge researchers and organizations to move towards positive based development that improves performance over time. They urge that all the negative theories (157) related to “. . . human behavior and motivation in organizations need to give way to positively oriented strength-based management that focuses on developing human, social and psychological capital to achieve their full potential. We propose that positive psychological capital management in particular can effectively channel people’s talents, strengths, and psychological capacities toward achieving worthwhile productive, ethical, sustainable outcomes and result in competitive advantage” (p. 24). Workplace coaching is a mechanism that can be utilized to channel Luthans and Youssef’s (2004) positive development notions forward within organizations.

### **Executive Function**

Related to discussions of positive psychological capital, is executive function. Descriptions of executive function skills began in the 1970’s with Karl Pribram first definition of executive functioning, and whose research suggested this functioning takes place in the pre-frontal cortex of the human brain (Barkley, 2022, see also Goldstein et al., n.d.). Russell Barkley contributes an immense body of research on executive function or executive functioning which relates to cognitive processes that we use to organize

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“thoughts and activities, prioritizes tasks, manages time efficiently, and makes decisions” (Barkley, 2022).

Executive function can be thought of as an umbrella term to describe executive function as “hypothesized cognitive processes including planning, working memory, attention, inhibition, self-monitoring, self-regulation, and initiation carried out by prefrontal areas of the frontal lobes” ([Goldstein et al. \(n.d.\)](#)). Banich (2009, p. 89) describes executive function as a “set of abilities required to effortfully guide behaviors toward a goal, especially in non-routine situations” and highlights it is of great psychological interest because it is instrumental in self directed behavior. Reynolds et al. (2018, p. 253) define executive function as “constructs involving cognitive abilities necessary for initiating, sustaining, and maintaining purposeful goal-oriented behavior”. This body of research enables us to study and build our understanding of the cognitive side of human behavior. When applied in a workplace coaching context, a highly developed executive function can aid leaders in understanding the intimate relationship that coaching creates between the coach and the coachee and the role executive function plays in setting and achieving goals.

### **Traditional Leadership Theories**

In addition to the four preceding leadership theories discussed at the top of this section, Table 2 follows below with definitions of other traditional leadership theories I include in my review. I will revisit as needed and guided by my data analysis.

### **Table 2**

#### *Leadership Theories*

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<b>Leadership Theory</b>	<b>Definition</b>
The Great Man Theory	Leaders are born not made.
Trait Theory	Leadership traits are inherited, trained, acquired.
Behavioral Theory	Leadership is based on actions and skills.
Contingency Theory	Leadership adapts to the internal and external factors in the environment.
Resilient Leadership Theory	Leadership style that is performance and change oriented, focused on meeting organizational goals and managing/initiative change to address demands of the internal and external organizational environments (utilizes strategic thinking, emotional intelligence) (Dartey-Baah, 2015)
Transactional leadership Theory	Mutual exchanges between leader and employee.
Transformational Leadership Theory	Two-way relationship.
Servant Leadership Theory	Serve first, lead second.
Participative Theory	Input of others is considered.
Skills Theory	Knowledge and acquired skills/abilities are major factors in effective leadership.

Source: Ahmed Khan, Nawaz & Khan (2016), see also Vasilescu (2019)

**Conclusion**

The diverse mix of the literature reviewed and the complexity of issues underpinning disrupted organizations in current times invites the exploration of and motivates my guiding research question. While the disruption in organizational environments is a combination of unplanned and planned change, the need to understand the change in context to environmental and human capital impacts is critical to successfully navigating, coaching, and thriving in this context.

The combination of ideas stemming from my review of emotional intelligence, existential positive psychology, organizational rules, adaptive and/or compassionate leadership, and sensemaking, potentially provide theoretical ideas and content with which to examine and understand how middle managers are coaching in today’s disrupted organizational environments. I endeavour to create an understanding of my



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research participant's lived coaching experiences and actions drawing relevant ideas from my data and to create an explanatory grounded theory related to how middle managers coach in today's disrupted environments. The purpose of doing so is to then influence middle management coaching practice to better achieve positive organizational outcomes and wellbeing within constant organizational disruption. As I interpret the data collect, I continue to consult relevant literature, that is informed, and guided by a combination of the data I collect and the emerging thematic analysis that emerges (Suddaby, 2006).

### **Chapter 3. Methodology**

#### **Introduction**

This chapter provides an overview and discussion of the qualitative methodology utilized to conduct my research study. Data collection, analysis, and management are discussed. The chapter concludes with a perspective of why this research is important and the value it can bring to practitioners and academia alike.

#### **Background**

I use a qualitative research design for this study for three reasons. First, it is my desire to bring a Canadian middle management narrative to this field of research and supporting literature, which is currently absent. Second, I seek to understand how select Canadian middle managers are interpreting and enacting their own coaching realities in relation to my research phenomenon. Finally, I wish to create an explanatory theory of the select Canadian middle managers lived experiences of coaching, or in other words, the “how” of their coaching delivery in-situ in contrast to what is prescriptively written about how coaching should be enacted.

My method is a commonly used qualitative approach (Thomson, 2011), in the traditional genre of inductive, grounded theory. This approach is used to generate an explanatory theory that is grounded in the research data collected (Chun Tie et al., 2019; see also Corbin & Strauss, 2015). The explanatory nature of grounded theory approach (Chun Tie et al., 2019; see also Corbin & Strauss, 2015) is congruent with the nature of my research question, “how are middle manager’s coaching in today’s disrupted organizational environments?” As little is documented regarding how middle managers are coaching in-situ in today’s disrupted organizational environments, grounded theory is

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an appropriate methodological choice. This is supported by Chun Tie et al. (2019, p. 2) who state, “. . . when little is known about a phenomenon” and the aim is to “. . . produce or construct an explanatory theory that is grounded in the research data and that covers a process inherent to the substantive area of inquiry” (Chun Tie et al., 2019, p. 2; see also Dunne, 2011; Glaser & Strauss, 2017)., Grounded theory has become a popular methodology in qualitative research across many fields, including software development, healthcare research, nursing (Dunne, 2011) and management studies (Bartunek, 1987; Browning et al., 1995; Gersick, 1988; Isabella, 1990; Sutton, 1987). I use grounded theory methodology in this study to generate new knowledge about middle manager coaching practice.

Use of this methodological approach enables me to determine the conditions in which middle managers are coaching, how they respond to challenging conditions, their actions within coaching relationships, and the subsequent consequences of their actions. I am able to understand middle manager perspectives related to their experiences of workplace coaching, their identities as a coach, and their personal perspective of their capability and competence as a coach. The interplay between these elements is central to grounded theory methodology and anchored in theoretical underpinnings from pragmatism and symbolic interactionism (Corbin & Strauss, 1990, see also Annells, 1996; Suddaby, 2006). Research participants are viewed to have control through their responses to the conditions and their perceived options of choice experienced in this interplay and fundamental to grounded theory is the researcher’s responsibility to capture this interplay (Corbin & Strauss, 1990).

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Further, grounded theory enables me to explore the process of the middle manager's coaching practice through their lived experiences versus the coaching experience itself (subjectively). I develop an explanatory theoretical perspective anchored in my research data that enables me to articulate the current coaching practice of a group of Canadian middle managers and potentially identify the demarcation between workplace coaching and workplace counseling in today's disrupted organizational environments. In other words, in using grounded theory, I am able to elucidate the descriptive, lived middle management coaching experiences in five specific areas as follows.

In using this method, I first investigate and describe how middle managers deliver their coaching practice in the context of today's disrupted organizational environments. Second, I consider how middle management business coaching practice and the coaching soft skills in today's disrupted work environments may differ from conventional views in the literature. Third, I consider if there is any need for the addition of non-clinical psychological counseling skills within a business coaching model context to address the complexity of thriving in today's disrupted organizational environments. Fourth, I explore any boundaries between the need for workplace coaching and workplace counseling. Lastly, I consider how respondent's emotional intelligence competence impacts coaching practice and promotion of organizational wellness. I discern whether a higher level of emotional intelligence and further development may be required for study participants and if so, what is needed to ensure development. Further, a grounded theory methodological approach enables me “. . . to make knowledge claims about how individuals interpret reality” (Suddaby, 2006, p. 634); or in other words, how my middle

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manager research participants interpret their reality, including their actions relative to their individual coaching practices.

### **Paradigm**

The research paradigm underpinning my study of how Canadian middle managers are coaching in today's disrupted environments, is social constructivism or interpretivism. Interpretivism takes the focus of understanding subjective experiences and individual perspectives (Bloomberg & Velope, 2019).

This aligns with my own subjectivist epistemological and interpretivist ontological perspectives. It aligns with my qualitative data collection interview method and with my desire to understand my research participants' lived workplace coaching experience including their context-specific perspective in a disrupted context. Lastly, an interpretivist approach aligns with taking the meaning of my participants' perspectives as the foundation to inductively establish a grounded theory to provide explanation to my research questions. (Bloomberg & Velope, 2019)

### **Research Questions**

The interview protocol is guided by the overarching research question, "how do middle managers coach in today's disrupted environments?" With my interview questions, I explore the following.

First, I am interested in exploring the lived experiences of how middle managers coach in today's disrupted organizational environments, how they make meaning of, and act related to their workplace coaching practices. Second, I am interested in exploring the role of emotional intelligence and the need for non-clinical psychological counseling skills in business coaching, given the dynamic challenges managers and employees

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experience in context of disruption. Finally, I am also interested in the role middle managers play in enacting emotional and adaptive work through their coaching practices to support employees and organization wellness. I explore with the supporting questions:

1. How has middle management business coaching practice and the coaching of soft skills (e.g., addressing workplace emotions) in today's disrupted work environments shifted from conventional views in the literature?
2. Is there a need for non-clinical psychological counseling skills to be integrated within a business coaching context, given employees' experience of emotional challenges in today's disrupted workplace?
3. How substantial/effective is emotional intelligence in current business coaching practice at addressing middle management coaching competence and organizational wellness? Is a higher level of emotional intelligence required? Do Canadian middle managers require development of a higher level of emotional intelligence? What is needed to ensure Canadian middle managers develop such emotional intelligence?

### **Research Design**

As noted above, I use an interpretive, qualitative, inductive research strategy (grounded theory) versus a quantitative, deductive research strategy for four reasons. First, the nature of a quantitative, deductive approach would not generate descriptive and narrative meaning of lived human experiences that I require for deep analysis to achieve abstract theoretical categorization of data (Suddaby, 2006; see also Glaser & Strauss, 2017). Second, given “methodological congruence is substantiated when the philosophical position of the researcher is congruent with the research question and the methodological approach selected” (Chun Tie et al., 2019, p. 7), this approach aligns

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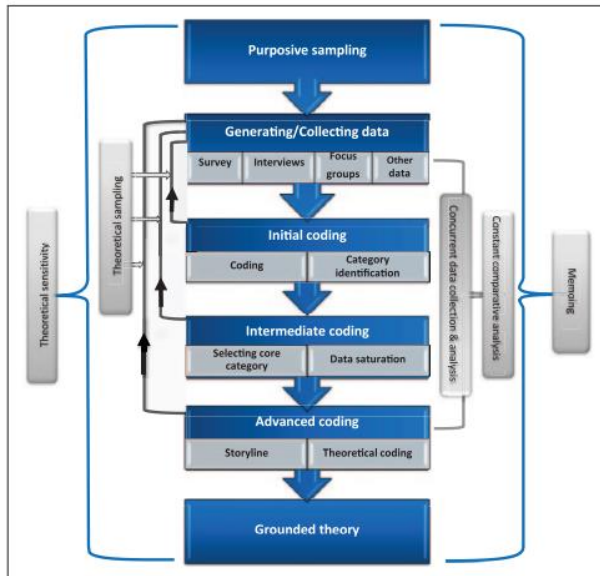
with my subjectivist epistemological and interpretivist ontological perspectives. Third, through an interpretivist lens, this approach enables me to deeply explore the lived coaching experiences of my research participants, including the meaning they assign to the social constructed coaching interactions and the in-situ delivery of their coaching practice in contexts of coaching as a process and in disrupted organizational environments, which aligns with the inquiry of my research question. Lastly, I seek to establish a deep understanding of the emotional reactions and applied impact of my research phenomenon, specific to the time and place of my study (Marshall, 2021, see also Wertz, 2005; Wilson, 2014).

To successfully achieve the goals of my research study, I seek a deep understanding of both the methodology and the supporting, iterative research process of grounded theory (Chun Tie et al., 2019). My successful execution of grounded theory research “involves the meticulous application of specific methods and processes” (p. 3), as depicted in the research design framework in Figure 1 (Chun Tie et al., 2019, p. 3), see below, and is explained in the following section, which focuses on the purpose of grounded theory and how it is carried out.

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**Figure 1**

## *Grounded Theory Design Framework*



(Source: Chun Tie et al., 2019, p. 3)

## **Grounded Theory: Purpose and How it is Done**

“The purpose of grounded theory is not to make truth statements about reality, but, rather, to elicit fresh understandings about patterned relationships between social actors and how these relationships and interactions actively construct reality” (Suddaby, 2006; see also Glaser & Strauss, 2017). As shown in Figure 1 (Chun Tie et al., 2019, p. 3), grounded theory can be explained as a series of iterative, repetitive, and interconnected steps taken with several different processes and tools to effectively capture and analyze research data. The main steps in conducting grounded theory that I follow in this research, are defined as follows (Chun Tie et al., 2019):

- *Purposive sampling* is the process in which research participants are purposively selected and engaged for the initial generation and collection of data aimed at



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answering the research question. *Concurrent data collection and analysis* is performed to develop the data set and the theory.

- *Generating and collection of data* is done through a variety of methods (i.e., interviews, surveys, focus groups, other data, documents, literature, artefacts) with interviews being the most common method (see also Thomson, 2011).
- *Theoretical sampling* enables the researcher to follow ideas and leads in the research data by engaging additional participants and relevant material, which supports evolving the theory and ensures the final product remains grounded in the research data.
- *Constant comparative analysis* is an analytical process used in the coding and categorization development steps of the methodology. It begins in the initial data generation and collection, where codes and categories are identified from within the data. Initially, data points are compared to each other in each code, which is followed by codes being compared to each other. Codes are then placed in categories. Data points, codes, and categories are constantly compared. As new data are added, they are compared, coded, and categorized together and with the other data already collected, coded, and categorized. The purpose of this iterative process is to generate “increasingly more abstract concepts and theories” (p. 4)
- *Initial coding* is the fracturing of the initially collected research data to begin the comparison of data points and looking for similarities, differences, and patterns in the data.
- *Intermediate coding* follows initial coding and starts to transform the initial data into more abstract concepts, which enables the theory to emerge.

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- *Advanced coding* follows intermediate coding and, in this phase, codes that have been categorized begin formation into interrelated concepts and “explanatory statements detail the relationships between categories and the central core category” (p. 6) of the research data.
- *Memo writing* is the process of writing analytic notes, which are considered an essential element in grounded theory, and in particular, “in ensuring quality in grounded theory” (p. 4). They are used by the researcher to capture their ideas, thoughts, feelings and thinking as they intimately work through capturing and analyzing the research data. Memos are notes related to “. . . the data and the theoretical connections between the categories” (p. 4) and “. . . informs the grounded theory findings” (p. 4).
- *Theoretical sensitivity* is threaded through the end-to-end process of grounded theory and relates to the researcher’s ability of knowing when they have identified data that is important to their theory. “Conducting grounded theory research requires a balance between keeping an open mind and the ability to identify elements of theoretical significance during data generation and/or collection and data analysis” (p. 6).
- *Grounded theory* is the resulting product of the data collection and analysis, which explains a process related to the research phenomenon, expressed as a concept(s), or related in a substantive theory (theory grounded in extant research) (Suddaby, 2006) of which are grounded in the research data collected by the researcher.

In short, Figure 1 (Chun Tie et al., 2019, p. 3) and the preceding section depict and explain the iterative process of grounded theory methodology that I use in this research study to generate an explanatory grounded theory related to my research

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phenomenon. Further, the grounded theory process I undertake is coupled with my attention to both extant theory and literature and my observations and data collection. This is a delicate balance of the middle ground between seeing the world with a theory view and one of experience and experimentation to develop new abstract theoretical statements and explanations of my research phenomenon (Suddaby, 2006).

### **Research Participant Recruitment Strategy**

My participant recruitment strategy for gathering participants for this study follows the tenets of the grounded theory methodology to ensure data integrity. There is no pre-determined sample size for grounded theory, given it is a data-driven research process and its main purpose “. . . is to generate enough data so that the illuminate patterns, concepts, categories, properties, and dimensions of the given phenomena can emerge” (Thomson, 2011, p. 46; see also Corbin & Strauss, 1990; Glaser & Strauss, 2017) Further, Glaser and Strauss (2017) posit reasons why representativeness of the sample is not a concern with grounded theory. First, “. . . theoretical (not statistical) sampling guides the choosing and handling of data” (p. 189). Second, it is the population scope that is important in generating theory and it can be increased by the researcher if representativeness is less of concern to the researcher (Glaser & Strauss, 2017). Therefore, to explore how Canadian middle managers are coaching in today’s disrupted organizational environments, an adequate sample size would be one which theoretically saturates the data related to how Canadian middle managers are coaching.

Theoretical saturation is determined by criteria related to the data categories. For example, when no new or relevant data emerges in relation to a category, if the properties and content of the categories are well developed, and/or category interrelationships are

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well formed and validated (Thomson, 2011; see also Hennick & Kaiser, 2021). In simple terms, when I experience data saturation, that is, when no new data insights are captured with subsequent interviews, I stop inviting participants for interviews. This approach aligns with the principle of saturation, meaning I must ensure my participant sample size is adequate to satisfy addressing my research question (Mason, 2010). Thomson (2011) performed a content analysis of one hundred articles that utilized grounded theory methodology with interviews as a collection method and a key point in the paper underscored the importance of theoretical saturation in guiding the sampling in grounded theory. Aptly stated (p. 49),

“Researchers cannot make a judgment regarding sample size until they are involved in data collection and analysis. They must allow the data to dictate the sample size; therefore, it is important to undertake data analysis during the data collection process. After each interview, the researcher or researchers should review the data and the emerging themes. This review will help identify the point of theoretical saturation.”

Thomson’s content analysis determined that theoretical saturation typically occurs between 10 and 30 interviews. The author suggested a best practice in that once theoretical saturation is achieved, test it by completing a few more interviews as a means of data validation and rigor. “It is only through the quality of the data that meaningful and valid results are developed, so it is essential that the researcher ensure that saturation has occurred” (Thomson, 2011, p. 50). According to Henning and Kaiser (2021, p. 9), “saturation is considered the cornerstone of rigor in determining sample sizes in qualitative research . . .”.

For the purpose of this study, the sample size aims to include two to three participants per targeted organization for a total sample size of 20-30 participants, unless

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saturation is reached. While a small sample size may be considered a limitation (discussed further in Chapter 5. Study Limitations and Implications to Practice and Theory, pp 183-193), a smaller study sample is consistent with the overall nature of qualitative research (Gill, 2014). It is also congruent with my philosophical interpretivist approach of wanting to be deeply immersed in research activities with my research participants (Wilson, 2014). Sample size limitations can be addressed in a few ways. First, data saturation, an important tenet of grounded theory, guides my sample size. Second, data triangulation may be used (Maggs-Rapport, 2000) to ensure research rigour and data validity and usefulness (Marshall et al., 2021). See below under Rigour, Consistency, and Resonance, pp. 99-105. The strength of a small sample allows deeper exploration of my participants' coaching experiences. This aligns with qualitative (phenomenological) emphasis of data quality, or rather, "rich qualitative accounts over the quantity of data" (Gill, 2014, p. 128).

### **Research Participant Recruitment Activities**

In my initial participant recruitment activity, I aim to compile my random sample from a cross section of thirteen Canadian companies in the service industry. I aim to select my research participants based on demographic criteria that I categorize based on different characteristics such as middle manager role type (e.g., senior director, director, senior manager; unit lead, team lead, or individual contributor), tenure, gender, and industry size and type for a diverse participant pool. For my target audience, I plan to select one to three potential middle management participants from each selected organization, resulting in ten to thirty middle managers as my initial targeted research participants to start my research study (data saturation will guide my sample size, as

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discussed above in Research Participant Recruitment Strategy, pp. 91-93. To broaden my recruitment strategy, I also target participants through my professional and personal network, and social media network via the social media platform, LinkedIn.

### **Initial Research Participant Recruitment Results**

Early deployment of my recruitment strategy proved difficult with an overall six-month time investment (August 2023 – January 2024), a low-yielding recruitment rate, and heavy administration. The following explains the details of my recruitment efforts including my challenges, reasoning for changing recruitment tactics, and the most fruitful strategies for securing my research participants.

**Recruitment Letters: Large Sized Canadian Service Companies.** Utilizing the [Forbes Global 2000 List](#) (Murphy, Haverstock, Gara, Helman & Vardi, 2021) which ranks the world's 2,000 largest publicly traded companies, I select 13 companies for the following reasons. First, I want to ensure a cross representation of service industries. Second, I want to ensure location dispersion across Canada, so I target organizations with different head office locations across the country. The one exception to this is the financial services companies as Toronto is home to many large financial service companies. Third, I aim to target responses from ten companies, I add an additional three companies to account for potential non-response, for a total of thirteen companies as outlined below in Table 3: Recruitment Letters Sent to a Selection of Large Sized Canadian Service Companies, p. 95; see Appendix B: Recruitment Letter: Canadian Large Sized Service Companies, pp. 216-217. I assign each with a company number (C#) and for privacy and anonymity, planned to share no further details.

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**Table 3**

*Recruitment Letters Sent to a Selection of Large Sized Canadian Service Companies*

C#	Organization	Location	Service Type
1.	Airline Industry	Saint-Laurent, PQ	Air Transportation
2.	Health Industry	West Laval, PQ	Healthcare
3.	Retail	Toronto, ON	Retail
4.	Utility	St. John's, NF	Utilities
5.	Retail	Vancouver, BC	Retail
6.	Financial Services/ Insurance	Toronto, ON	Financial Services
7.	Agriculture	Saskatoon, SK	Agriculture Products
8.	Communications & Media	Toronto, ON	Communications & Media
9.	Dairy	Saint-Léonard, PQ	Dairy Products
10.	e-Commerce Platform	Ottawa, ON	e-Commerce
11.	Financial Services	Toronto, ON	Financial Services
12.	Financial Services	Toronto, ON	Financial Services
13.	Telecommunications	Vancouver, BC	Telecommunications

The response rate from these thirteen companies was 15% or two out of the thirteen companies. For privacy and anonymity of participants, these two companies are not revealed here. One of the responding companies supported having two of their middle managers participate in my research, while the other supported four of their middle managers from their parent and holding companies to participate.

**Networks: Professional and Social Media.** Given my low success at recruitment to date, I then canvassed my professional network and my social media network. My professional network through conversation produced a small number of individuals who were interested in participating. I chose to hold on inviting these participants as my preference was to interview middle managers outside my present employer.

My social media network was similar in fashion. I created and posted a [LinkedIn Research Post](#), an online recruitment invitation to my study. This online recruitment

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invitation was open to anyone on the LinkedIn platform and several of my network reposted to their own profile pages. Initially, I received nineteen responses to my LinkedIn posting and I replied with an acknowledgment email which included criteria questions to ensure fit for my study. Seventeen of these responses were spam email (no responses received), and unfortunately, the other two individuals who responded did not fit the current scope of my study.

**Change in Recruitment Strategy: Organizational Scope, Personal Network, and Snowball Sampling.** I successfully recruited 6 participants. As a result of the low response rates to my initial recruitment activities, with the support of my Committee, I made purposeful changes to my recruitment approach:

- I changed the scope of the organizations I was targeting from large sized, Canadian service companies, to varying size of the organizations to broaden the field of service organizations.
- My focus was primarily on canvassing my personal network and using the snowball sampling technique during my conversations and interviews to potentially broaden my field of participants. Snowball sampling is when a random sampling of participants is drawn from a set population (Goodman, 1961). Unfortunately, taking this snowball sampling approach (Goodman, 1961) with my interview participants by asking for recommendations from other participants was not successful for the following reasons. The request was either met with an indication that they would pass on my invite (no additional responses received); no commitment but they would get back to me; or even though they did pass the invite on or encourage downline



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members of the team to participate, they were not able to make the time as they were too busy current workload to participate.

Changing my organizational scope from only large sized service organizations to that of varying size proved to be successful in increasing response rate in recruiting participants.

### **Participant Demographics**

As a result of the changes made in my recruitment strategy, I was able to recruit an additional fourteen participants. A referral to a financial services provider yielded five participants; a referral to a post-secondary institution yielded five participants; my personal/academic network yielded one participant; and lastly, three participants from my professional network. In total, I had twenty research participants from a reasonable cross section of Canadian service companies with dispersion across the country as outlined below in Table 4: Research Participants: Organizational Data. Following on, Table 5 below outlines Research Participants: Demographic Data. For privacy and anonymity, participants were assigned a Participant Number (P#), and further descriptive details are not shared.

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**Table 4**

*Research Participants: Organizational Data*

P#	Sector	Company	Location	Service Type	Employee Base	Global or Domestic
01	Government	Financial Services	Quebec City, PQ	Financial	150	Domestic
02	Government	Financial Services	Ottawa, ON	Financial	150	Domestic
03	Publicly Traded	Waste Management	Edmonton, AB	Waste Management	10,000	Domestic
04	Publicly Traded	Agriculture	Saskatoon, SK	Agriculture Products	27,000	Global
05	Government	Financial Services	Halifax, NS	Financial	150	Domestic
06	Government	Financial Services	Ontario	Financial	150	Domestic
07	Publicly Traded	Agriculture	Saskatoon, SK	Agriculture Products	27,000	Global
08	Government	Financial Services	Calgary, AB	Financial	150	Domestic
09	Publicly Traded	Financial Services	Toronto, ON	Financial	90,000	Global
10	Publicly Traded	Financial Services	Toronto, ON	Financial	90,000	Global
11	Publicly Traded	Financial Services	Toronto, ON	Financial	90,000	Global
12	Publicly Traded	Utilities	St. John's, NL	Utilities	9,200	Global
13	Publicly Traded	Utilities	PEI	Utilities	219	Domestic
14	Publicly Traded	Utilities	NL	Utilities	650	Domestic
15	Publicly Traded	Utilities	St. John's, NL	Utilities	9,200	Global
16	Private	Education	Mississauga, ON	Post-secondary	12,424	Domestic
17	Private	Education	Mississauga, ON	Post-secondary	12,424	Domestic
18	Private	Education	Mississauga, ON	Post-secondary	12,424	Domestic
19	Private	Education	Mississauga, ON	Post-secondary	12,424	Domestic
20	Private	Education	Mississauga, ON	Post-secondary	12,424	Domestic

All research participants in this study are middle managers within their organizations, and each participant has people management responsibilities with a varying number of direct reports and tenure in their current roles. They each engage in workplace coaching as a core part of their middle management role responsibilities.

Participant demographic data is outlined below in Table 5 Research Participants,

Demographic Data, p. 99, by participant number (P#).

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**Table 5**

*Research Participants: Demographic Data*

P#	Title	Role Type	Direct Reports	Role Tenure	Age	Gender
01	District Manager	Regional Head	20	4 Yrs	60-Older	M
02	Asst Vice President	Strategic Initiatives	5	10 Mos	41-50	M
03	Manager	Leadership Development	1	2 Yrs	41-50	F
04	Vice President	HR Business Partner	4	1 Yr	51-60	M
05	District Manager	Regional Head	20	9 Mos	Not Disclosed	M
06	Manager	Administration	24	2.5 Yrs	41-50	F
07	Vice President	Financial Business Services	7	7 Mos	41-50	M
08	District Manager	Regional Head	16	4 Yrs	60-Older	M
09	Senior Director	Workplace Safety	5	2	41-50	F
10	Director	Strategic Initiatives & Change Mgmt	1	1 Yr	41-50	F
11	Director	Business Continuity Planning	8	6 Mos	41-50	F
12	Vice President	Culture & People	3	8 Yrs	Not Disclosed	F
13	Manager	Sustainability & Corporate Communications	2	1.5 Yrs	Not Disclosed	F
14	Director	Customer Relations and Energy Solutions	3	12 Yrs	31-40	F
15	Manager	Corporate Communications	1	4	31-40	F
16	Assistant Dean	Student and International Initiatives	3	2 Yrs	41-50	M
17	Director	Student Housing & Residence Life	3	3 Yrs	31-40	M
18	Director	Student Services and Auxiliaries	7	5 Yrs	31-40	F
19	Assistant Director	Residence Administration and Operations	3	1.5 Yrs	41-50	F
20	Director	Student Engagement	2	6 Yrs	41-50	F

## **Ethical Considerations**

Given that this study involves working with human research participants, Athabasca University requires that established research ethics guidelines be followed. Prior to conducting research, all proper approvals were secured from the Athabasca University Ethics Committee. Moreover, all participants were invited in writing to participate at their discretion along with their permission being secured by each signing a participation consent form. Further, participants were informed (also in writing) that they are able to withdraw from the research study at any time, unencumbered. (Wilson, 2014; see also Marshall et al, 2021).

## **Rigor, Consistency, and Resonance**

Meticulous attention in my research practice to organization, detail, and process, combined with ethical research conduct ensures that I conduct and produce quality

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research with academic and practical relevance (Chun Tie et al., 2019, p. 7). To establish trustworthiness in my interpretations of research data, the validity, credibility, and transferability of my research data and research activities was addressed (Marshall et al., 2021), along with mitigations for researcher bias.

Validity (quality of data collected) and credibility (accuracy of data interpretation) (Whittemore, Chase, and Mandle, 2001) are addressed in my study as follows. First, the amount of time that I engage in my research setting (virtual and physical) was documented so I am transparent in the time spent in research, see Table 7: Researcher: Time Spent in Research, p. 107 for detail. Second, the objectives of this research study and the interview questions were well defined, easy to understand and feasible. Third, care was taken to ensure the measurements utilized relate to the research questions and study objectives and can be compared with similar extant research. Fourth, my research participants may be engaged following the completion of my data analysis processes, to review my data analysis to validate and create a level of confidence between my view and that of my participants and enable me to incorporate their validation into my study findings. (Marshall et al., 2021; see also Wilson, 2014).

Further on, the meticulous application of the grounded theory methods ensures the resulting product remains grounded in the underlying research data and the application of rigor sustains throughout the entire cycle of research activity. This ensures quality in the research study. (Whittemore et al., 2001) Quality in grounded theory research as suggested by Chun Tie et al. (2019, p. 7) can be related to: “1) the researcher’s expertise, knowledge, and research skills; 2) methodological congruence with the research question; and 3) procedural precision in the use of methods.” Further

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they suggest that “data collection or generation and analytical conceptualization need to be rigorous throughout the research process to secure excellence in the final grounded theory” (Chun Tie et al., 2019, p. 7).”

Additionally, procedural precision requires my “. . . careful attention to maintaining a detailed audit trail, data management strategies and procedural logic” (Chun Tie et al., 2019, p. 7). My audit trail is captured in my field notes, data analysis notes, and in analytic memos (Chun Tie et al., 2019).

Further, I use NVivo to support my data management strategy and audit trail, including the organization and confidential management and storage of research data and analytical memos. I also document my decision making in context to my research activities including changes in the direction of my research and the rationale for decisions made, which are essential to ensure rigour in the final grounded theory product. (Chun Tie et al., 2019, p. 7).

For example, I have clear documentation of how I developed my data codes, data categories, and data themes which demonstrates transparency of relationships between data and rigor in my analysis activities (Corbin & Strauss, 2015), see Appendix D: Coding Clusters, pp. 219-225. Another example is of analytic memos I use in this study, see Appendix E: Examples of Analytic Memo Used in Study, p. 226 to document thoughts or decisions related to methodological decisions.

I explain my justification for my approach to snowball sampling (Goodman, 1961) my recruitment participants and use grounded theory methods of data saturation as guides for my appropriate interview population for this study (see above Research Participant Recruitment Strategy and Research Participant Recruitment Activities, pp.

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93-97). Hennick and Kaiser (2021, p. 2) highlighted through a review of empirical qualitative studies focused on identifying and assessing saturation, that a lack of transparency exists in describing how the justification of sample size is achieved and in how saturation is assessed and criteria for determining saturation is “. . . largely absent in qualitative studies”.

From a construct validity perspective, grounded theory has inherent critical evaluation and verification within its process of systematically capturing and analysing of research data. I conduct constant comparative analysis which allows for continuous critical evaluation of emerging constructs from the data against my ongoing research observations. (Suddaby, 2006) This activity is also considered a primary means of verification as it guides a researcher to “. . . continue to collect data until no new evidence appears,” defined as “category saturation” (Suddaby, 2006, p. 636).

Further, saturation defined as “the process of acquiring sufficient data to develop each category or theme fully in terms of its properties and dimensions and to account for variation” (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 239) provides an avenue of consistency in capturing study data. Determining when saturation has been reached is partly based on the researcher’s assessment, as stated by Glaser and Strauss (2017), “the criteria for determining saturation . . . are a combination of the empirical limits of the data, the integration and density of the theory and the analyst’s theoretical sensitivity” (p. 62).

In this study, data saturation was reached around interview #15 as no new data was coming forward (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). I then complete the remaining additional five interviews (total of 20) testing theoretical saturation (Thomson, 2011), ensuring my

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data categories and themes are well developed and I am able to succinctly explain my emerged grounded theory (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

To mitigate predefined response bias and enable participants to feel comfortable answering questions (Bianchi, Prandi, & Bonetti, 2021), interview questions are open ended to enable all parties involved to ask relevant follow up questions (Wilson, 2014). I manage research time efficiently with interviews of 45 to 50 minutes, leaving time for participants to add anything they feel important to the discussion. Also, relevant secondary data is used to support the study (Wilson, 2014). For example, findings from relatable grounded theory studies with which to compare the proposed study findings (Wilson, 2014) are used to draw related conclusions toward answering the guiding research question.

Further, given my personal experience and perspective related to my research phenomenon, I am mindful to situate myself within my research study by practicing reflexivity. I continuously check myself in terms of how I am constructing and reconstructing my understanding of data and my own reality while conducting my research activities. I hold a continual practice of “questioning, examining, accepting and articulating my attitudes, assumptions, perspectives and roles” (Barrett et al., 2020, p. 10). The purpose of practicing reflexivity throughout all phases of my research allows me to recognize my positionality or in other words, I recognize that my own identity as a middle manager and my coaching experiences within the current disrupted context can potentially impact all aspects of my research, my ability in assessing and analyzing data and in formulating findings. I also recognize a need to remain neutral by staying focused on my participants while separating myself from both the participants and the data, so not

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to inject the data with my own value judgements. (Bevan, 2014, also see Marshall et al., 2021, Wertz, 2005) To address researcher bias, or in other words, my own bias during the research, I undertake specific actions and control strategies (Corbin & Strauss, 2015). I acknowledge that I bring my own biases, values, assumptions, and world-view perspectives to this research. I remain mindful to not overlay or give meaning to data analysis with my perspectives or actions, and reactions, but rather, to allow the data to reveal its own insights, information, and meaning. I am mindful to accept the data as it presents to me, and to document, transcribe, code, and analyze it as it is. I am also mindful of and anticipate nuances in the data and that there is potential to discover completely different meanings or insights that I am not expecting.

Most importantly, I acknowledge that central to the success of my research is the subjective views of my research participants (Marshall et al., 2021) and not that of my own. The bias control strategy I use during my research leverages the built-in mechanisms with the grounded theory methodology that supports constant comparison between data and the constant questioning of data meaning to help avoid the intrusion of bias (Corbin & Strauss, 2015).

Finally, generalizability or generalized findings is not the focus of my research findings. Given I am interested in exploring and providing a theoretical explanation as to how select Canadian middle managers in varying sized organizations in cross-service industry are coaching in today's disrupted organizational environments, based on the time and place of my study, I am not aiming to produce "truths" that can be generalized to other actors or settings rather, I aim to ". . . develop context-relevant findings that can be applicable to broader contexts while still maintaining their content-specific richness"



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(Bloomberg & Volpe, 2019, p. 205). From a transferability perspective, I aim for my study to generate an explanatory theory, insights, and knowledge others may find useful in their own settings through an understanding of how my research occurred within its setting (Bloomberg & Velope, 2019).

### Data Collection

The study primary data collection method is semi-structured interviews. Twenty interviews were completed between August 18, 2023 – January 31, 2024. The interviews were 45-60 minutes in length, conducted through Microsoft Teams, and managed with the support of an interview guide for eight specific questions, refer to Appendix C: Semi-Structured Interview Guide, p. 218). The interview questions are designed to understand the lived experiences of how middle managers in today’s disrupted organizational environments are coaching, below see Table 6, Research Interview Questions:

**Table 6**

#### *Research Interview Questions*

Q#	Research Interview Question
1.	Tell me about your organization, your role, role title, role tenure and the size of your team.
2.	What is your current experience coaching as a middle manager in today’s disrupted organizational environment?
3.	What is your coaching practice model? (How do you coach/coaching approach; what is being coached)
4.	What skills do you find of value in your coaching practice? What skills do you find do not add value? What skills, if any, are missing?
5.	How do you know your coaching practice is effective? How is your coaching effectiveness measured?
6.	Thinking about your coaching practice, how relevant has addressing workplace emotions/stress in your coaching been?
7.	How do your emotions/stress, if at all, play in your coaching practice? How do your emotions/stress of your employees/ leaders/ peers, if at all, play in your coaching practice?
8.	Thinking about your coaching practice, how relevant has addressing workplace emotions/stress in your coaching been?

With these questions, I am looking to explore and understand the following:

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- Their coaching practice and frameworks or tools they may be utilizing
- Topics they are coaching with their employees
- Behavior and skill patterns might they be applying in their coaching practice
- How coaching is defined, and the meaning associated
- How their coaching effectiveness is measured, if at all
- How workplace emotions and stress because of disruption plays into their coaching practice to determine if there is a need for non-clinical psychological counseling skills in a business coaching context and if there is a need to delineate boundaries between the two.

### **Data Analysis**

My data analysis approach is driven by my choice of grounded theory methodology, which means constant comparison of the data through several cycles of data collection, data comparison, and data analysis until data saturation is reached. To provide a fulsome view of my data analysis, I invest time in three rounds of coding (initial, intermediate, and advanced), constantly comparing and analyzing data, and mind mapping (Wheeldon & Ahlberg, 2019) to create a visual representation of my research data and data themes. (Chun Tie et al., 2019)

I use qualitative analysis software, NVivo to assist in my data analysis and capturing of analytic memos to document key thoughts and ideas as I work through my data collection and analysis (Chun Tie et al., 2019), see Appendix E: Examples of Analytic Memos Used in Study, p. 226.

The coding aspect of the data collected for this study is a significant investment of time. The time invested in coding my twenty transcribed interviews was substantial in

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relation to the 20 hours of initial interview time. End to end coding took approximately 49 hours, see below Table 7: Researcher: Time Spent in Research, or approximately 2.45 times longer than my interview time investment. This work period aligns with suggested practice in qualitative data analysis as Jackson & Bazeley (2019, p. 76) suggest allowing for end-to-end data analysis to take “two to five times as long as the period taken to make arrangements and gather data”.

Two key factors drove my time investment. First, learning how to use NVivo to capture my transcribed files and complete the subsequent coding and mind mapping, discussed further along in this section, included a steep learning curve. Second, the rich quality of my interview data also guided the amount of time I spent in analysis (Jackson & Bazeley, 2019). I collected an average of eighteen pages of transcription per interview. A total of 362 pages of transcribed data was utilized for end-to-end data analysis, see below, Table 7: Researcher: Time Spent in Research.

**Table 7**

*Researcher: Time Spent in Research*

*(n= 20 Participants; h= Hours; t= Transcribed Pages)*

Time Spent (h) Interviewing	Time Spent (h) Verbatim Transcription	Time Spent (h) Initial Coding	Time Spent (h) Intermediate Coding	Time Spent (h) Advanced Coding & Mind Mapping
20	59	19	22	8
<b>Total Time Spent in Research (h)</b>			128	
<b>Total # of Transcription Pages (t)</b>			362	

The steps I use to code my transcript data (362 pages) follow the tenets of the grounded theory methodology including rounds of initial coding, intermediate coding, and advanced coding (Chun Tie et al., 2019). While coding, I continue to undertake constant comparison of my transcript data as well as continue with data collection. A

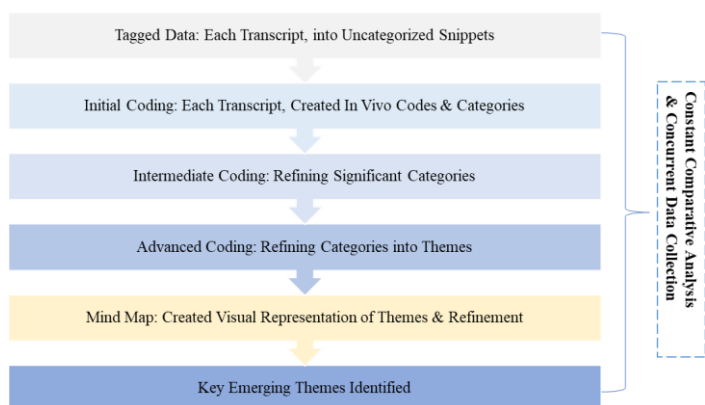
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detailed explanation of the coding process I execute follows, refer below to Figure 2:

Anticipated Coding Process for Qualitative Data Analysis.

**Figure 2**

*Anticipated Coding Process for Qualitative Data Analysis*



Adapted from Urquhart (2023, Figure 9.3, p. 187), Chun Tie et al., (2019)

**Tagged Data.** The first coding action I take is as I complete my first two interviews, I read the cleaned-up transcriptions to identify snippets of data that were meaningful, related to my interview questions, and linked back to answering my overarching study question. I code these data points as “uncategorized,” as I want to isolate the data for coding and comparison so I can get a feel for the data before I begin.

**Initial Coding.** In the first phase of coding, I create in vivo codes using actual words from my participants (Saldaña, 2021) for all the uncategorized snippets, creating initial codes or more abstract concepts of the data (Chun Tie et al., 2019). As I continue to interview participants, I continue to compare data from these new interviews with the existing data already coded and subsequently will code the new transcription into uncategorized snippets and existing codes. I also create new codes as the data requires. As I start to gather a significant number of codes, I start to see relationships and

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differences in my data and begin creating categories. I sort my codes into categories accordingly. I continue in this fashion until I complete all twenty interviews, reach data saturation, and I begin to engage in intermediate coding.

**Intermediate Coding.** In the second phase of my coding process, I engage in intermediate coding in which I continue to look at my code categories and refine the comparison and analysis (Chun Tie et al., 2019). In this stage of the process, I flag the categories that are most dominant across the transcripts, meaning the categories that have the most references within the transcripts.

I then export my NVivo code book (see Appendix F: NVivo Code Book, p. 227) into an Excel spreadsheet and couple this with a Word document (see Appendix D: Coding Clusters, pp. 219-225), to catalogue my dominant codes by interview question, so I can then proceed to refine categories and create themes through abstract thinking. I chose this approach as I find it an easier process to create the code categories and data themes outside of NVivo (Adu, 2023). Once I have my dominant categories, I was ready to embark on advanced coding.

**Advanced Coding.** In the last coding phase, I work through my analysis to pull the data up to a higher level of abstraction (Suddaby, 2006) by analyzing my dominant categories for relationships and differences and to create themes or interrelated concepts (Chun Tie et al., 2019) by grouping the categories of data. The data was scaled up into broader themes (Urquhart, 2023). I link these emergent themes back to each interview question and ensure the themes also relate back to my overarching research questions, refer to Table 6: Research Interview Questions, p. 105. With direction from my supervisory committee to make the analysis easier to manage, I create a mind map to

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visually represent my coded and categorized research data centered around my research question (Wheeldon & Ahlberg, 2019, p. 63).

### **Mind Mapping: As a Qualitative Data Analysis Tool**

The substantial volume of verbatim transcription generated from my data collection (total of 362 pages) is an overwhelming task to review, compare, and analyze the data efficiently and effectively. Given that I am a visual learner, this proved to be a challenge. Literature discussing qualitative research analysis and tools reinforces that analyzing the volume of data generated in qualitative research is a challenging endeavor (Wheeldon & Faubert, 2009, also see Kachel & Jennings, 2020).

Wheeldon and Faubert (2009) suggest the beneficial use of concept maps and mind maps as a flexible and visual way within qualitative research to effectively manage, analyze, and present findings from vast volumes of data. According to Wheeldon & Faubert (2009) concept maps emerged in the 1970's through the work of Stewart, Van Kirk and Rowell (1979) and their utility as an effective analysis tool has continued to develop over time. A concept map is defined as a technique to visualize understanding and relationships between several concepts and has a structured hierarchy and clear definition of concept connections (Wheeldon & Faubert, 2009). Research shows that concept maps have been used in qualitative research by its traditional definition across “. . . the fields of science education, engineering, mathematics, psychology, and health” (Wheeldon & Faubert, 2009, p. 69; also see Wheeldon & Ahlberg, 2019, p. 1115-1116) since 1997 (Wheeldon & Ahlberg, 2019).

Tony Buzan first developed mind maps in the late 1970's and are defined as, “. . . diagrams used to represent words, ideas, and other concepts arranged around a central

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work or idea (Wheeldon & Ahlberg, 2019, p. 63). A mind map is more free form in nature with focus on one core idea, while a concept map focuses on several concepts (Wheeldon & Faubert, 2009, also see Wheeldon & Ahlberg, 2019).

Visual mapping in qualitative has beneficial utility and substantial benefit. It can be used as an instrument to collect data during interviews (Wheeldon & Faubert, 2009), used during data analysis to assist in managing, analyzing, coding, and theming volumes of research data (Fearnley, 2022), and in presenting findings (Wheeldon & Ahlberg, 2019). The benefits experienced by the qualitative researcher are several. First, a time savings benefit (Fearnley, 2022) in synthesizing and summarizing the data analysis faster given the visual nature of mapping versus the traditional written approach. Second, creating a mind map provides a visual representation of the understanding and relationships between data. Third, it helps with the analysis of complex data and aids in the simplification and translation of knowledge. Fourth, these types of maps enable the researcher to focus on abstract thinking and easily identify emerging themes within large data sets. Fifth, it provides a canvass for the researcher to perform free thinking, identifying additional ideas related to the data, the emerging themes, and the research phenomenon. (Wheeldon & Faubert, 2009)

To make my data easier to consume, review, compare and analyze during constant comparison, I create a mind map anchored by my overarching research question. I found benefit in using visual mapping as part of my data analysis strategy. Creating a mind map enables me to visualize in detail, the transcribed data of each interview, by interview question, and link data back to my study research question. This ensures my collected data set is indeed answering my research questions and keeps my focus linked

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to my overarching research problem (Wheeldon & Faubert, 2009, also see Wheeldon & Ahlberg, 2019). It provides a flexible approach for me to sort through the data to create codes, categories and scale up to general themes (Urquhart, 2023) based on the data relationships and differences and perhaps more importantly, it enables me to clearly see and map the data “. . . based on how the participants presented their experiences” (Wheeldon & Ahlberg, 2019).

In sum, using a mind map enables me to easily sort through my transcription volume and my coded data to efficiently compare and analyze the vast volume of data and scale up my emerging themes or in other words, group my code categories into broader emergent themes (Urquhart, 2023). I discuss the reasoning for choosing and the utilization of my mind map as a qualitative research analysis tool in the section following Table 9 Emergent Themes and Research Interview Questions, p. 121).

### **Summary**

Using grounded theory as my method in collecting research data and as the guiding framework for my data analysis through constant comparison, I can efficiently scale up the data codes and data categories into ten emergent themes (Urquhart, 2023) grounded in the study data. These ten emergent themes provide the foundation for building a grounded theory that explains how select middle managers in Canadian service organizations are coaching in today’s disrupted organizational environments.

My research question aligns with my choice of a qualitative research approach. My aim through my data collection and analysis is to explore my research question and understand “how” coaching is being conducted related to my research phenomenon and this is congruent with utilizing a qualitative methodology. My intention through



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grounded theory methodology is to “lift data to a higher level of abstraction than the data itself” (Suddaby, 2006, p. 636).

Using grounded theory’s constant comparative method enables me to effectively move research observation and data to abstract theoretical categories and blend data with extant knowledge to determine an explanatory theory to support how my research participants are coaching in today’s disrupted organizational environments. (Suddaby, 2006) Grounded theory is a good methodological fit to achieve my research aims and offered flexibility to examine current coaching practices without prejudice:

“One of the more satisfying elements of conducting research in management is that, in contrast to the physical sciences, social science research looks at how human invention continually generates new ways of interaction and organization. Researchers can best understand those new modes of interaction and organizing by using a methodology that is attentive to issues of interpretation and process and that does not bind one too closely to long-standing assumptions. Fortunately, that’s precisely what grounded theory is.” (Suddaby, 2006, p. 641)

This research is a crucial step towards advancing practitioner and academic knowledge and literature related to middle management workplace coaching and in potentially mitigating knock-on effects to middle manager coaching practice, as well as individual and organizational performance and psychological wellness. I anticipate through this research study to potentially “make discoveries contributing to the development of empirical knowledge” (Corbin & Strauss, 2015, p. 14), related to business coaching in today’s disrupted organizational environments. I further anticipate the potential to incorporate lived coaching experience into future theory and frameworks for coaching intervention and practical implementation.

## **Chapter 4. Grounded Theory Findings and Discussion**

### **Introduction**

The purpose of this research is to explore and understand how middle managers coach in today's disrupted organizational environments and determine if there is a need for elevated emotional intelligence and non-psychological counseling skills in a business coaching context and a need to delineate a boundary between workplace coaching and counseling. This chapter explains and discusses the study findings associated with the lived experiences of how the middle manager participants of this study are coaching in today's disrupted organizational environments, which aligns with my guiding research question. In addition, I seek answers to the following questions:

- How has middle management business coaching practice and the coaching soft skills in today's disrupted work environments shifted from conventional views in the literature?
- Is there a need for non-clinical psychological counseling skills to be integrated within a business coaching context, given employees' experience of emotional challenges in today's disrupted workplace?
- How substantial/effective is emotional intelligence in current business coaching practice at addressing middle management coaching competence and organizational wellness? Is a higher level of emotional intelligence required? Do Canadian middle managers require development of a higher level of emotional intelligence? What is needed to ensure Canadian middle managers develop such emotional intelligence?

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## Findings and Discussion

Data collected through semi-structured interviews with twenty research participants is analyzed using grounded theory methodology and visualized through conceptual mind mapping to scale up the data codes and categories into broader themes (Urquhart, 2023) of evidence. I use a mind map to generate analysis by exploring the categories within my data and identify relationships and differences between those data. The mind mapping exercise enables me to validate data in subsequent interviews (Wheeldon & Faubert, 2009) and create core data themes and connections (Fearnley, 2022). As a result, I can further refine my data analysis and identify a total of ten dominant study themes, see below, Table 8: 10 Dominant Study Themes. Please refer to Appendix D: Coding Clusters, pp. 219-225 and Appendix F: NVivo Code Book, p. 227, for a detailed list of the dominant codes and categories that support the ten study themes derived from the transcript data collection of this study.

**Table 8**

### *10 Dominant Study Themes*

Theme #	Theme Description
1.	Multi-Generational Workplace
2.	Coach Identity
3.	Coaching Effectiveness and Measurement
4.	Essential Coaching Competencies: Coaching Skills of Value, What is Missing, No Value
5.	Emotional Work and Effects of Workplace Emotions and Stress
6.	Followership
7.	Coaching Competence and Capability Build
8.	Coaching Framework, Tools, and Routines
9.	Coaching Topics
10.	Organizational Boundaries

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Further, my conceptual mind map is represented below in Figure 3 Mind Map: How do Middle Managers Coach in Today's Disrupted Environments? This provides a good visual representation of the process in coming to the ten dominant study themes.

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**Figure 3**

*Mind Map: How do Middle Managers Coach in Today's Disrupted Environments?*



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Further, using mind mapping as part of my data analysis strategy provides an opportunity to contribute back to academic and practitioner literature, my lived experience. While visual mapping has been utilized in qualitative research for some time now, it has traditionally been “. . . as a tool for the purpose of visualization and communication of research frameworks or findings” (Kachel & Jennings, 2020). There is established conversation on the utilization of visual mapping also as a data collection tool including research studies that have utilized this approach. Wheeldon & Faubert (2009) discuss how this concept was utilized in data collection for a criminal justice reform project. However, less has been written on the use of mind maps as a data analysis tool and the resulting lived experience documentation (Kachel & Jennings, 2020, see also Fearnley, 2022), as in the way in which I use the mind mapping tool.

One such lived experience example is by Fearnley (2022) who discusses using mind mapping as a data analysis tool in interdisciplinary and multi-sited research projects. The author discusses their own challenge during their PhD journey studying the communication of volcanic hazards and discusses their being challenged with utilizing tools to effectively analyze vast amounts of collected data. Similarly, Kachel and Jennings (2020), in which the first position author reflects on her PhD project (focused on travelers’ climate change perceptions) and how she grappled with vast amounts of collected data. The author reflects on how she evolves her data analysis strategy to include mind mapping because she was challenged in clearly seeing “. . . concepts and theories emerging” in her data while using NVivo software. This author shares a rich experience of how the combination of traditional tools and the addition of mind mapping

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as an analysis tool can enable researchers to clearly “see emerging themes and to represent her participant’s voices” (p. 75).

The implication of sharing lived experiences of utilizing visual mapping (concept mapping or mind mapping) as a qualitative research analysis tool is that knowledge in this area is advanced and practical application in this regard is deepened within the qualitative research community and for novice researchers. My experience can build upon others and contribute to breaking down the notion that mastering vast amounts of qualitative data collection is a monumental challenge (Wheeldon & Faubert, 2009, also see Kachel & Jennings, 2020). With the right tools, anything is possible.

Among the ten dominant study themes, three overarching dominant themes are central to underpinning my grounded theory related to repositioning the focus of workplace coaching in the modern organization. The three overarching dominant themes are: 1) Theme 5: Emotional Work and Effects of Workplace Emotions and Stress, 2) Theme 7: Coaching Competence and Capability Build, and 3) Theme 10: Organizational Boundaries.

The three dominant overarching themes provide data evidenced explanation of how middle managers are coaching in today’s disrupted organizational environments and are the major focus underpinning my grounded theory development. Theme #5, Emotional Work and Effects of Workplace Emotions and Stress, describes the emotional and adaptive work middle managers are undertaking within their regular coaching practice and their lived experiences. Theme #7: Coaching Competence and Capability Build emerged from my study data with strong perspective on the current state preparedness of my research participants to address the emotional and adaptive work

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they face and a viewpoint on specific domains of capability build to aid in building their coaching competence in their disrupted environments. Theme #10 articulates the compelling need to define and delineate organizational boundaries between workplace coaching, workplace counseling, and clinical counseling so that middle managers have clear understanding of where their responsibility starts and stops.

The following section explains and discusses each of the ten dominant study themes that emerged from the study data, illustrating a chain of data evidence linking the themes to the interview questions, see below, Table 9: Emergent Themes and Research Interview Questions, p. 121, and to the guiding research questions. Each theme is underpinned with supporting categories, codes, participant narrative, and appropriate literature integration with appropriate literature.



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**Table 9**

*Emergent Themes and Research Interview Questions*

<b>Research Interview Question</b>	<b>Themes That Address Interview Question</b>
What is your current experience coaching as a middle manager in today’s disrupted organizational environment?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coaching Topics</li> <li>• Effects of Disruption</li> <li>• Emotional Work</li> <li>• Organizational Culture</li> </ul>
What is your coaching practice model? (How do you coach/coaching approach; what is being coached)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coaching Time Allocation</li> <li>• Coach Identity</li> <li>• Coaching Routine</li> <li>• Coaching Framework or Tools (Framework, Tools, Manager Perspective of Coaching Framework)</li> <li>• Coaching Topics</li> </ul>
What skills do you find of value in your coaching practice? What skills do you find do not add value? What skills, if any, are missing?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Essential Competencies</li> <li>• Competence &amp; Capability Build (Skills Missing, Training Needed)</li> <li>• Non-value Add Skills</li> <li>• Other Missing</li> </ul>
How do you know your coaching practice is effective? How is your coaching effectiveness measured?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Subjective Measurement</li> <li>• Objective Measurement</li> <li>• No Measurement</li> </ul>
Thinking about your coaching practice, how relevant has addressing workplace emotions/stress in your coaching been?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coaching Relevancy</li> <li>• Competence &amp; Capability Build</li> <li>• Multi Generational Workplace</li> <li>• Emotional Work</li> <li>• Effects of Emotions &amp; Stress</li> <li>• Organizational Culture</li> </ul>
How do your emotions/stress, if at all, play in your coaching practice? How do your emotions/stress of your employees/ leaders/ peers, if at all, play in your coaching practice?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Organizational Boundaries</li> <li>• Effects of Emotions &amp; Stress: Leader</li> <li>• Emotional Work</li> <li>• Effects of Emotions &amp; Stress: Employees</li> <li>• Organizational Culture</li> </ul>
Why do you think people follow you? (Goleman (1995) has a perspective that people follow leaders because of their style, energy level and their emotional approach)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Followership</li> </ul>

Study findings are articulated as follows. Each theme is introduced with a rich explanation of the findings including sub-themes (nuances) where relevant, followed with a discussion of what the data reveals in terms of learnings related to how middle managers are coaching in today’s disrupted environments. The findings and discussion are reinforced with lived experience narrative of the study participants and the integration of literature. The three overarching dominant themes are highlighted in the narrative as (Dominant Overarching Theme #). Further, Figure 3 Mind Map: How do Middle

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Managers Coach in Today’s Disrupted Environments? on p. 117, serves as the visual guide of the ten dominant study themes discussed in the following narrative, in a clockwise fashion on the map. I begin introducing the study findings with Theme 1: Multi-Generational Workplace (top right of mind map) and conclude with Theme 10: Organizational Boundaries (top left of mind map).

**Theme 1: Multi-Generational Workplace**

Theme	Sub-Theme	Categories	Dominant Codes
Multi-Generational Workplace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>← Younger Generations Want to be Seen &amp; Heard</li> <li>← Generational Difference in Expectations</li> <li>← Coach Generations Differently</li> </ul>	← Multi-Generational Workplace	← Generational Differences

The theme Multi-generational Workplace emerged through my grounded theory analysis based on participant discussion of the five generations within the workforce and their leadership and cross-generational coaching experiences. I identify “younger generations want to be seen and heard,” “generational differences in expectations,” and “coach generations differently” as three important sub-themes in participant conversation data collected.

Findings illustrate that many of the participants spoke of their perspective in which they feel employees are more willing than ever to express their feelings and emotions at work, and particularly the younger generations in the workplace. It has been experienced that the younger generation has a different expectation than older generations when it comes to sharing their feelings, being heard, seen, and speaking up when something has either upset them, or they have an opinion to share. Differences in generational expectations seem to add complexity to an already complex situation.

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Some participants expressed grappling with the notion of “bringing your whole self to work” and how that is currently manifesting in the workplace as it brings a heavy emphasis on sharing of emotions. They also spoke of the challenges they experience in coaching and manifesting a balance between the amount of time employees spend talking about their emotions in the workplace versus getting work done.

While some participants are used to dealing with emotions in the workplace, there was evidence in the study data that there has been a shift, an increased prevalence of addressing workplace emotions since the disruption of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Participant #17 who works in post-secondary education articulated his experience of an increased shift in addressing workplace emotions and balancing employee need to share with the challenge of getting work done. He expressed the need for establishing boundaries to manage these challenging situations. He stated,

Participant #17: . . . we are used to doing that in general, but man, oh man has it changed since the pandemic. Sometimes you know, even having conversations with my managers who are also coaches in their own right, about when is it too much? When do we need to start saying OK, we need to build some boundaries between what is a remote, like emotional response or a personal response or mental health or feelings about perceptions of work and actually getting the work done?

He acknowledged his experience and coaching struggles with generational differences in terms of “. . . the perceptions of what they bring to work and what should be brought up at work is very different” in the context of younger generations like Gen Z versus older generations like Baby Boomers.

There appears to be a need for supporting guidelines or boundaries as to how this people strategy effectively integrates into the workplace culture for successful integration and enablement. These findings represent a strong signal for continued adjustment in

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existing organizational culture and existing coaching practice to ensure tactical addressing of the notion of bringing your whole self to work. In other words, balancing the increasing strategic importance of enabling the workforce to bring their whole self to the office with deepening the understanding of what it practically means to move people from a “work self” (Hall, 1996, p. 9) to “whole self” (Hall, 1996, p. 9) in the workplace and how this plays out behaviorally across the generations. Continual strategy design review and implementation adjustments are important as organizational strategy and planning is often written based on a static future perspective, which often does not address the reality of the business environment as it unfolds (Sparks & McCann, 2021).

Interestingly, the current findings of the multi-generational workplace relate to the findings of the Dominant Overarching Theme 5: Emotional Work and Effects of Workplace Emotions and Stress, pp. 143-151 and Dominant Overarching Theme 10: Organizational Boundaries, pp. 165-170. These three themes are related through the commonality of suggesting there is potential to address the need to establish organizational boundaries that clearly define and aid in providing a supportive and guided outlet for employees to share their workplace emotions while enabling them to balance getting their work done. Setting these types of boundaries can also aid workplace coaching and counseling practice. Managers would know the bounds in which to coach and counsel employees in a business coaching context, closing the gap on how to effectively identify and support these situations. The need for workplace coaching and counseling boundaries are discussed further in Theme 10: Organizational Boundaries, pp. 165-170.

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A nuance in the study findings that emerged was an alternative perspective on the multi-generational workforce. Participant #20 who works in post-secondary education, felt it was not about the differences of the generations and how they manifest in the workplace. Rather, it is about leveraging the diversity of the generations in our leadership approach. She stated, “. . . need to acknowledge and incorporate differences into our leadership approaches otherwise we are not honoring the diverse, lived experiences of those we coach.”

Study findings suggest the need to reduce the generational gap in the workplace and leverage intergenerational collaboration to manage the impact of disruption which aligns with the view of Waldman (2021). This participant perspective is a reminder of the strength that comes from understanding our multi-generational workforce and how to appeal to generational differences and differing perspectives. As younger generations flood the workplace and their norms and expectations are understood, there is opportunity to learn new ways, new perspectives, and a new narrative is being forged in terms of reducing stigma and opening conversations on topics that traditionally were not accepted (Waldman, 2021).

Similarly, this study shows there is potential for the influence of cross-generational diversity to play a role in extending and refreshing leadership and coaching approaches while at the same time helping to reduce the generational gap. A relationship with Dominant Overarching Theme 7: Coaching Competency and Capability Build, pp. 153-158 surfaced in the multi-generational workplace data. The need for deeper understanding of the multi-generational workplace was identified as an area for development and training by research participants. They feel there is a need to address

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the multi-generational challenges they are experiencing and to help bridge the generational gap. This can be added to a future research agenda.

Study findings suggest there are opportunities to refresh leader development and coaching practice in the topic of multi-generational workplaces in four ways. First, to deepen understanding of the multi-generational workforce in general. Second, deepen understanding in how to leverage multi-generational diversity and differences to reduce misunderstanding. Third, how to enable benefit from intergenerational collaboration. (Waldman, 2021) Lastly, integrate our understanding of multi-generational diversity into our coaching and leadership approaches to honor and leverage the lived experiences and diversity of those we lead and coach (Participant 20). This can be added to a future research agenda.

**Theme 2: Coach Identity**

Theme	Sub-Theme	Categories	Dominant Codes
Coach Identity	←	← How Coach Sees Self	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A Compass</li> <li>• Leverage Education and Experience</li> <li>• Required to be Adaptable</li> <li>• Sense Maker, Sense Giver</li> <li>• Role Model Best Version of Self</li> <li>• Stress Reducer</li> </ul>

The Theme 2: Coach Identity organically emerged through the research data as participants were describing their lived experiences of coaching in their organizational disrupted environments and helping their employees deal with workplace emotions and stress. This theme focuses on how the study participants perceive themselves as a coach. It describes important roles they feel they play as a coach and a leader. It also provides

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rich insight from their perspective into an emerging need for measuring their coaching effectiveness as a validation mechanism of their identity, competence, and confidence as a coach.

Fourteen codes were identified in this subset of data (refer to Appendix D: Code Clusters, p. 219-225, for all dominant codes) and six dominant codes emerged. The dominant codes that illuminate understanding how the participants see their identity as a coach are as follows:

- A Compass
- Leveraging Education and Experience
- Required to be Adaptable
- Sense Maker, Sense Giver
- Role Model Best Version of Self
- Stress Reducer

Throughout the interviews, the dominant themes were evidenced. The participants spoke of the important role they play as a coach in supporting and enabling their employees to navigate their disrupted organizational environments, hence acting like *a compass*. As Participant #01 articulated, “. . . I see myself more like a compass to show the direction than anything else.”

Participants also spoke of leveraging their education and professional experiences and best practices learned throughout their career to support their coaching and day-to-day management. In explaining an example of having to change directions in a rapidly changing environment during the Covid-19 pandemic, Participant #17 spoke of drawing on previously acquired skills to deal with the challenge of helping others through while he too was personally working through the chaos,

Participant #17: . . . It was challenging because I had to give them that information. I had to give them that direction. Umm, but also I had to coach them through this, but I was also going through this too, right? So, it was a

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really challenging time and a time where *I had to really lean on some of the skills that I brought that I developed throughout my career.*

Further, a participant spoke of their perception of *needing to be adaptable* and responsive to the ongoing disruption. Participant #19 describe this as, “. . . It is like I am just constantly never assuming that I know what the conversation might look like and always trying to be prepared to think about what that will look like for them and what questions do I need to ask to help get to what the actual concern is or what skill we are missing, or we are trying to build on.” Further Participant #16 spoke of how they view themselves playing a role of sense maker and sense giver: “. . . I think one thing that has been like constant for me throughout my whole career with respect to coaching is I am really providing like some sense making like I feel like that is one perspective that I can apply when I am helping people understand the environment and then giving them the resources they need to plan in that environment. . .”. This finding aligns with a suggestion from Mills and Murgatroyd that through the coaching process leaders can aid in helping employees understand and make sense of organizational life (Mills & Murgatroyd, 1991, Rule #5).

Participant #11 spoke of the importance of how a leader shows up for their employees amidst disruption, the need to *role model the required behaviors* to enable thriving amidst the chaos. They articulated, “. . . but coaching time is their time, and for me as a leader, it is important how I show up and so I make it a point of duty that when I am going into these coaching sessions that I am OK, you know, mentally, physically, spiritually.” This finding aligns with Bowman et al.’s (2013) notion that one’s emotional state can influence the view of self and others.

Participants also spoke of filtering stress in the environment to shelter their



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employees and *reduce stress*. Participant #01: when speaking of the early days of the Covid-19 Pandemic articulated his efforts, “. . . I tried to filter most of the stress and emotions coming from the top because there was certain time there was a little bit of panic at that top out there. . .”.

Reflecting on the data collected my interpretation is participants were undertaking identity construction work to secure their identity as a coach, particularly a supportive and effective coach given the nature of disruption in their work environment. My interpretation aligns with leadership identity work literature. The idea that my study participants are wanting to secure a sense of a validated self-identity as a coach within disruption aligns with the activity of identity construction (Sveningsson & Larsson, 1996). While identity work is out of scope for this study, my assumption based on my study data is how leaders see themselves as and show up as a coach as identity work is relevant. Further how this self-identity as a coach within a disrupted context then manifests from both a practical application and leadership development perspective must be considered and added to a future research agenda.

In sum, Participant #15 had a soulful perspective on how to be an effective coach: “. . . I feel like the one of the most beneficial ways to coach is to just to be in the trenches. Do you know what I mean? Like there is no job that is too dirty, that is too, you know, far out there. . . the best leader I always see are the ones that you know, just are right there at ground level doing it and if you are not, you are missing something . . .”

An interesting nuance to identity that was discussed in my literature review, Chapter 2. Business Coaching and its Value Proposition, pp. 25-33, showed that research asserts coaching may have its own conceptual identity crisis in determining where it

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belongs “somewhere between therapy, training, development, mentoring, counseling, and interventions” (Schutte & Steyn, 2015, p. 7). There is a call for further research to theoretically investigate and evolve coaching approaches and concepts in business coaching (Schutte & Steyn, 2015). Perhaps my study findings evidenced by the need related to delineating the boundaries between workplace coaching, workplace counseling and clinical counseling as expressed by my study participants contributes to this research call. Clearly delineated boundaries would bring further clarity to the identity of coaching versus counseling versus clinical therapy. My study findings in this regard are discussed further in Dominant Overarching Theme 10: Organizational Boundaries, p. 164-169.

Further, I assert the notion of individual identity work in this theme and the conceptual identity crisis of coaching (Schutte & Steya, 2015) have a relationship to Theme 3: Coaching Effectiveness and Measurement and Theme 6: Followership, in that understanding who you are as a coach, why people follow you as a leader, and how effective you are at coaching are all interconnected through identity. Coaching effectiveness will be explored in the following section.

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**Theme 3: Coaching Effectiveness and Measurement**

Theme	Sub-Theme	Categories	Dominant Codes
Coaching Effectiveness & Measurement	← Objective Measurement	← Formal Measurement	← Tied to Goals & Objectives
	← Subjective Measurement	← Manager Perspective	← Behavior Change ← Employee Engagement ← Employee Feedback ← Manager Feedback ← Linked to Organizational Goals and Results ← Team Morale ← Employee Growth/Progression ← Seeing Results from Coaching Conversations
	← No Measurement	← No Measurement	

Theme 3: Coaching Effectiveness and Measurement focuses on how study participants know whether their coaching practice is effective and whether the impact of their coaching practice or in other words, coaching effectiveness is measured within their organizations. The data was coded into two dominant themes: 1) subjective measurement and 2) objective measurement.

This study found that workplace coaching effectiveness across the study participants’ organizations is subjectively measured as indicated by fourteen out of twenty of the study participants. Most of the organizations do not formally measure coaching effectiveness. Examples of this evidence include:

Participant #02: . . . we do not have anything concrete to really tell us that or Uh anyway means to provide feedback to me of you are doing great in these areas or maybe these are areas that I can improve upon on my particular, my means of coaching” . . . so I know I am successful when a period of time has passed and we have seen growth or we continue to have the conversation.

Participant #04: But as far as the effectiveness of coaching? Uh, that would, you got me stumped, honestly.

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Participant #07: No, I do not think formally, no, absolutely not.

Participant #11: How is it measured? I do not have a formal way of measuring my coaching practice.

When asked how they know their coaching is effective, this question gave pause for thought. Most participants indicated that their organizations do not have a formal mechanism to measure coaching effectiveness outside of goals/results-based metrics or in other words, most tied formal evidence of coaching effectiveness to performance results against organizational goals set. They considered this to be a formal or objective measurement.

Outside of objective, goals-based measurement, participant perception is they know their coaching is effective through specific subjective factors. These factors include the following (dominant codes). Receiving employee and manager feedback as evidenced by Participant #06, #07, #11, and #15:

Participant #06: So, I think for me a lot of the time it is feedback.

Participant #07: When other people come to you and say, you know, I have heard good things like, would you mind being a mentor?

Participant #11: I get very positive feedback from my employee, like she thanks me when I provide her with some coaching. Per year end comments back to me is that she has learned a lot from me this past year, even though it has only been, you know, eight months. So that reinforces that, OK, I am doing something right.

Participant #15: . . . I rely on those who coach me to provide feedback on their perspectives of my coaching ability, but I also relate it back to those goals, right? So, if I have helped or supported, you know my direct report and others in meeting the goals that we set together, then that is successful and more often than not, you know, my experience has been we have been able to meet those goals and then some, you know. . .

Seeing behavior change in their employees as the result of coaching conversations and the achievement of organizational goals and organizational results are other

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subjective factors perceived for measuring coaching effectiveness. As described by

Participant #11:

Participant #11: So again, theoretically I would say I know it is effective based on how my employees are showing up to work. I find you know my employees are eager to share, to participate, and they are very engaged in the team. If I put out a mandate, I quickly have someone raising their hand to say yes, you know, I will take that on, and I will support, or I will do whatever is required to get the job done.

They also indicated employee engagement, team morale, employee growth and progression, along with seeing tangible results from coaching conversations as additional factors that indicate their coaching practice is effective. Supporting data evidence includes:

Participant #13: . . . You know if I am not doing well, I think I would know by turnover, and I think I know by my people not being engaged.

Participant 16: So, another way that I can measure the impact on that coaching is if I see them moving through steps in their career goals.

Participant 12: Well, I think it shows up in in your, you know the people reporting to you and their performance.

Participants did express it would be valuable to have a more formal tool or approach to measure and validate their coaching effectiveness. Examples of supporting data evidence from Participant #04 and Participant #13:

Participant #04: . . . quite honestly, I am hoping your report when you are done will tell me how to do that because now we are not good at that at all.

Participant #13 indicated, there are no tools, there should be tools.

Providing measurement and validation of coaching effectiveness is related to Theme 2, Coaching Identity. This study suggests that building self-awareness, perceived to be a core coaching competency, is tied to identity construction. As suggested by

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Carden et al., one of the main activities of the coach is to build self-awareness in others and to do that effectively, they need to develop their own self. This is because they use their own self-awareness to enable a change in the behavior of others. Having an effective measure of one's coaching effectiveness can inform an understanding of one's self-awareness and how their coaching is affecting others. (Carden et al., 2022)

Based on feedback from this study's participants and the data collected, there seems to be an expressed need and desire for formal measurement and validation of workplace coaching effectiveness. In doing so, several functions can be served. First, aid in the coach constructing and securing their self-identity in this domain. Second, measuring coaching effectiveness can inform their current skill and competence as a coach and inform future development. Lastly, understanding coaching's effectiveness can aid in understanding the impact the coaching is having or not, on those being coached and the organization.

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**Theme 4: Essential Coaching Competencies**

Theme	Sub-Theme	Categories	Dominant Codes
Essential Coaching Competencies	← Skills of Value	← Valuable Skills	← Emotional Intelligence ← Accepting People as They Are ← Empathy ← Be Vulnerable ← Listening ← Understanding Others
	← Skills of No Value	← Non-Value Add Skills	← Coaching Having All the Answers ← Following Processes Rigidly ← Micromanaging
	← Missing Skills or Other	← Missing Skills or Other	← Mental Health Skills ← Face to Face Interaction ← Coaching Structure ← Personal & Professional Development

When the interview question related to essential coaching competencies was discussed with participants, the resulting data was grouped into three categories. The categories were: 1) skills that add value, 2) skills of no value, and 3) missing skills or other. The purpose of understanding the essential coaching competencies of participants was designed to answer underlying research questions. First, I wanted to understand what skills and behaviors participants were using and more importantly how they were applying these in their coaching practice. Second, I wanted to understand how substantial or effective emotional intelligence is in current coaching practice at addressing middle management coaching competence and organizational wellness. Third, I wanted to determine if there was a need for a higher level of emotional intelligence given the disruption in organizational environments. Lastly, I wanted to understand if there was a

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need for further development of emotional intelligence, and if so, what is needed to ensure development?

**Skills of Value.** Study participants shared a combined total of fifty different coaching skills they find of value in their coaching practice. Valuable coaching skills that were most dominant (6 out of 50) include:

- Emotional Intelligence
- Accepting People as They Are
- Listening
- Understanding Others
- Empathy
- Be Vulnerable

While six skills emerged as dominant, the two that I would like to focus on as being most relevant to my grounded theory development, are *emotional intelligence* and *accepting people as they are*.

**Emotional Intelligence.** The data which emerged into the most dominant skill codes provides insight into answering my research question related to the skills and behaviors that study participants were currently utilizing in their coaching practice. Emotional intelligence emerged as one of the dominant coaching competencies that study participants feel is of value in their coaching practice. They spoke of its importance in coaching (Participant #01, Participant #04, Participant #18, Participant #19), enabling the coach to get to know their people and to understand their emotions (Participant #01). One participant referred to emotional intelligence as “human skills” and being “paramount” to understanding their employees (Participant #11):

Participant #11: . . . Some will call it emotional intelligence. Some will call it soft skills. I call it just simply human skills.” . . . “And so that human skill is paramount. I do not think we can evolve as a leader without tapping into that human side of things and included in that is also being able to hear and see and understand you know what the employees are going through. And then from



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there being able to provide the feedback, the tools, the support that is required.

Participant #19 had a similar perspective on the importance of emotional intelligence in their coaching practice and its importance related to self-awareness (of self and others) stating,

Participant #19: So, I think the skills that continue to be the most valuable for me are OK. So, one is my own self-awareness like it starts there because if I do not know what is going on with me, then I am doomed. For everything else, it is emotional intelligence.

These insights demonstrate a strong importance of emotional intelligence in coaching and leadership. They also demonstrate an answer to my second inquiry related to understanding how substantial or effective emotional intelligence is in current coaching practice at addressing middle management coaching competence and organizational wellness.

The use of emotional intelligence by study participants aligns with how it is described in literature. Participants are using emotional intelligence as a tool for problem solving and decision making. Most importantly, the data evidenced they are using emotional intelligence as a mechanism to help both their employees and them in coping with daily organizational demands and associated pressure. (Bratton et al., 2011)

Interestingly, emotional intelligence did not emerge as an area in which the study participants felt a higher level was needed. Only one out of twenty study participants felt a higher level was needed. Similarly, emotional intelligence did not emerge as a dominant topic identified for further training and development. Only one out of twenty study participants felt more training was required. His view was also broader on the types of intelligence need to thrive as a coach in today's disrupted organizational environments,

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Participant #01: I think that is something that we have to have intelligence, emotional intelligence, cultural intelligence, and mental health. I think that they are going to make us better and the way we are, we are going to be as a coach.

However, this lack of emergence provided the answer to my third emotional intelligence inquiry in which I wanted to determine if there was a need for a higher level of emotional intelligence given the disruption in organizational environments. My last inquiry was also answered by this lack of emergence, in which I wanted to understand if there was a need for more training and development related to emotional intelligence and what might be needed to ensure development.

**Accepting People as They Are.** This dominant skill of nurturing inclusion and accepting people for their whole self has a relationship with Theme 1: Multi-Generational Workplace, pp. 122-126, through diversity and inclusion and the notion of encouraging employees to bring their whole self to work.

When discussing with participants what skills are of value in their coaching practice, participants acknowledged developing in this area, the importance of leveraging diversity, and its role as part of leadership responsibility (Participant #03, Participant #04, Participant #15):

Participant #03: . . . so allowing my report to be who she is a skill that I have had to learn.

Participant #04: . . . We are demanding leaders to care about them and care about the whole person. And so, we talk about that here a lot, about you know, we want people to come to work as their authentic self and we also want them to feel that they can be themselves and also thrive here.

Participant #15: It is like we can only be as good as we are collectively, right? And everyone has to try to, you know, reach their ultimate potential in order to be able to give and as leaders, it is our responsibility to figure out how we can support people to do that.

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The data provides evidence that participants in this study recognize the importance of diversity and inclusion and are actively supporting their employees in bringing their whole self to work. Refer to Theme 1: Multi-generational Workplace for detailed discussion on data related insights on the topic of accepting people as they are, or in other words, bringing your whole self to work.

Further, while out of scope for this study, there is an opportunity to review and compare the skills of value expressed by study participants against extant coaching development models and/or coaching competency maps such as the [International Coaching Federations Core Competencies](https://coachingfederation.org/credentials-and-standards/core-competencies) (<https://coachingfederation.org/credentials-and-standards/core-competencies>) to see if there is alignment or areas of opportunity to develop competency gaps. Practitioners may be interested in a coaching competency map designed to support coaching in constant disruption.

**Skills of No Value.** The data that emerged from the participants as the dominant codes that represent coaching skills that do not add any value in coaching practice include:

- Coach Thinking They Have to Have all the Answers
- Following Processes too Rigidly
- Micro-managing

The interesting nuance found related to “coach thinking they have to have all the answers” as a coaching skill that offers no value, was the personal reflection of this notion that emerged from a few participants. Traditionally many have been taught or think that leaders must know all. The reflected leadership lesson participants shared was their personal learnings that as a leader, it is not about having all the answers, or the solutions, or being the knowledge expert. It is okay to not have some or any of these and

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to recognize a person can be a great leader (Participant #11, Participant #20) The key reflections shared by Participant #11 and Participant #20 follow:

Participant #11: When I first started off in my leadership journey, I thought I had to be the expert and, you know, be the one that has all the answers and the solutions and over time, you know I have quickly come to realize that is not the case. I cannot and I have never been the expert.

Participant #20: . . . but I do not find thinking that you need to be a knowledge expert in the work that your people are doing. I do not find that to be the case.

Following on, Participant #19 shared a perspective on getting comfortable with not having all the knowledge, solutions, or answers:

Participant #19: . . . So that is one of the things that I guess is more, it is not so much a skill but a mindset change knowing that it is ok to not be the expert and still be an amazing leader.

This study finding through these leadership reflections signals a shift in leadership mindset, leadership style, and coaching model is afoot. These reflections do align with a similar perspective in practical literature in which continually disrupted environments are demanding a change in leadership style and leader utility to enable effective coping and adapting (Ibarra & Scoular, 2019).

Leaders are no longer expected to have all the answers nor continue to operate with a traditional command-and-control leadership style of directing with instructions. In coping with and adapting to the disrupted reality of the organizational environment, a shift is indeed happening in leadership style and coaching model. Also, a change of mindset is necessary, embracing the notion of what may have worked in the past, will not work now and into the future. (Ibarra & Scoular, 2019).

The role focus of the leader is shifting to become one of leader-coach. This shift is bringing the utility of a leader-coach role to that of supporting and guiding

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employees and enabling their adaptability within constantly disrupted environments.

The role is also evolving to one in which the leader-coach is facilitating employees to leverage their potential and the disrupted organizational environment to “. . . unleash fresh energy, innovation, and commitment.” (Ibarra & Scoular, 2019)

The shift to being a leader-coach (Ibarra & Scoular, 2019, November-December) in practical literature aligns with and confirms academic literature in that workplace coaching is a core part of a manager’s responsibilities (Misiukonis, 2018). My findings confirm the demand for a leader-coach approach (Ibarra & Scoular, 2019, November-December) and the changing nature of the coaching role in disrupted organizational environments. My findings have the potential to extend the business coaching literature in underscoring the important role the leader-coach plays in deploying the combination of workplace coaching and counseling in bringing a balance to the delicate intersection of getting work done and organizational wellness.

**Missing Skills or Other.** The need for more face-to-face interactions with employees is highlighted as missing and is data evidence of a desire to return to having personal interaction at the forefront. Similarly, coaching structure, the need for a safe place to practice coaching conversations and role playing along with the need to rethink policy and structure to accommodate employee needs were also expressed as missing.

The most dominant skill expressed as missing is:

- Mental Health Skills

The other dominant skills that participants highlight where further training and development is needed to support addressing disruption, emotions, and stress in the workplace include:

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- What & How of Coaching
- Difficult Conversations
- Stress Management

Given the scope of the four dominant identified areas of training and development, this theme is relationally linked to the Dominant Overarching Theme 7: Coaching Competence and Capability Build, pp. 153-158 and the Dominant Overarching Theme 10: Organizational Boundaries, pp. 165-170.

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**Theme 5: Emotional Work and Effects of Workplace Emotions and Stress**

**(Dominant Overarching Study Theme)**

Theme	Sub-Themes	Categories	Dominant Codes
Emotional Work & Effects of Workplace Emotions & Stress		← Emotional Elements	← Balancing Emotional Wellness and Coaching Goal Achievement ← Deciphering Employee Mentality
		← Emotional Work	← Working More on Emotions ← Coaching Stress and Emotions but Not Part of Current Coaching Framework ← Emotions and Stress More Prevalent in Workplace
	← Doing More (Emotional Work) Now Than Ever		
	← Emotions and Stress More Prevalent in Workplace	← Effects of Disruption	← Coaching Impacted by Covid-19 (Disruption) ← Environment Has Changed ← Nature of Coaching Conversation Has Changed ← Coaching Virtually
	← Coaching Emotions & Stress Not Part of Coaching Framework		
	← Day To Day Impacts		
	← Coaching Relevancy		
		← Day to Day Impact	← Employee Sick Leave ← People Willing to Talk About Emotions and Stress Since Pandemic
		← Effects of Emotions & Stress: Leader	← Leadership Self-Care ← Balancing Employee Stress Levels ← Management Style Impacts ← Manager Stress and Emotion Play into Coaching
		← Effects of Emotions & Stress: Employee	← Decrease in Employee Productivity ← Support Each Other ← Emotional Response ← Employee Emotional Suffering ← No Time ← Employees Talking with Everyone About their Issues ← Employee Stress and Emotions Plays into Coaching

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Emotional work and the effects of workplace emotions and stress emerged early and consistently through the data analysis and this section discusses this theme in detail. It addresses one of the underpinning research questions that this study set out to explore which is, how has middle management business coaching practice and coaching soft skills in today's disrupted working environments shifted from conventional views in the literature? Five sub-themes emerged in the data: 1) day to day impacts, 2) emotions and stress are more prevalent in the workplace, 3) doing more emotional work than before, 4) coaching emotions and stress is not part of a coaching framework, and 5) coaching relevancy. These findings and discussion of these five sub-themes are tightly interwoven throughout the following.

**Day to Day Impact.** The study participants provided rich insight into their lived experiences of how they are conducting workplace coaching within the disrupted organizational environments of their Canadian service organizations. Participants expressed they have continuously been experiencing effects of disruption within their organizational environments. The external environmental factors driving continual disruption and change that they expressed include the continued impact manifestation of the Covid-19 pandemic, global social movements, ongoing economic volatility, and current global conflicts.

**The Nature of Business Coaching Practice and Required Soft Skills are Shifting.** Participants' lived experiences of coaching within their disrupted organizational environments proved consistent with the background environmental context positioned for this study in Chapter 1. Background Context, pp. 3-7. Their experiences are in alignment with extant literature discussion of the VUCA concept



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experienced within organizations, or in other words the volatility, uncertainty, complexity, and ambiguity (VUCA) of the organizational environment that can have detrimental effects on the organization and its performance (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014; see also Iqbal, 2021; Roslan, Syukri, & Zulhansi, 2020). The study findings also evidenced potential for extension of VUCA concept through participant data linked to increased prevalence of needing to acknowledge and address through coaching the emotions and stress in the workplace. There is an increasing need to include a focus of employee mental health and wellness in their coaching practice in addition to the traditional focus of employee performance and development/growth. There is data evidence that study participants are not fully prepared to deal with the emotions, stress in the workplace, and require ongoing training to build competence in mental health support.

Participants expressed the speed of their workplace environment feels faster than pre-covid, work volume has increased exponentially, and both the internal environment and the nature of coaching has changed because of ongoing disruption. This is due to ongoing environmental impacts that continue to deliver “unpredictable change” that in turn presents both challenges and opportunities (Bennett & Lemoine, 2014, p. 312), and the resulting stress and emotions individuals are feeling and experiencing at work and in their personal lives.

Time pressure is prevalent across participants. Participants indicated they do not have enough time to manage their day-to-day work volume, and some indicated they have no time available for personal or professional development. Other participants indicated that coaching is quite often the first activity to be deprioritized to make room in

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the workday or it is “bumped to the bottom of the list” (Participant #09) as unplanned, critical incidents demand immediate attention and day to day workflow is interrupted with the need to reprioritize work focus to address these immediate issues.

Participant #13, a manager within the utility sector articulated her perspective of the impact her organization and employees are experiencing from disruption in the workplace. She indicated, “. . . people’s resiliency has changed and I’m seeing a direct correlation and reflection of that in the people on my team, but also across our company.” Further, she felt the combination of environmental disruption and the psychological impact of stress and emotions in the workplace has significantly changed workplace coaching and communication. She said of workplace disruption and workplace emotions and stress, “. . . so I think that’s completely changed the way in which we coach and talk.”

**Workplace Emotions and Stress Are Prevalent.** Most of the participants interviewed expressed that workplace stress and emotions are more prevalent in their environments and in their coaching practice more so now than in pre-Covid times. Most participants spoke of how the nature of their coaching sessions has changed due to their disrupted organizational environments and resulting emotional impact over the past few years. This is mostly due to the Covid 19 pandemic and the need for their organizations to integrate remote or hybrid operating models. Given that almost all participants were working in a remote or hybrid environment during the pandemic, the majority experienced replacing their face-to-face coaching interactions with video calls.

**Doing More Emotional Work Than Ever Before.** Participant #01 and Participant #15 described their perspective of taking on more emotional work or in other

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words, dealing with the added context of workplace emotions and stress because of environmental disruption in their day-to-day work,

Participant #01: . . . yeah, I think there is more and more. We are more and more sensitive to those emotions. I think I am more. . . there is all those events too at the international level with the new war in Ukraine now and Israel and all those things and that scares some people.

So yeah, and we talk about it once in a while, but I can just have a quick feel of things or how things are going and if there is any concern, but yeah, I am working more on the emotion than ever.

Participant #15: So, it has just been such an interesting road to be able to manage, you know, expectations, flexibility and stress and it has been a constant absolutely everyday practice.

**Addressing Workplace Emotions Not Part of Coaching Framework.** The coaching sessions in this remote format began with employee check-ins, to understand how the employees and their families were coping. Day-to-day work discussions, personal development, and career development became the latter half of the discussion, if at all. As time has passed and organizations settled into a new normal, participants talked about how the reprioritized focus in the coaching and conversational approach has remained. The disrupted environment drove the need to change the past approach of conversations predominately starting with work-related discussion and wrapping with a personal focus. Now the focus is largely on the employee, checking in on stress and emotions and followed by day-to-day work. Most participants articulated that checking in from an emotional wellness perspective and coaching emotions and stress was not part of their existing coaching frameworks (or lack thereof) however, they have added it to their discussion and routine due to its immediacy and relevancy.

**Coaching Relevancy of Emotions and Stress.** It is evident in this study that emotions and stress are fundamentally relevant to the coaching practice the middle

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manager participants in this study enact. Participant #14 articulates how checking in has become part of the job:

Participant #14: It has been so important, and people have had their own mental health issues. Throughout this whole, like the last few years, like it has really been a struggle and I do think supervisors, managers are taking on more.

I mean, there is always personnel stuff that you are always dealing with, but now recognizing it, especially with people from home and trying to pick up on it when you are not necessarily seeing someone every day, how people are doing and checking in, how are you, how are you doing? Know that has become part of the job.

These findings demonstrate that emotions are certainly at the heart of issues being coached in the workplace which aligns with similar suggestion from Bowman et al. (2013).

**Other Findings.** Other findings relate to emotional work include the ongoing emotional and physical adjustments to remote or hybrid working models and the influence of personal issues or situations on workplace emotion and stress. Many of the middle managers interviewed felt video-based interactions are not as rich as in-person coaching sessions. They express employees alike continue to grapple with adjusting. It is difficult to read body language virtually, and the ambience of the interaction is not the same and even more difficult if video cameras are not on during the interaction.

Data findings illustrate that most participants acknowledge that workplace stress and emotions are also influenced by what employees or they themselves may be experiencing personally and this shows up in individuals' interactions at work. Similarly, participants experience that the emotional work related to dealing with workplace emotions and stress also affects the psychical and mental wellbeing of their one-up manager and their peers, based on their own lived experiences in this context.

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Findings also suggest that impacts of disrupted environments have been manifesting, for example, through the increased numbers of employee sick days and decreased employee productivity. Participants also talk about how they adjust their leadership style to adapt to and accommodate the hybrid work environment, continued environmental disruption, and supporting the emotionally driven needs of their employees through coaching. They are also coaching their employees in adapting to continued disruption (Ibarra & Scoular, 2019). As such, this finding implies the effects of disruption beget further disruption as leaders and employees deal with coping and adapting to ongoing, disrupted organizational environments.

This articulated need to adapt aligns with research that shows emotions can affect adaptive behavior (Izard, 2001). This finding also aligns with literature that shows leaders are faced with dealing with adaptive change in disruptive environments and are “asking and expecting individuals to change their mindset and behaviors to align with new operating models, new ways of working, in new environments where boundaries between work and personal no longer exist” (Heifetz & Linsky, 2002). Participant #19 described her need to be flexible and adaptable to the environment and the needs of her employees via informally structured coaching routines:

Participant #19: So, it is not super formal, it is really informal, and it is really kind of just based on whatever is going on around them. So, I guess one would say that I am required to just get adaptable.

Also, several participants expressed finding themselves in situations where they need to role model behaviors for their employees, express vulnerability, and share their own personal experiences of dealing with disruption and mental wellbeing. This finding raises a further question related to leadership style and/or leadership responsibility. Does

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this requirement of vulnerability raise leadership impacts with the notion of leading with vulnerability versus being vulnerable? While it is out of scope for this study, it may be considered as a future research agenda.

In addition, these findings raise another question for further exploration outside this study. This relates to coaching and workplace emotions and stress, the notion of a synergistic relationship between the two or a synergistic effect of coaching within the modern, disrupted organizational environment. Traditional views on coaching relate to addressing the performance, development, and growth of those being coached (Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011; see also Chan & Burgess 2015). Based on the lived experiences of the study participants, the results of this study imply an extension within the coaching focus of study participants. While they coach employee performance, development, and growth (Passmore & Fillery-Travis, 2011; see also Chan & Burgess 2015)., the ongoing disrupted environment has shifted their coaching focus to include coaching emotional wellbeing and employee ability to adapt (Ibarra & Scoular, 2019). They also coach balancing employee productivity while supporting employees in sharing and addressing their emotions and stress in the workplace. This finding demonstrates how participants use coaching as a mechanism to help mitigate or control behavior (Mills & Murgatroyd, 1991, Rule #6) to drive positive organizational outcomes amidst disruption.

Further, the results from this study also imply that organizational boundaries are needed to delineate between workplace coaching, workplace counseling, and clinical counseling so that managers can clearly discern the difference, know which management skills to apply and when, and leverage the boundaries to support employees with guided referrals to employee assistance programs, as needed. The need for organizational

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boundaries in this context is discussed as a theme later in this section. Refer to Dominant Overarching Theme 10: Organizational Boundaries, pp. 165-170 for details.

Findings of data evidence in this study demonstrate extant leadership and coaching theories do not address the impact of the modern organization’s ongoing disrupted environment, nor the resulting increased emotional work leaders are conducting through their workplace coaching practice which aligns with a similar perspective of Sparks & McCann (2021). A shift in both coaching focus and soft skills is evident in the study data. This study implies this shift is required to address appropriate and effective coaching, counseling and support of mental health and wellbeing in the workplace. Data findings from the study participants aligns with existing leadership development literature that suggests the focus and processes of leadership development needs to change to support leadership effectiveness in a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous world (Lawrence, 2013).

**Theme 6: Followership**

Theme	Sub-Theme	Categories	Dominant Codes
Followership	← Competency Based	← Competencies	← Follow Up and Follow Through
	← Organizational Culture Based	← Organizational Culture	← Role Model Behaviors
	← Personal Attributes	← Personal Attributes	← Caring for Others ← Supportive ← Trustworthy ← Transparent ← Authentic ← Human ← Vulnerable ← Energy Level ← Listen

Theme 6: Followership provides study findings and discussion related to why the study participants feel employees follow them (as leaders). The intent of asking this in

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the study interviews was to gauge participants' emotional approach as part of their leadership and coaching style. A total of forty-eight reasons were categorized based on competency, organizational culture, and personal attributes. Eleven dominant codes emerged. The self-reflected reasons why employees follow the study participants include the leader, being, doing, or acting:

- Authentic
- Transparent
- Trustworthy
- Role Model Behaviors
- Follow Up and Follow Through
- Energy Level
- Vulnerable
- Human
- Listen
- Supportive
- Caring for Others

Interestingly, these study findings align with the perspective of Goleman (1995) in that people follow leaders because of their style, energy level, and their emotional approach. This theme also links with Theme 2: Coach Identity, pp. 126-130, and these findings imply that understanding why people follow you as a leader can contribute to your identity construction. Below, Figure 4, Manager Perspective: Why People Follow a Leader provides a visual representation of the dominant data codes.

### **Figure 4**

*Manager Perspective: Why People Follow*



([www.freewordcloudgenerator.com](http://www.freewordcloudgenerator.com))



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**Theme 7: Coaching Competence and Capability Build (Dominant Overarching Study Theme)**

Theme	Sub-Theme	Categories	Dominant Codes
Competence and Capability Build	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>← Training Needed                             <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• What &amp; How of Coaching</li> <li>• Difficult Conversations</li> <li>• Mental Health First Aid</li> <li>• Stress Management</li> </ul> </li> <li>← No Time for Development</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>← Skills Missing</li> <li>← Low Skill/Capability to deal with Emotions &amp; Stress</li> <li>← Training Needed</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>← Mental Health Skills</li> <li>← Unprepared to Address Emotions in Coaching</li> <li>← Do Not Know How to Respond</li> <li>← Lack of Confidence in Responding</li> <li>← Need Mental Health Training</li> <li>← Emotions &amp; Stress</li> <li>← Having Difficult Conversations</li> <li>← What and How of Coaching</li> <li>← Mental Health Support and How and When to use Mental Health Resources Effectively</li> </ul>

Theme 7: Coaching Competence and Capability Build emerged from the study data early and consistently across the interviews and provides rich insight. It addresses one of the underpinning research questions that this study aimed to examine. The question is, is there a need for non-clinical psychological counseling skills to be integrated within a business coaching context, given employees’ experience of emotional challenges in today’s disrupted workplace?

Two dominant sub-themes emerged from the study findings which are: 1) training is needed, and 2) there is no time for development. Four dominant training subjects emerged from the data as critical areas that the study participants felt would make a significant difference in the competence and capability related to their coaching practice

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in disrupted organizational environments (dealing with emotions and stress). The four dominant subjects emerged as: 1) what and how of coaching, 2) how to have difficult conversations, 3) providing mental health first aid, and 4) managing stress.

**What and How of Coaching.** A compelling finding of this study that research participants shared was that they felt they had never formally been taught how to coach and manage a group of people. Whether it be through their academic studies (Undergrad or MBA) and/or workplace training (Participant #01, Participant #02, Participant #09, Participant #11, Participant #14), there was not enough or any focused training on what business coaching is, why it is important, how to actual deliver a coaching session, and the how of coaching and management. Similarly, there is a lack of resources for how to manage a group of people. Study findings demonstrate an expressed need for tactical, practical guidance and direction:

Participant #01: Yeah, I always said we never had enough training. . . been four years [in role] and that role and formally did not get any training or professional development on coaching . . .

Participant #02: . . . the point being is that throughout all of that (undergrad, MBA) there was very little that was devoted towards the actual soft skill . . . maybe the practical, uh, means to coach . . . however, there was, in my opinion, very little about practical skills as to how do you actually manage a group of individuals.

Participant #09: There is no, like re-onboarding as a people manager and there are no real onboarding coaching people.

Participant #11: I cannot pinpoint specifically any training around how to manage a team or how to coach a team . . . holistically that framework and tapping into some of those skills, umm that you need as a leader. I think that is where the gap is and yeah, I think we definitely have some opportunities there to improve on that.

Participant #13: But I think that sometimes what I am finding from my team is in that they want the prescription and the road map or the pathway to get things done and so do I . . . we have given them the three or four manuals, we

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have given books, but I find that they keep telling me they do not have time to read or they want the road map of how to get there, which is quite interesting, right? I do not think I can keep up with that thirst and then I wonder what the template is to help them because I do not think from a clinical perspective that I am trained at all. I have not been given any real tools how to coach people.

Participant #13: I think a lot of people are starving for that template of, you know, what is the balance, how much time do I spend with employees? How much time when you think about your work, when the work that has to get done, is there a recipe for success that it is once a quarter? What is the template? You know, you will hear, I am sure you have heard this, but we just want a template like at the middle manager level. Like, I am not talking this strategic level where I am chairing things, tactical . . . I think fundamentally it is the templates. You know what makes a good coach?

Participant #14: . . . I do find that people also, there is a lot of avoidance [coaching] because they did not feel like they had, they did not know how to do it and I think that leaders really struggle with it like they find it really, really hard cuz they think it is all negative . . .

Also evident in the study data is the expression that needed development opportunities in this regard are absent. Further, several of the participants also openly articulated that even if there were development opportunities offered, there is little time within their schedules for more than the fast-paced, day-to-day business activities.

Participants express sincere interest in developing their coaching capabilities however a strong theme of time pressure in their schedules was also expressed (Participant #07, #16):

#07: Little bit of anxiety and stress mixed in with working as hard as you have ever worked, zero downtime. There is no slow time anymore. There are no slow days, it is just one hundred miles an hour, all the time. Yeah, that is causing more people to reach their breaking point, for lack of a better term.

#16: So mentioned time already, so I will not spend more time on that, but I had more time before and it felt better to be more thoughtful and I am very impatient, so stress makes that worse.

Findings also evidence that many participants indicate that they draw upon their previous workplace coaching experience, mentorships, and sharing of best practices with

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peers as ways they build their coaching capability. They also read leadership and coaching books written by well-known academics or practitioners for development.

**Mental Health First Aid.** This study found several of the participants openly questioning their coaching capability and effectiveness. Particularly when dealing with workplace emotions and stress and mental health issues raised by their staff. While they all expressed empathy, compassion, and a deep willingness to help their teams, several indicate they feel ill-prepared to effectively address these types of situations and in having *difficult conversations*. They expressed concern they either did not know how to respond or were mindful of the potential impacts if they respond incorrectly. They were also keenly aware of not wanting to cause further employee impact. One participant expresses, “. . . not sure I even know how to coach or if I am good at it . . . employees need me.” They went on to express employees need them to listen, help problem solve, and aid in finding solutions.

Another participant felt that leaders in general are unprepared to deal with the mental health issues that are presenting within the workplace. She drew upon her lived experience as a mechanism to help her understand and address mental health in the workplace,

. . . I was able to recognize it early in my career because of personal experiences I had at my family level. But truly, understanding how different the needs are of people who are experiencing mental health challenges in the workplace. UM is like it is profound, like it is hugely different and umm, we are unprepared.

Findings indicate some study participants do not have adequate mental health resources and training in coaching and counseling to deal confidently and effectively in these situations. They feel they do not have the opportunity to practice, and role

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play prior to responding to their employees. They also do not have an avenue to seek coaching advice from clinical professionals. Others feel they have too many mental health resources available and find it difficult to locate these resources quickly. The compelling impact identified is if they could find the resources, they do not necessarily know how and when to apply them effectively.

**Stress Management.** Participants in the post-secondary education field have received crisis intervention training as a requirement of their roles and thus feel their skills were adequate in dealing with certain types of mental health crises (Participant #16, #17, #18, #19, #20). However, they have not been trained to effectively deal with workplace stress (Participants #16). Study findings identify stress management as a subject for coaching competence and capability building.

Data evidence also shows many of the study participants speak of leveraging their peers and one up managers as a support mechanism to deal with workplace stress and emotions, whether it be their own or employee situations with which they are dealing. A few participants note the strong support from their one up manager and their peers has an incredibly positive impact on their own stress level and their ability to cope (Participant #18, #19, #20). They value having the mechanism to openly discuss issues, seek guidance, role play for conducting *difficult conversations*, and diffuse their own stress and emotions. Others who mention they work in results focused environments find it difficult to balance this culture and deal with the day-to-day disruption impacts (Participant #04, Participant #07, Participant #09).

**Other Findings.** Participant #19 spoke of how they do not think about the skills they use every day in the same way as they did in the past given the disruption in their

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environment. They also discuss applying their existing skills and existing coaching tools in new or different ways than they did in the past, given the dominance of and to address emotions and stress in their coaching conversations and day to day interactions (Participant #19). Old ways of coaching seem to no longer address the effects of modern day disrupted environments.

Further a few participants articulate that you cannot be too rigid or too focused on step-by-step approaches in coaching or applying coaching models (Participant #02, Participant #03). Participant #03 shared, “. . . I think sometimes, as humans, we are just very good at following the steps. That is not always a skill that is valuable in coaching. You must be flexible. You have to allow for some steps not to be followed.”

Findings of data evidence in this study demonstrate extant leadership and coaching theories do not address the impact of the modern organization’s ongoing disrupted environment (Sparks & McCann, 2021) nor the resulting increased emotional work leaders are conducting through their workplace coaching practice.

This study implies a coaching focus shift is required to address appropriate and effective coaching, counseling and support of mental health and wellbeing in the workplace. Data findings from study participants aligns with existing leadership development literature that suggests the focus and processes of leadership development needs to change to support leadership effectiveness in a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous world (Lawrence, 2013).

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**Theme 8: Coaching Framework, Tools, and Routines**

Theme	Sub-Theme	Categories	Dominant Codes
Coaching Framework, Tools, and Routines		← Coaching Framework or Tools Used	← Visualization ← Coaching Model for Manager Tools ← PXT ← 9 Blocks ← {Org} Performance Incentive Program
	← Coaching Framework Largely Not Utilized	← Manager Perspective of Coaching Framework	← Need to Balance Structure Format with Producing Productive Outcomes ← Manager experience, personality, education, choice of and application of coaching tools
	← Coaching Time Allocation	← Coaching Routine	← Weekly Coaching Routines ← Coaching Impact Bi-weekly or Thrice Weekly Coaching Routines ← Weekly Staff Meeting ← Takes Time to Reveal Itself ← Monthly Coaching Routines ← Quarterly Coaching Routine ← Skip Meetings ← Observational Coaching ← Coaching Done Virtually

Understanding the coaching frameworks, tools, and routines the study participants use within their coaching practice was central to understanding the main research question guiding this study. The purpose of this topic is not to delve deeply into the processes and tools that participants may be using, but rather to understand their lived experiences and the context of how they are coaching in today’s disrupted organizational environments.

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Thus, the combination of coaching frameworks, tools, and routines in evidence articulates the coaching structure of how the study participants are coaching in today's disrupted environments. Theme 8: Coaching Frameworks, Tools and Resources emerged from the data analysis with two sub-themes, 1) coaching framework largely not utilized, and 2) coaching time allocation.

**Coaching Framework Largely Not Utilized.** This study found that most of the research participants articulate they have an unstructured, informal approach to coaching with their employees as their organizations do not use formalized coaching frameworks. The study data shows, most participants speak of having more formalized frameworks for setting and coaching organizational performance goals such as an organizational performance program (Participant #04) or performance management frameworks (Participant #01). Very few spoke of using specific, formalized coaching frameworks.

Another finding reveals some participants leverage an [external coach/consultant](https://humanfactorleadership.com/) (<https://humanfactorleadership.com/>) to aid in building their leadership and coaching skills. The study participants in the post-secondary education sector, use an outside coach/consultant for coaching development support and use personality tools to understand their own personalities, and that of their employees and peers (Participants #16, #17, #18, #19, #20). One post-secondary education participant (#16) discussed utilizing a [coaching model framework](https://www.manager-tools.com/2009/07/coaching-model-revised) (<https://www.manager-tools.com/2009/07/coaching-model-revised>) he prefers, to guide coaching conversations however, this model is not embedded in his organization's leadership tools and resources.

The findings related to coaching routines emerged from the data based on how participants described the frequency and format of workplace coaching activities with



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their employees. While all participants engage in coaching with their employees, most articulated they have an unstructured approach to workplace coaching as their organizations do not utilize formalized coaching frameworks.

**Coaching Time Allocation.** Study findings illustrated how the types of coaching interactions and time spent deploying their coaching practice. Findings showed most participants have weekly or bi-weekly coaching routines with their employees with a time duration of 30 – 60 minutes. The employee owns the coaching agenda. Findings also revealed most participants dedicate time to regular team meetings and monthly or quarterly reviews of results against organizational goals. Additional findings showed some participants complete skip meetings in which they meet with employees a level or two lower than themselves, and similarly meet with senior leaders, one or two levels higher than themselves. This enables two-way communication across levels and is used as an employee engagement tactic.

Observational coaching was also found to be a coaching activity completed by a few participants. This coaching activity is completed when they join their direct report and observe them in action, and coach on items they noted during the interaction. Participants who have teams in sales or heavily laden administration roles (Participant #01, Participant #06, Participant #08) use this coaching activity.

Also evident in the study data was the issue of time pressure in the disrupted organizational environment. Findings show that coaching can be readily deprioritized to deal with immediate issues (Participant #09). Time pressure is prevalent across industry. Participants in Financial Services and the Agricultural sector spoke of their time

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pressured schedules and the impact it has on the work leaders want to do or their coaching practice,

Participant #07: . . . like it is just there is not enough time. I would love to spend more time talking to the team and having more soft conversations and just getting to know you even more. There is just no time, business has gotten so busy and when you think about what you need to do . . .there is no time built into those schedules for these types of things.

Participant #08: No, I think it is just my overall feeling about coaching is I would love to do more of it, and I think everyone feels that way. It is just life is so busy and I think we probably like, I would love to be more effective by being able to spend more time at it, and I can probably talk to any one of my colleagues and tell you the same thing. And so maybe there is different ways of us doing things that will help us accomplish that, because I do not see things getting any quieter.

Findings also illustrated an expressed need to do things differently to optimize time in a constantly busy context where there is never enough time for coaching, as articulated by Participant #08:

Participant #08: You are like always in firefighting mode and you know, it would be awesome to turn that into something more productive. That is still being able to take time and help people with scripting and like going down deeper. Like I am constantly feeling I am not going deep enough with my team on some of the soft skills and so maybe that is where we have to be able to take those things away and we need to develop training where I cannot spend, you know, enough time here doing it. I must fight. We have to maybe find a way to integrate that, maybe through our practice leader teams or you know, whatever that looks like, but we have to spend the time identifying what those things look like as a group.

The findings of this theme illustrate the potential contribution this study can make in terms of deepening middle management coaching knowledge by providing a view of the lived coaching experiences of select Canadian middle managers cross-service industry in context of disrupted environments. Further, the intention is to contribute Canadian Middle Management lived coaching experience towards closing literature gaps identified in Chapter 2. Literature Gaps, pp. 50-52. Of interest is the research call of

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Wang et al. (2021) related to exploring theoretical constructs anchored in psychotherapy or counseling skills to formulate coaching models which they suggest might have potential for better coaching outcomes. Findings from this study present an opportunity to build on Wang et al. (2021), to explore creating a business coaching model that integrates a mental health and wellness emphasis as part of the coaching session structure. The aim is to support enhancing individual efficiency and effectiveness to better achieve positive organizational outcomes and wellbeing within constant disruption.

**Theme 9: Coaching Topics**

Theme	Sub-Theme	Categories	Dominant Codes
Coaching Topics	←	← Coaching Topics	← Day to Day Issues Performance ← Management Issues (HR) ← Goal Achievement ← Relevant Subjects ← Performance Reviews ← Long Term Goal Planning (Career Progress) ← Goal Setting (What) ← Employee Growth & Development ← Creating Autonomy ← Performance Improvement ← Mental Health & Wellbeing ← Emotions and Counsel ← Goal Setting (How)

The theme of coaching topics emerged through my data analysis as participants described their coaching practice in terms of what they discuss with their employees during coaching sessions. The study participants expressed a large variety of topics being discussed during coaching interactions and most empower their employees to set the coaching agenda. Most spoke of starting their coaching conversations by checking in on the emotional wellbeing of their employees and work-related conversation follows (refer

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to Dominant Overarching Theme 5: Emotional Work and Effects of Workplace Emotions and Stress, pp. 143-151, for detailed discussion related to how participants are coaching to emotions and stress), and this is not part of their current coaching format. It has invited itself into the conversation based on impact of the disrupted environment.

They also share how they empower their employees to set the coaching agenda based on what they need. Participants highlight forty-eight different topics covered in coaching conversations. Thirteen dominant topics emerged:

- Day to Day Issues
- Performance Management Issues (HR)
- Goal Achievement
- Relevant Subjects
- Performance Reviews
- Long Term Goal Planning (Career Progress)
- Goal Setting (What)
- Employee Growth & Development
- Creating Autonomy
- Performance Improvement
- Mental Health & Wellbeing
- Emotions and Counsel
- Goal Setting (How)

The coaching topics evident in this study align with the literature discussed in Chapter 2. Literature Review, see Table 1: Types of Coaching, pp. 21-22, in which workplace coaching topics can address employee learning, development, work life and psychological wellbeing (Wang et al., 2021).

Findings from this study evidence that study participants are actively coaching the wellbeing of their employees in addition to their performance, development, and growth (Passmore et al., 2011). Findings also evidence that coaching emotions and stress is not part of current coaching frameworks (informal or formal) in participant organizations and that managers have proactively undertaken doing so as a direct result

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of the disruption in which their organizational environments operate. This finding aligns with Mills & Murgatroyd’s (1991) assertion that coaching can be guided by actions and enacted because of the day-to-day situations within organizational life that employees must deal with (Rule #8) and deliberately created by human actors (Rule # 1 and Rule #7). Further, this study also demonstrates through this theme that coaches and their coachee are discussing a wide variety of topics including issues, performance, and goals which align with coaching topics suggested by Mills & Murgatroyd (1991, Rule # 3). While there may not be a formal coaching framework being used as discussed in Theme 8: Coaching Framework, Tools and Routines, the enactment of the coaching process is providing, a structured interaction of conversation and decisions being shared or in other words, “rules of negotiated order” (Mills & Murgatroyd, 1991, p. 18, Rule #3).

**Theme 10: Organizational Boundaries (Dominant Overarching Study Theme)**

Theme	Sub-Theme	Categories	Dominant Codes
Organizational Boundaries		← Boundaries Needed	← Delineate Coaching vs Counseling
	← Coaching vs. Counseling		← Leader Set Boundaries for Self-Care
	← Employees Talking About Emotions vs Getting Work Done		← Address/Balance Emotions and Stress vs Getting Work Done
	← Leader Self-Care and Protection	← Organizational Culture	← More Sensitivity to Mental Health Issues ← Psychological Safety ← Nurture Resiliency and Positivity
		← Employee Engagement	← Building Morale ← Making People Excited About Work ← Rallying People ← Bring Whole Self to Work

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Through this study, I wanted to explore if there was a need to delineate a boundary between workplace coaching and workplace counseling. Theme 10: Organizational Boundaries emerged in the data findings related to the coaching interactions the study participants were having within their organizations. Three sub-themes represent a study finding in which participants indicate organizational boundaries are required to help effectively support coaching and counseling emotional wellbeing in the workplace. The subset themes include delineating a need for boundaries related to 1) workplace coaching versus workplace counseling versus clinical counseling, 2) employees talking about emotions versus getting work done, and 3) leader self-care and protection.

**Boundaries: Coaching versus Counseling.** Five participants, while they nurture and support a psychologically safe workplace enabling their employees to bring their whole selves to the office, questioned the need for boundaries in the workplace (Participants, #16, #17, #18, #19, #20). They felt boundaries in the workplace were needed for the following reasons. First, to balance both sharing and getting day-to-day work done; second, to ensure leaders have boundaries to balance work and protect themselves through self-care and given the overarching feeling for the need for more mental health training; and lastly, to delineate their coaching responsibilities related to dealing with workplace wellbeing and mental health issues as to not overstep into a counseling role outside of their managerial competence.

**Boundaries: Balancing Employees Talking About Emotions Versus Getting Work Done.** Findings of this study show it is currently more acceptable within the organizations (organizational sensitivity) of my research participants, to support

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employees in sharing or “airing” (Participant #18) their feelings and emotions in the workplace. However, findings demonstrate this raises questions and challenges related to managing practical manifestation. For example, a participant who works in university student services questions how much she should be managing when it comes to employee’s stress and emotions versus managing the work getting done. Where should the boundaries be related to employees sharing their stress and emotions and managing their work (Participant #18)?

The findings of this study related to the need expressed by participants for boundaries to be delineated between workplace coaching, workplace counseling, and clinical counseling aligns with active literature discussion. Passmore & Fillery-Travis, (2011) suggest that a coach must be trained to effectively identify and manage their boundaries between coaching intervention and the need for referral to medical and/or therapeutic intervention.

Bachkirova & Baker (2018) suggests it is difficult to delineate the difference between coaching and counseling in practice because the boundaries can be blurred. Data findings in this study illustrate this through the ambiguity participants experience in trying to understand where the boundaries currently are or should be, so that they are not erroneously crossing into clinical counseling.

While the study finding that participants are grappling with helping employees balance talking about their emotions at work and getting their work done as a real issue, Bachkirova et al. (2018, p. 2) reinforces that coaching in the workplace may certainly have coaches dealing with “the whole person”. This aligns with the diverse and inclusive people strategy that study participants are dealing with in terms of their organizations

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supporting employees bringing their whole self to the office. This finding further confirms the literature in that study participants are not just focusing their coaching on work-related issues. They are also experiencing a large majority of effects from personal issues or problems external to the office (Bachkirova et al., 2018, see also Walton, 2021).

There is also a debate in the literature regarding boundaries. Some researchers suggest there should be clear boundaries, while others have a viewpoint that the boundaries should be contextual based on the coach's ability and knowledge to help with the issue being discussed or problem being solved (Bachkirova et al., 2018). A recent practitioner blog written by Quantic.edu (2021, November 15) provides a perspective on the difference between coaching, training, and counseling in the workplace. The article suggests an easy way to decipher the difference between coaching and counseling relates to the time perspective of each. Coaching has a forward-looking perspective. Coaching is about helping employees achieve their performance goals, perform effectively in their role, and includes helping them develop and grow their skills, capabilities, and their career. Leaders use management skills to provide coaching. Coaching is leveraged within organizations to drive employee engagement, employee retention, productivity, efficiency, and achievement of organizational goals. Employees benefit from compensation, professional and career development, and employee benefit programs. Similarly, training is used to build or enhance skills and capabilities and increase competence from a go forward perspective. (Quantic.edu, 2021, November 15)

Counseling has a past-looking perspective. In the context of workplace coaching, counseling refers to taking care of behaviors and thoughts that affect employee performance and productivity. For example, after an employee experiences setback or a



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negative situation they experience, they may have an emotional response that affects their performance or productivity. Addressing the nature of this situation with employees through active listening, asking good questions and finding a way forward together which might include a recommendation they seek external counseling or support. It is about using management skills to help and support employees. This is not about fixing the situation nor is it the same as clinical counseling that trained professionals provide. Clinical counseling is addressed by professionally trained individuals utilizing medically trained skills and clinical interventions to care for and help individuals deal with situations related to mental health and mental illness. (Quantic.edu, 2021, November 15)

Effectively utilizing management skills to understand and support employees when their performance or productivity is being affected is key to ensuring leaders are applying workplace coaching, training, or workplace counseling in the appropriate manner. Keeping the coaching focus on the employee's performance, productivity and development will guide leaders in deploying the right support, at the right time and nurturing employee wellness and an organizational culture that is inclusive and flexible. (Quantic.edu, 2021, November 15, also Greenwood & Krol, 2020).

Another participant in the post-secondary education sector suggests the need to use disrupted workplace learnings as a learning and development mechanism to inform what she calls "trauma informed leadership style and trauma informed coaching approach" (Participant #20). While outside the scope of this study, this may be a future research topic and/or practitioner article relating to what we have been learning regarding disruption effects and implications for leadership style as well as workplace coaching approach and framework.

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**Boundaries: Leader Self-Care and Protection.** Findings of this study illustrate the increasing need for leaders to establish boundaries for self-care to aid in thriving in disrupted organizational environments. Participants talk about the important role self-care plays in managing emotions and stress to be the best version of themselves for their employees, organizations, and families. They speak of role modelling the use of exercise, proper nutrition and sleep, and counseling to build coping strategies and emotional/stress related outlets (Participant #01, Participant #04, Participant #11, Participant #20).

### **Theory Development Study Contribution: Repositioning the Focus of Workplace Coaching in Modern Organizations**

Based on answering the study research questions with key study findings, particularly from the three dominant overarching data grounded themes (Theme 5, Emotional Work, Theme 7 Coaching Competence and Capability Build, Theme 10 Organizational Boundaries), I developed an explanatory theory based on the participants' experiences and their workplace coaching practice in today's disrupted organizational environments. The theory implies the need to "reposition the focus of workplace coaching in modern organizations" to include a shift in mindset and focus of mental health and wellness in addition to performance, development, and growth (Passmore et al., 2011) in business coaching models. The purpose of doing so is to influence middle management coaching practice to better achieve positive organizational outcomes and wellbeing within constant disruption. My grounded theory is anchored by the following study data reasoning:

- Emotional work is more prevalent than ever before and has shifted and widened the focus of workplace coaching from traditionally addressing employee performance

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and their development/growth to in the modern, disrupted organization, *formally including addressing employee mental health and wellbeing in addition to their performance, and their development and growth.*

- The notion that disruption begets disruption and as a result, causes a continuous cycle of reaction, response, and disruption. These further places pressure on managers to deal with the emotional and adaptive capacity fallout for which they are not prepared, nor did they sign up for in their leadership role. There is an opportunity to address coach competence and capability in this regard.
- There is an opportunity to target coaching development specific to *what and how* of coaching and management in middle manager training and development to ensure adequate competence and capability build to address leading and coaching in today's modern organizational environment with confidence and competence.
- Study findings indicate that traditional leadership and coaching theories are not aligned with addressing the emotional work and complex environmental disruption modern organizations continue to face. Addressing mental health and wellbeing in the workplace is also not deeply integrated in traditional business literature (integrated in psychological positive coaching literature) or current business coaching frameworks.

From an academic perspective, there is an opportunity to extend existing literature by crossing business and positive psychological coaching literature to integrate mental health and wellness into a business coaching context with non-clinical psychological counseling skills. There is an opportunity to explore theoretical constructs anchored

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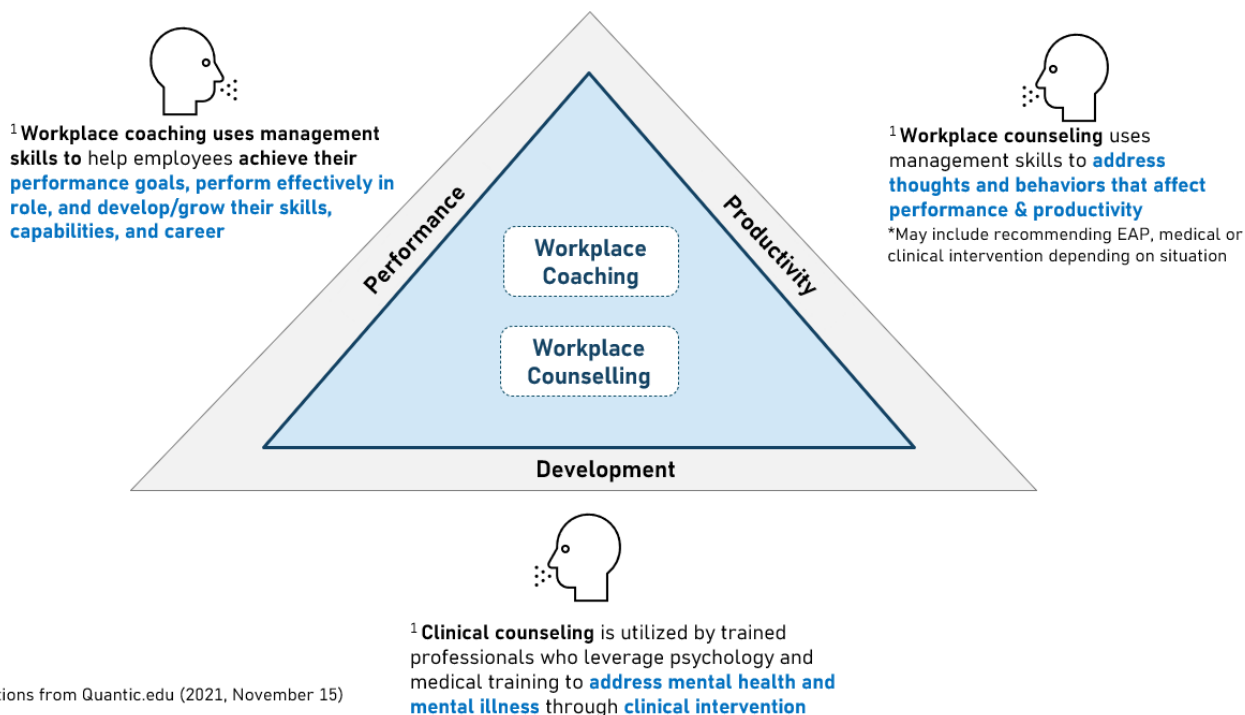
in psychotherapy or counseling skills to formulate coaching models which might have potential for better coaching outcomes (Wang et al., 2021) in practice.

- From a practical literature perspective there is an opportunity to build skill and competence in dealing with mental wellbeing in workplace coaching and counseling. For example, creating a coaching session structure (Grant, 2011) or framework with supporting playbook that integrates non-clinical psychological coaching skills for practical application. This study's findings imply the need to integrate conversational skills, structural skills, basic psychological therapy skills, and stress management skills with a proven coaching session structure (i.e.. GROW Model (Grant, 2011) or a positive psychological counseling model). This may prove helpful in practical application as a starting point, to address coaching effectively in modern, disrupted organizational environments.
- Study findings indicate a need to clearly delineate boundaries between workplace coaching, workplace counseling, and clinical counseling. The purpose of this is to provide a framework for transparency, expectations, and safeguards professional conduct. There is an opportunity to leverage and extend the work of Quantic.edu (2021, November 15) to provide clear boundary delineation using their definitions for workplace coaching and workplace counseling. In this manner the use of management skills and the focus of the underlying nature of the employee interaction is the boundary guide for managers to determine where their competence ends and the need for support referral begins, as defined by Quantic.edu (2021, November 15), see below, Figure 5, Boundaries: Workplace Coaching, Workplace Counseling, and Clinical Counseling:

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**Figure 5**

*Boundaries Defined: Between Workplace Coaching, Workplace Counseling, and Clinical Counseling*



- Building on the boundary guides defined by the work of Quantic.edu (2021, November 15) in articulating the difference between workplace coaching and workplace counseling, see Figure 5: Boundaries: Workplace Coaching, Workplace Counseling, and Clinical Counseling above, I extended their work by creating The GAUGE Model which provides a framework as an aid for the coach to check which process to deploy, workplace coaching, workplace counselling or support referral which can include employee assistance program or clinical counseling. The GAUGE Model has five elements the coach can consider when determining the boundaries between workplace coaching, workplace counseling and clinical counseling in

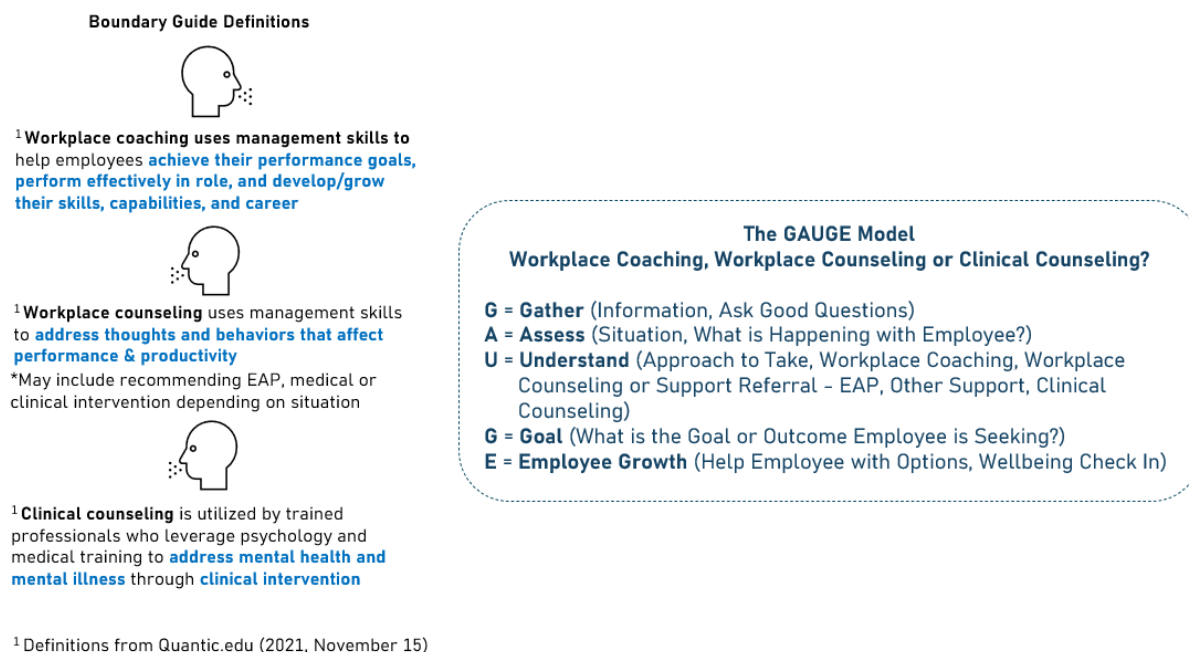
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conjunction with the defined boundary guides (Quantic.edu, 2021, November 15), see

Figure 6 below:

**Figure 6**

## *The GAUGE Model*



It is anticipated that using a combination of the boundary guide definitions (Quantic.edu, 2021, November 15) and The GAUGE Model, can provide clarity for middle managers in defining the boundaries between workplace coaching, workplace counseling, and clinical counseling.

## **Summary of Grounded Theory Findings and Discussion**

Study findings are compelling in the development of the resulting grounded theory that implies the need to reposition the focus and mindset of workplace coaching in modern organizations. Repositioning the focus and mindset of workplace coaching is required to address the following. First, the increasing emotional work leaders are undertaking to address mental health and wellness. More formally integrating this into

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coaching session structure, in addition to the traditional focus of performance and development/growth within coaching interactions. Second, scale up coaching training and development to meet the disruption demanded shift in role evolution from leader to leader-coach and to address potential gap in training leaders the “what and how” of effective workplace coaching. Third, integration of non-clinical psychological counseling skills in the context of business coaching to provide tools and skills to effectively support coaching emotions and stress in the workplace. Lastly, delineating boundaries between workplace coaching and counseling to help managers understand the difference between and application of their managerial competence in both.

The following provides a findings summary overview of this study by theme, see below, Table 20: Summary of Grounded Theory Study Findings, pp. 176-179, which is then followed with a deeper summary of the study’s three Dominant Overarching Themes, Theme 5: Emotional Work and Effects of Workplace Emotions and Stress, Theme 7: Coaching Competence and Capability Build, and Theme 10: Organizational Boundaries. For full findings and discussion of each of the ten dominant study themes, please refer to Chapter 4. Grounded Theory Findings and Discussion, pp. 114-181.

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**Table 20**

*Summary of Grounded Theory Study Findings*

Grounded Theory Findings	Study Finding/Learning
Theme 1: Multi-Generational Workplace	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Current disrupted work environments as expressed by study participants align with the VUCA concept literature (Bennett &amp; Lemoine, 2014; see also Iqbal, 2021; Roslan, Syukri, &amp; Zulhansi, 2020)</li> <li>• Lived coaching experiences of participants can extend VUCA concept to include workplace emotions &amp; stress as a complexity from an interpersonal perspective</li> <li>• Expressed need for guidelines on effectively managing people strategy of bringing whole self to work (to balance productivity and sharing of emotions in workplace) which also relates to the need for boundary definition between workplace coaching, workplace counselling, and clinical counseling so managers understand where their competence ends and need for support referral begins</li> <li>• Expressed opportunity to reduce generational gaps in the workplace and leverage intergenerational collaboration to manage disruption impacts, aligns with Waldman (2021)</li> <li>• Expressed opportunity for the influence of cross-generational diversity to play a role in extending and refreshing leadership and coaching approaches (potential to help reduce generational gaps)</li> </ul>
Theme 2: Coach Identity	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Study participants express their coach identity as:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ A Compass</li> <li>○ Leveraging Education and Experience</li> <li>○ Required to be Adaptable</li> <li>○ Sense Maker, Sense Giver</li> <li>○ Role Model Best Version of Self</li> <li>○ Stress Reducer</li> </ul> </li> </ul> <p>Findings align with literature:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Study participants are wanting to secure a sense of a validated self-identity as a coach within disruption aligns with the activity of identity construction (Sveningsson &amp; Larsson, 1996).</li> <li>• The sense making/sensegiving activities of study participants align with a suggestion from Mills &amp; Murgatroyd (1991, Rule #5) that through coaching leaders can aid in helping employees understand and make sense of organizational life</li> <li>• Participants role modelling best version of self for their employees in helping them cope and adapt to disruption aligns with Bowman et al.'s (2013) notion that one's emotional state can influence the view of self and others</li> </ul>
Theme 3: Coaching Effectiveness and Measurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Workplace coaching effectiveness is subjective across the majority of participants</li> <li>• Most of the organizations do not formally measure coaching effectiveness</li> <li>• Achievement against goals, organizational results, change in employee behavior are key ways participants gauge their coaching effectiveness</li> <li>• Expressed interest in having formal tools to measure and validate coaching effectiveness and impact on those coached</li> </ul>



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Grounded Theory Findings	Study Finding/Learning
<p>Theme 4: Essential Coaching Competencies</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Dominant Skills of Value:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Emotional Intelligence (EI): use of EI aligns with use in literature (Bratton et al., 2011). No need for elevated levels in coaching within disruption</li> <li>○ Accepting People as They Are</li> <li>○ Listening</li> <li>○ Understanding Others</li> <li>○ Empathy</li> <li>○ Be Vulnerable</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Dominant Skills Missing:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Mental Health Skills</li> </ul> </li> <li>Other Identified Areas of Training Needed:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What &amp; How of Coaching – several participants expressed they had not received training (academically or practically) on what and how of coaching</li> <li>○ Difficult Conversations</li> <li>○ Stress Management</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Dominant Skills of No Value:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Coach Thinking They Have to Have all the Answers – some participants expressed the realization that as leaders, they do not have to have all the answers which aligns with suggestion from Ibarra &amp; Scoular (2019) that disrupted environments demand a change in conventional leadership style to one of enabling and adapting employees and role evolution leader-coach, reinforcing coaching is core to the management role (Misiukonis, 2018)</li> <li>○ Following Processes too Rigidly</li> <li>○ Micro-managing</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
<p>Theme 5: Emotional Work and Effects of Emotions and Stress <b>(Dominant Overarching Study Theme)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants expressed they have continuously been experiencing disruptive environmental factors and resulting effects of disruption within their organizational environments which aligns with VUCA literature (Bennett &amp; Lemoine, 2014; see also Iqbal, 2021; Roslan, Syukri, &amp; Zulhansi, 2020)</li> <li>• The focus of coaching interactions has shifted due to constant disruption. There is an increasing need to include a focus of employee mental health and wellness in their coaching practice in addition to the traditional focus of employee performance and development/growth</li> <li>• Study participants are not fully prepared to deal with the emotions and stress in the workplace and expressed a need for ongoing training to build competence in mental health support (aligns with Lawrence (2013) who suggests leader training and development needs to shift to support leadership effectiveness in VUCA environment)</li> <li>• Time pressure is prevalent in the workplace (not enough time)</li> <li>• Workplace emotions and stress are prevalent and relevant in coaching</li> <li>• Participants are doing more emotional work than ever before</li> <li>• Addressing emotions and stress is not part of the coaching framework</li> <li>• Participants expressed coaching employees in adapting, aligns with Ibarra &amp; Scoular (2019)</li> <li>• Workplace emotions and stress are also affected by personal issues</li> <li>• All levels of employees affected by workplaces emotions and stress</li> <li>• Participants expressed common day to day impacts of disruption include increased sick days, decreased employee productivity</li> <li>• Findings suggest traditional leadership and coaching theories are no longer adequate as there is an expressed need to include mental health and wellbeing in addition to coaching employee performance, development, and growth. This aligns with the suggestion of Sparks &amp; McCann (2021)</li> <li>• Evidence in data that participants use coaching as a mechanism to mitigate behavior (aligns with suggestion of Mills &amp; Murgatroyd, 1991, Rule #6)</li> </ul>

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Grounded Theory Findings	Study Finding/Learning
Theme 6: Followership	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participant reflection of why employees follow them (dominant codes) has alignment with Goleman (1995) of style, energy level and emotional approach:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Authentic</li> <li>○ Transparent</li> <li>○ Trustworthy</li> <li>○ Role Model Behaviors</li> <li>○ Follow Up and Follow Through</li> <li>○ Energy Level</li> <li>○ Vulnerable</li> <li>○ Human</li> <li>○ Listen</li> <li>○ Supportive</li> <li>○ Caring for Others</li> </ul> </li> </ul>
Theme 7: Coaching Competence and Capability Build <b>(Dominant Overarching Study Theme)</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Four dominant training subjects emerged from the data as critical areas that the study participants felt would make a significant difference in the competence and capability related to their coaching practice in constant disruption (dealing with emotions and stress):               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ What and how of coaching</li> <li>○ How to have difficult conversations</li> <li>○ Mental Health First Aid</li> <li>○ Managing Stress</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Expression that needed development opportunities are absent and/or little time available for development</li> <li>• Study findings evidence there is a shift in both coaching focus and soft skills to address coaching in constant disruption (aligns with suggestion of Sparks &amp; McCann (2021) that traditional leadership and coaching theories do not address modern organizations)</li> </ul>
Theme 8: Coaching Frameworks, Tools & Routines	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Study participants do not utilize formal coaching frameworks</li> <li>• All participants have regular coaching routines, most have an unstructured approach</li> <li>• Employee owns coaching agenda</li> <li>• Time pressure can impact coaching delivery</li> <li>• Findings present an opportunity to build on Wang et al. (2021), to explore creating a business coaching model that integrates a mental health and wellness emphasis as part of the coaching session structure. The aim is to support enhancing individual efficiency and effectiveness to better achieve positive organizational outcomes and wellbeing within constant disruption</li> </ul>
Theme 9: Coaching Topics	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Thirteen dominant topics (48 in total) emerged from the study data which aligns with the suggestion of Wang et al. (2021) that workplace coaching topics can address employee learning, development, work life and psychological wellbeing and with Mills &amp; Murgatroyd (1991, Rule #3) suggestion that a wide variety of topics can be covered:               <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Day to Day Issues</li> <li>○ Performance Management Issues (HR)</li> <li>○ Goal Achievement</li> <li>○ Relevant Subjects</li> <li>○ Performance Reviews</li> <li>○ Long Term Goal Planning (Career Progress)</li> <li>○ Goal Setting (What)</li> <li>○ Employee Growth &amp; Development</li> <li>○ Creating Autonomy</li> <li>○ Performance Improvement</li> <li>○ Mental Health &amp; Wellbeing</li> <li>○ Emotions and Counsel</li> <li>○ Goal Setting (How)</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Participants are actively coaching mental health and wellness which is not part of a coaching framework however they are addressing due to relevancy and immediacy (aligns with Mills &amp; Murgatroyd (1991, Rules #1, #7, and #8) assertion that coaching can be guided by the day-to-day situations in organizational life and be deliberately created)</li> </ul>

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Grounded Theory Findings	Study Finding/Learning
<p>Theme 10: Organizational Boundaries <b>(Dominant Overarching Study Theme)</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Participants expressed a need for clear boundary definitions to help effectively support coaching and counseling emotional wellbeing in the workplace which are often blurred (Bachkirova &amp; Baker, 2018); notion of boundary definition aligns with similar suggestion of Passmore &amp; Fillery-Travis (2013)</li> <li>• Boundaries also required to help balance employees talking about emotions versus getting work done and leader self-care and protection</li> <li>• Qunatic.edu (2021, November 15) provide clear definition between workplace coaching, workplace counseling, and clinical counseling that can be leveraged as boundary guides</li> </ul>
<p><b>Theory Development Study Contribution</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Grounded Theory: Repositioning The Focus of Coaching in Modern Organizations</li> <li>• Boundary Guide Definitions: Workplace Coaching, Workplace Counseling, and Clinical Counseling</li> <li>• The GAUGE Model</li> </ul>

**Theme 5: Emotional Work and Effects of Workplace Emotions and Stress.**

Study findings from this dominant overarching study theme illustrate that most of the study participants felt they are conducting more emotional work through addressing the stress and emotions of their employees, than they experienced prior to the Covid-19 pandemic. This is in addition to addressing employee performance, and development/growth. Speed of the environment, volume of work, time pressure, addressing mental wellbeing (emotions and stress) in the workplace, and the need for more training and support particularly in dealing with workplace emotions and stress as identified in Dominant Overarching Theme: 7 Coaching Competence and Capability Build, are factors collectively impacting their coaching delivery.

Further, this overarching dominant theme provides data evidence that demonstrates extant leadership and coaching theories do not address the impact of the modern organization’s ongoing disrupted environment nor the resulting increased emotional work leaders are conducting through their workplace coaching practice (McCann & Sparks, 2021). A shift in both business coaching focus and soft skills is evident in the study data. This study implies this shift is required to address appropriate

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and effective coaching, counseling and support of mental health and wellbeing in the workplace. Data findings from the study participants aligns with existing leadership development literature that suggests the focus and processes of leadership development needs to change to support leadership effectiveness in a volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous world (Lawrence, 2013).

**Theme 7: Coaching Competence and Capability Build.** This dominant overarching theme bears findings that illustrate the importance of and need for non-clinical psychological counseling skills in the context of business coaching models. Study participants expressed little opportunity for regular personal or professional development due to disruption as well as little prior training (academically or practically) on how to coach. Study findings also demonstrate an expressed need for more coaching training and development in how to effectively coach, how to have difficult conversations, and how to effectively address stress management and mental health in the workplace.

Theme 7 findings also demonstrate a perceived lack of training on how to apply mental wellbeing tools and resources in real-time coaching practice. Study findings also illustrate the need to address how much leaders should be taking on when addressing emotions and stress in the workplace. While this has left some participants with low confidence and questioning their coaching ability, it has not diminished the overall desire to support and care for those in their charge.

**Theme 10: Organizational Boundaries.** Findings through this dominant overarching study theme demonstrate the importance and need of delineating boundaries between coaching and counseling in the workplace. In this regard, findings identified a

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need for clear definition of workplace coaching, workplace counseling, and clinical counseling to help managers understand the boundaries of their managerial competence in context. Further, organizational boundaries are evidenced to be needed to delineate coaching and counseling, to foster leader self-care, and to aid in balancing the emotional work of supporting employees with sharing their emotions and getting work done.

This research study provides answers to the guiding research questions as to how select middle managers are coaching in today's disrupted organizational environments. It is evidenced through the lived experiences of the Canadian middle managers who participated in this study that the effects of constant disruption continue to impact their organizational environments. Moreover, the nature of their coaching practice and coaching interactions have shifted from conventional views in the literature to now include an emphasis on addressing mental health and wellness in addition to performance, development, and growth.

## **Chapter 5. Study Limitations and Implications to Practice and Theory**

### **Introduction**

This study has limitations and the findings of this study have significant implications to practice and theory as it relates to middle management workplace coaching practice in the context of disrupted organizational environments and organizational wellbeing. This chapter discusses the limitations, delimitations, and implications both practical and academic.

This research is a crucial step towards advancing practitioner and academic knowledge and literature relating to how select Canadian middle managers are coaching in today's disrupted organizational environments. This study provides an intimate view into the lived workplace coaching experiences of twenty Canadian middle managers of organizations of varying sizes across the service industry.

Study implications may be important for practice, policy, theory, and further research related to reshaping business coaching and nurturing psychological wellbeing in the workplace. Further, study implications may potentially address concerns, problems, and potential developmental needs of middle managers and their coaching practice related to delivering effective coaching in a disruptive organizational context. Human capital risks related to employee experience, employee engagement, individual and organizational wellness may also be addressed.

### **Limitations and Delimitations**

This study has limitations. First, while the participant sample size satisfies data saturation or the data collection required to build a grounded theory, it is not large enough to generalize to the overall, larger population of Canadian middle managers or all

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managers in the service industry. Generalizability was not an aim for my research findings as noted in Rigor, Consistency, and Resonance, pp. 99-105. Second, the study is limited to the specified population and criteria as outlined in Research Participant Recruitment Strategy, pp. 91-93, namely only twenty Canadian middle managers of cross-service industry in organizations of varying sizes participated in this study. Thus, given this study focuses on select middle managers, in select Canadian service industries, who are responsible for departments and teams, it limits my conclusions for other types of managers, industries, and size of organizations. Future research is recommended in other industries to understand if middle managers in these other settings deploy similar or different coaching practices and experiences to those captured in this study.

Delimitations for this study are addressed and integrated throughout the proposal. For example, in Chapter 1. Study Introduction in which I state my research problem statement, the purpose of my research, my guiding research question, and the scope of my study. Also, in Chapter 3. Study Methodology, where I detail and discuss my research design, methodology, data collection, and analysis methods.

### **Implications to Practice**

Findings from this study have implications to practitioner knowledge, literature, and practical implementation as follows.

- Grounded theory development that implies the need to reposition the focus and mindset of coaching within modern organizations. This would update or advance existing middle management coaching theory and practical implementation.
- Contribute to practitioner literature a construct that outlines delineated boundaries between workplace coaching, workplace counseling, and clinical counseling for

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practical implementation (see Figure 5: Boundaries Defined: Between Workplace Coaching, Workplace Counseling, and Clinical Counseling, p. 173).

- Contribute to practitioner literature and leader led workplace wellness by introducing practical literature discussing the boundaries that guide leader self-care and boundaries to guide supporting employee need to discuss emotions balanced with getting work done.
- Contribute lived middle management coaching experiences and narrative to practitioner literature to extend practitioner knowledge in a disrupted coaching context.
- Potential reshaping of middle management coaching development and practice through practitioner evidence. Potential to extend practitioner knowledge and coaching training and development in the following areas: mental health first aid; conversational training (non-clinical counseling, having difficult conversations), session structural training, stress management training, and “what and how” to coach.
- Extend practitioner knowledge related to how coaching & soft skills required in today’s disrupted work environment have shifted from traditional views (Sparks & McCann, 2021) to a focus on the shift to emotional work and build on leader-coach role evolution (Ibarra & Scoular, 2019, November-December), inclusion of mental wellness in coaching session structure and integration of non-psychological counseling skills and boundaries
- Advance workplace coaching to focus on mental health and wellness in addition to employee performance, development/growth. Emphasize the combination of non-clinical psychological counseling skills and management skills (cross psychology and business) in a business coaching context. For example, train workplace coaches to not



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take on responsibility of the other person's issues or situation as their role is to acknowledge, ask questions, and leave ownership of the issue with the employee.

### **Implications to Academia**

Findings from this study can extend leadership and coaching theories to address coaching in disrupted organizational context. Findings can also shift the construct of coaching structure models to include focusing on mental health and wellness of employees in addition to the traditional focus of employee performance and development/growth.

Findings can extend the academic body of knowledge in the following domains, middle management business coaching, positive psychology coaching, middle management theory, middle management role design, and qualitative data analysis through the following ways:

- Contribute my grounded theory to the literature that implies a need to reposition workplace coaching in the modern organization as well as The GAUGE Model, (see Figures 5: Boundaries Defined: Between Workplace Coaching, Workplace Counseling, and Clinical Counseling, p. 173 and Figure 6: The GAUGE Model, p. 174).
- Contribute the lived Canadian middle management coaching experiences into relevant literature with the purpose of deepening this body of knowledge
- Clearly delineating boundaries between workplace coaching, workplace counseling, and clinical counseling can bring further clarity to the identity and of workplace coaching versus workplace counseling versus clinical counseling and extend current literature in this regard, working towards closing the suggested

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conceptual coaching identity crisis in the literature (Schutte & Steya, 2015).

- Extend the business coaching literature in underscoring the important role the leader-coach plays in deploying the combination of workplace coaching and workplace counseling in bringing a balance to the delicate intersection of getting work done and organizational wellness.
- Contribute my lived experience of using mind mapping as a qualitative data analysis tool within my grounded theory study. This can extend academic qualitative research literature. Currently, less has been written related to the use of mind maps as a qualitative data analysis tool and the resulting lived experience documentation than as a qualitative data collection tool (Kachel & Jennings, 2020, see also Fearnley, 2022).

### **Future Research**

This study provides opportunities for a robust future research agenda related to building and deepening knowledge and practical application of middle management coaching practice. Identified areas for future research related to this study include the following.

**Refresh Leadership and Coaching Approaches with Cross-Generational Diversity Influence.** This study shows there is potential for the influence of cross-generational diversity to play a role in extending and refreshing leadership and coaching approaches while at the same time helping to reduce the generational gap; integrate our understanding of multi-generational diversity into our coaching and leadership approaches to honor and leverage the lived experiences and diversity of those we lead and coach (Participant #20, Theme 1).

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**Coach Identity.** My assumption based on my study data is how leaders see themselves as and show up as a coach is identity work that is relevant to how they feel about their competence and confidence as a coach. Further, how this self-identity as a coach within a disrupted context then manifests may further inform both a practical application and leadership development perspective, (Theme 2 Coach Identity)

**Coaching and Workplace Emotions and Stress.** There is potential for future research in three areas related to coaching and workplace emotions and stress because of this study:

- Further research and development work to support the recommendations of this study related to building on the leader-coach role evolution (Ibarra & Scoular, 2019, November-December) and the inclusion of mental mental wellness in coaching session structure. This includes the integration of non-psychological counseling skills coupled with the boundary guide definitions (Quantic.edu, 2021, November 15), (see Figure 5: Boundaries Defined: Between Workplace Coaching, Workplace Counseling, and Clinical Counseling, p. 173), and Figure 6: The GAUGE Model (see p. 174) from this study into coaching development, coaching tools, and practical implementation and sustainment activities. (Chapter 4. Grounded Theory Findings and Discussion – Theory Development Study Contribution)
- **Middle Management Coaching Competency Mapping.** Study findings related to the coaching skills participants found most valuable in their coaching practice provide an opportunity to review and compare these skills against extant coaching development models and/or coaching competency maps such as the [International Coaching Federations Core Competencies](#) (International Coaching Federation, n.d.)

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to determine alignment or areas of opportunity to develop competency gaps.

Practitioners may be interested in a coaching competency map designed to build competence and confidence in coaching in constant disruption.

- **Synergistic Effects of Coaching.** Explore the notion of a synergistic relationship between disruption and coaching or a synergistic effect of coaching within the modern, disrupted organizational environment. (Theme 5: Emotional Work and Effects of Workplace Emotions and Stress (Dominant Overarching Study Theme))
- **Leading with Vulnerability or Being Vulnerable.** Study findings express a need for middle managers to role model behaviors for employees both in being vulnerable and leading with vulnerability within constant disruption. Practitioners may be interested in these concepts from both a leadership style and leadership responsibility perspective. Further exploration of these concepts in the context of disrupted environments may answer questions if they raise leadership impacts with the notion of leading with vulnerability versus being vulnerable. (Theme 5: Emotional Work and Effects of Workplace Emotions and Stress (Dominant Overarching Theme)).

**Trauma Informed Leadership and Coaching Approaches.** An opportunity to conduct evidenced based research related to what we have been learning regarding disruption effects and implications for leadership style as well as workplace coaching approaches and coaching models (Participant #20, Theme 1: Multi-Generational Workplace).

**Workplace Coaching and Impact to Individual and Organizational Efficiency and Effectiveness.** Based on the lived coaching experiences of the study participants and the emotional work they undertake, there is an opportunity to explore the

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process of middle management coaching in a disrupted context to continue to build understanding of the human purpose of coaching, potentially moving beyond a mechanical purpose as suggested by Chan and Burgess (2015) in driving organizational efficiency and effectiveness. The purpose of doing so may enable how coaching can enable and give meaning to individual efficiency and effectiveness which in turn may enhance organizational efficiency and effectiveness from a positive perspective of productivity, innovation, and building sustainable competitive advantage. Exploring how workplace coaching may impact productivity in relation to individual and organizational efficiency and effectiveness is a topic practitioners and organizations may find of interest.

### **Summary**

The purpose of this grounded theory study is to understand how Canadian middle managers are coaching in today's disrupted organizational environments. The research involves collecting data, analyzing it through constant comparison analysis, and the developing of a grounded theory anchored in the study data. This research is a crucial step towards advancing practitioner and academic knowledge and literature related to middle management workplace coaching in a disruptive organizational environment context and in potentially mitigating disruption knock-on effects to middle manager coaching practice, as well as individual and organizational performance and psychological wellness.

**Three Dominant Overarching Study Themes.** The study aids in explaining the lived experiences of how middle managers in select Canadian service organizations of varying sizes are coaching in today's disrupted environments. Moreover, this study

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shines significant light on three dominant overarching themes that emerged from the lived coaching experiences of the research participants that shaped my grounded theory.

First, there is an increasing level of emotional work undertaken in relation to their coaching practice to address workplace emotions and stress. Second, there is an expressed need for coaching competence and capability build to strengthen their coaching capability to enhance their preparedness to enact workplace coaching and workplace counseling and reduce the knowing-doing gap as it relates to middle management coaching practice. Third, there is an expressed need for organizational boundaries to clearly delineate between workplace coaching, workplace counseling, and clinical counseling to enable managers to understand the difference between and application of their managerial competence in both.

**Theory Development Study Contribution.** The findings from the study's three dominant overarching study themes are compelling in shaping the resulting grounded theory that has both practitioner and academic implications to elevate the repositioning of workplace coaching in modern organizations. This study implies there is a need to reposition the mindset and focus of workplace coaching in modern organizations due to the nature of continued disruption and the increased relevance of coaching emotions and stress within workplace coaching practice. Also, study findings imply traditional coaching models, leadership theory (Sparks & McCann, 2021), and business coaching theory no longer align in addressing the realities of the continued disruption in today's modern organizations.

**Need for Coaching Competence and Capability Build.** The grounded theory also addresses the compelling need to reposition our approach to how we train and

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develop our middle managers, particularly how we train them as workplace coaches.

While current training and development may address “what” middle managers need to do within their role, there is compelling evidence within the data collected for this study, that what is not addressed directly or if at all through academic or on the job training, is the “how” to be a middle manager or “how” to coach. Thus, a development curriculum that focuses on the “what and how” to be a coach and how to manage can address this expressed need.

**Boundary Delineation.** Delineating boundaries between workplace coaching, workplace counseling and clinical counseling is also addressed by my grounded theory and The GAUGE Model (Figure 6, p. 174). These not only provide boundary guides for managers to determine where their competence ends and need for referral begins, it also addresses boundaries for leader self-care, and aids in helping managers balance employee need to talk about their emotions with getting work done. Boundaries in the context of business coaching are crucial to framing transparency, expectation, and safeguarding professional conduct.

In sum, this study’s findings suggest new understanding and knowledge related to middle management coaching. Further, based on participant lived coaching experiences in disruptive organizational environments, the following is expressed as a result of this study. A grounded theory to reposition the coaching focus that middle managers deploy to include mental wellbeing as it relates to the depth and breadth of emotional work they conduct. The GAUGE Model, to aid in boundary delineation between workplace coaching and workplace counseling, and clinical counseling to ensure clarity of these boundaries so middle managers understand where their competence ends and referral for

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other support begins. The need to provide sufficient training and development in both how to coach and how to manage within a disrupted environmental context. Lastly, suggestions for a future research agenda follow. All of these findings hold critical success implications for organizational performance and wellbeing.

**Future Research.** Further, findings from this study also suggest ideas for a robust future research agenda that remains focused on middle management workplace coaching with an intent towards improving the human condition within today's disrupted modern organizations (as discussed above in Chapter 5. Future Research pp. 186-189).

I intend on continuing to pursue research and development to support the development and implementation of my grounded theory recommendations. I am also interested in pursuing a robust future research agenda in middle management coaching aiming to influence advancing both academia and practical application as it relates to coaching in disrupted environments and nurturing organizational wellness.

I trust my research will continue to support the notion of closing the middle management knowing-doing gap, help to inform modern coaching learning and development, and intersect business and positive psychology coaching where appropriate. Most of all, the higher purpose of my research is to influence improving the human condition within organizations through middle management coaching practice that focuses on achieving wellbeing and positive organizational outcomes within constant disruption.



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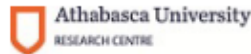
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## Appendix A: Certification of Ethics Approval



### CERTIFICATION OF ETHICAL APPROVAL

The Athabasca University Research Ethics Board (REB) has reviewed and approved the research project noted below. The REB is constituted and operates in accordance with the current version of the Tri-Council Policy Statement: Ethical Conduct for Research Involving Humans (TCPS2) and Athabasca University Policy and Procedures.

**Ethics File No.:** 25258

**Principal Investigator:**

Mrs. Brenda Kennedy, Doctoral Student  
Faculty of Business\Doctor of Business Administration (DBA)

**Supervisor/Project Team:**

Dr. Deborah Hurst (Supervisor)

**Project Title:**

Middle Management: Exploring the Practice of Workplace Coaching – A Grounded Theory Study

**Effective Date:** June 02, 2023

**Expiry Date:** June 01, 2024

**Restrictions:**

Any modification/amendment to the approved research must be submitted to the AUREB for approval prior to proceeding.

Any adverse event or incidental findings must be reported to the AUREB as soon as possible, for review.

Ethical approval is valid *for a period of one year*. An annual request for renewal must be submitted and approved by the above expiry date if a project is ongoing beyond one year.

An Ethics Final Report must be submitted when the research is complete (*i.e. all participant contact and data collection is concluded, no follow-up with participants is anticipated and findings have been made available/provided to participants (if applicable)*) or the research is terminated.

**Approved by:**

**Date: June 02, 2023**

Weiming Liu, Chair  
Faculty of Business, Departmental Ethics Review Committee

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Athabasca University Research Ethics Board  
University Research Services Office  
1 University Drive, Athabasca AB Canada T9S 3A3  
E-mail rebsec@athabascau.ca  
Telephone: 780.213.2033

# MIDDLE MANAGEMENT: EXPLORING THE PRACTICE OF WORKPLACE COACHING – A GROUNDED THEORY STUDY

## **Appendix B: Recruitment Letter: Canadian Large Sized Service Companies**

June 26, 2023

Air Canada  
7373 Cte Vertu, Boulevard West  
Saint-Laurent, Quebec, H4S1Z3

Attention: Human Resources

This letter is a request for Air Canada's assistance with a research study I am conducting as a requirement to complete my Doctor of Business Administration degree at Athabasca University, under the supervision of Dr. Deborah Hurst and Dr. Stephen Murgatroyd. My research study is entitled: Middle Management: Exploring the Practice of Workplace Coaching – A Grounded Theory Study.

The purpose of this research study is to explore, understand, describe, and interpret the coaching practice of a select group of Canadian middle managers<sup>1</sup> in large sized, publicly traded companies in the Canadian service industry (cross-industry). The research will focus on the lived, subjective experiences of how they deliver their coaching practice in-situ in today's disruptive organizational environments. The research should benefit participants through the opportunity to contribute their personal knowledge and experience in workplace coaching for the development of knowledge and change in future training, education, and development of middle management coaches in practical application.

It is my hope that I can connect with 2-3 middle managers within your organization, in corporate head office, to invite them to participate in my research study. Participation in this project is entirely voluntary and would take approximately two hours of participant's time. Participants would be asked to participate with me the principal investigator, Brenda Kennedy, in:

1. A 45-minute face-to-face interview (video teleconference or in-person), at a time convenient for participants.
2. A 45-minute follow-up conversation to review interview transcripts and data analysis, at a time convenient for participants. This meeting enables participants to alter/clarify their comments.

All information provided during the study will be protected through our ethical duty of confidentiality, meaning participant privacy and confidentiality will be maintained during this study. All participants will be anonymous. There will be no personal identifiers such as personal descriptions or demographic information included in the study. Data codes will be used instead of participant names. All hard copy and soft copy data will be stored in secured, locked and/or password protected storage. The data will be shared with my

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<sup>1</sup> Canadian middle managers are defined in this research as senior directors, directors, and senior managers who are situated between top level executives and front-line managers and employees in the middle of the organizational hierarchy and may lead organizational units or teams or be individual contributors who coach horizontally with their peers and one-up with their senior leaders.



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supervisors, Drs. Deborah Hurst and Stephen Murgatroyd, and the final report will be available to Athabasca University.

There are no risks anticipated in participating in this study and in appreciation of time spent, participants will receive a \$20 Amazon e-gift card. If you have middle managers that would have interest in learning more about this study or in participating in this study, please have them contact the principal investigator, Brenda Kennedy, at [bkennedy1@learn.athabascau.ca](mailto:bkennedy1@learn.athabascau.ca).

Thank you for considering this invitation. If you have any questions or would like more information, please contact me, Brenda Kennedy, (principal investigator) by e-mail [bkennedy1@learn.athabascau.ca](mailto:bkennedy1@learn.athabascau.ca) or (my supervisors), [deborahh@athabascau.ca](mailto:deborahh@athabascau.ca) or [murgatroydstephen@gmail.com](mailto:murgatroydstephen@gmail.com). I have also attached my research participant recruitment flyer and my LinkedIn profile and research post links below.

Thank you,

Brenda Kennedy

[bkennedy1@learn.athabascau.ca](mailto:bkennedy1@learn.athabascau.ca)

*LinkedIn Profile:* <https://www.linkedin.com/in/brenda-kennedy-dissertation-research-au/>

*LinkedIn Research Post:*

<https://www.linkedin.com/feed/update/urn:li:activity:7078595382963752960/>

This project has been reviewed by the Athabasca University Research Ethics Board. Should you have any comments or concerns about your treatment as a participant, the research, or ethical review processes, please contact the Research Ethics Officer by e-mail at [rebsec@athabascau.ca](mailto:rebsec@athabascau.ca) or by telephone at 780.213.2033.

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**Appendix C: Semi-Structured Interview Guide**

**Objective:** My intent is to give voice to Canadian middle managers as coaches – examine, understand, and share their lived experiences as middle management coaches in today’s disrupted organizational environments.

**Purpose:** to understand how middle managers in today’s disrupted organizational environments coach (what is their coaching practice, what are they coaching, what behavior patterns and skill patterns are applied in coaching, how is coaching defined, what is the meaning of coaching, how do they know their coaching is effective (assessment and measurement, what topics are they coaching?). Further, to determine if there is a need for non-clinical psychological counseling skills in a business coaching context and delineating a boundary between the two.

**Research Question:** How are middle managers coaching in today’s disrupted organizational environments?

**Review:** Participant Informed Consent (refer to actual form)

- Thank you for agreeing to participate in the interview and for your informed consent.
- Participant is free to ask questions throughout interview and can withdraw participation at any time.
- A \$20 Amazon card emailed following the interview as a thank you.
- Your confidentiality and privacy will always be maintained during this study; data may be shared with my supervisor(s).
- You have agreed you are comfortable with my recording our discussion, my use of your direct quotations, and I may contact you after our interview to review/verify that my commentary is accurately reflected in my transcription.

Q#	Interview Question
1.	Tell me about your organization, your role, role title, role tenure and size of team.
2.	What is your current experience coaching as a middle manager in today’s disrupted organizational environment?
3.	What is your coaching practice model? (How do you coach/coaching approach; what is being coached)
4.	What skills do you find of value in your coaching practice? What skills do you find do not add value? What skills, if any, are missing?
5.	How do you know your coaching practice is effective? How is your coaching effectiveness measured?
6.	Thinking about your coaching practice, how relevant has addressing workplace emotions/stress in your coaching been?
7.	How do your emotions/stress, if at all, play in your coaching practice? How do emotions/stress of your employees/leaders/peers, if at all, play into your coaching practice?
8.	Why do you think people follow you? (Goleman (1995) has a perspective that people follow leaders because of their style, energy level and their emotional approach)

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**Appendix D: Coding Clusters**

- Purpose: categorize codes to develop themes to address the research question
  - Sorting codes based on relationships between the codes (or not)
  - Started the categorization process with my most dominant codes (case count & code count)
  - Categorized codes into clusters based on relationships and then labeled each cluster
  - Looked at characteristics of each code, for relationships (put in same cluster as other codes), no relationship, put in new cluster box
  - Looked at the content of each cluster box to produce a label to form themes – aimed to ensure the themes addressed my overarching research question to demonstrate credibility of my findings
  - My research question, “how are middle managers coaching in today’s disrupted organizational environments?”
- In each table: First Line = Themes; Second Line = Categories; Third Line = Dominant Codes

**Research Question 1**

What is your current experience coaching as a middle manager in today’s disrupted organizational environment?

<b>Coaching Topics</b>	<b>Effects of Disruption</b>	<b>Emotional Work</b>	<b>Organizational Culture</b>
<b>Coaching Activity</b>	<b>Effects of Disruption</b>	<b>Emotional Elements</b>	<b>Employee Engagement</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Skill Building</li> <li>• Providing Autonomy</li> <li>• Coaching Positive and Negative</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coaching Impacted by Covid (Disruption)</li> <li>• Environment Has Changed</li> <li>• Nature of Coaching Conversation Has Changed</li> <li>• Coaching Virtually</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Balancing Emotional Wellness and Coaching Goal Achievement</li> <li>• Deciphering Employee Mentality</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building Morale</li> <li>• Making People Excited About Work</li> <li>• Rallying People</li> <li>• Bring Whole Self to Work</li> </ul>

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**Research Question 2**

What is your coaching practice model? (how do you coach/coaching approach, what is being coached)

Coaching Time Allocation	Coach Identity	Coaching Routine	Coaching Framework or Tools	Coaching Framework or Tools	Coaching Topics
<b>How coaching time is spent</b>	<b>How Coaches Sees Self</b>	<b>Coaching Routine</b>	<b>Coaching Framework or Tools Used</b>	<b>Manager Perspective of Coaching Framework</b>	<b>Coaching Topics*</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Specific coaching topics</li> <li>• Observational Coaching</li> <li>• Need to do things differently to create time for coaching</li> <li>• Let employees talk</li> <li>• No Time to Learn or Develop Coaching Skills</li> <li>• Difficult to Find Time or No Time to Coach</li> <li>• Length of Coaching Sessions</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Manages expectations, communication, autonomy</li> <li>• As a Compass</li> <li>• Coach and Counsellor</li> <li>• Executing not thinking about coaching</li> <li>• Influence Best Performance</li> <li>• Make Employees Successful</li> <li>• Need to be int Trench</li> <li>• Provide Psychological Safety</li> <li>• Rallies People</li> <li>• Be Adaptable</li> <li>• Sense Maker</li> <li>• Sense Giver</li> <li>• Stress Reducer</li> <li>• Role Model Best Version of Self</li> <li>• Leverage Education and Experience</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Weekly Coaching Routines</li> <li>• Coaching Impact Bi-weekly or Thrice Weekly Coaching Routines</li> <li>• Weekly Staff Meeting</li> <li>• Takes Time to Reveal Itself</li> <li>• Monthly Coaching Routines</li> <li>• Quarterly Coaching Routine</li> <li>• Skip Meetings</li> <li>• Observational Coaching</li> <li>• Coaching Done Virtually</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Visualization</li> <li>• Coaching Model for Manager Tools</li> <li>• PXT</li> <li>• 9 Blocks</li> <li>• {Org) Performance Incentive Program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Need to Balance Structure Format with Producing Productive Outcomes</li> <li>• Manager experience, personality, education, choice of and application of coaching tools</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Goal Setting (How)</li> <li>• Goal Setting (What)</li> <li>• Emotions and Counsel</li> <li>• Mental Health &amp; Wellbeing</li> <li>• Performance Improvement</li> <li>• Day to Day Issues</li> <li>• Skill Building</li> <li>• Creating Autonomy</li> <li>• Employee Growth &amp; Development</li> <li>• Long Term Goal Planning (Career Progress)</li> <li>• Performance Reviews</li> <li>• Relevant Subjects</li> <li>• Goal Achievement</li> <li>• Performance Management Issues (HR)</li> </ul>

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**Research Question 3**

What skills do you find of value in your coaching practice?

What skills do you find do not add value?

What skills, if any, are missing?

Essential Competencies	Competence & Capability Build	Competence & Capability Build	Non-value Add Skills	Other Missing
Valuable Skills	Sills Missing	Training Needed	Non-value Add Skills	Other Missing
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Asking Good Clarifying Questions</li> <li>• Authentic</li> <li>• Bring Own Experiences to Coaching</li> <li>• Communicating Change</li> <li>• Flexibility</li> <li>• Needs Identification</li> <li>• Patience</li> <li>• Use Open Ended Questions</li> <li>• Accepting People as They Are</li> <li>• Be Transparent</li> <li>• Communication</li> <li>• Be Vulnerable</li> <li>• Empathy</li> <li>• Emotional Intelligence</li> <li>• Understanding Others</li> <li>• Listening</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mental Health Skills</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Emotions &amp; Stress</li> <li>• Having Difficult Conversations</li> <li>• What and How of Coaching</li> <li>• Mental Health Support and How and When to use Mental Health Resources Effectively</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Coach Thinking They Have to Have All the Answers</li> <li>• Following Process Rigidly</li> <li>• Micromanaging</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Face to Face Interaction</li> <li>• Coaching Structure</li> <li>• Personal Professional Development</li> </ul>

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**Research Question 4**

How do you know your coaching practice is effective?

How is your coaching practice measured?

Subjective Measurement	Objective Measurement	No Measurement
<p><b>Manager Perspective</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employee/Team Morale</li> <li>• <b>Behavior Change</b></li> <li>• <b>Employee Engagement</b></li> <li>• <b>Manager Feedback</b></li> <li>• <b>See Employee Growth or Progression</b></li> <li>• <b>Seeing Results from Coaching Conversations</b></li> <li>• <b>Linked to Organizational Goals and Results</b></li> <li>• Employee Feedback</li> </ul>	<p><b>Formal Measurement</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tied to Goals and Objectives</li> <li>• No formal measurement</li> </ul>	

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**Research Question 5**

Thinking about your coaching practice, how relevant has addressing workplace emotions/stress in your coaching been?

Coaching Relevancy	Competence & Capability Build	Multi Generational Workplace	Emotional Work	Effects of Emotion & Stress	Organizational Culture
<b>Coaching Relevancy</b>	<b>Low Skill/Capability to deal with Emotions &amp; Stress</b>	<b>Multi Generational Workplace</b>	<b>Emotional Work</b>	<b>Day to Day Impact</b>	<b>Organizational Culture</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Not Relevant</li> <li>• No Change in Relevancy</li> <li>• Relevant in Coaching</li> <li>• <b>Post pandemic increase in coaching relevancy</b></li> <li>• Important Element in Coaching</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Unprepared to Address Emotions in Coaching</li> <li>• Do Not Know How to Respond</li> <li>• Lack of Confidence in Responding</li> <li>• Need Mental Health Training</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Generational Differences</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working More on Emotions</li> <li>• Coaching Stress and Emotions but Not Part of Current Coaching Framework</li> <li>• Emotions and Stress More Prevalent in Workplace</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Employee Sick Leave</li> <li>• People Willing to Talk About Emotions and Stress Since Pandemic</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• More Sensitivity to Mental Health Issues</li> </ul>

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**Research Question 6**

How do your emotions/stress, if at all, play in your coaching practice?

How do your emotions/stress of your employees/leaders/peers, if at all, play in your coaching practice?

<b>Organizational Boundaries</b>	<b>Effects of Emotion &amp; Stress: Leader</b>	<b>Emotional Work</b>	<b>Effects of Emotions &amp; Stress: Employees</b>	<b>Organizational Culture</b>
<b>Boundaries Needed</b>	<b>Effects of Emotions &amp; Stress: Leader</b>	<b>Emotional Work</b>	<b>Effects of Emotions &amp; Stress: Employees</b>	<b>Organizational Culture</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Delineate Coaching vs Counseling</b></li> <li>• <b>Leader Set Boundaries for Self-Care and Protection</b></li> <li>• Address/Balance Emotions and Stress vs Getting Work Done</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leadership Self-care</li> <li>• Balancing Employee Stress Levels</li> <li>• Balancing Leader Stress Levels</li> <li>• Management Style Impacts</li> <li>• Leader Vulnerability</li> <li>• Manager Stress and Emotion Play into Coaching</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Leaders doing more emotional work</li> <li>•</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Decrease in Employee Productivity</li> <li>• Support each other</li> <li>• Emotional Response</li> <li>• Employee Emotional Suffering</li> <li>• No Time</li> <li>• Employees Talking with Everyone About Their Issues</li> <li>• Employee Stress and Emotions Play into Coaching</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Nurturing Resiliency and Positivity</li> <li>• Psychological Safety</li> </ul>



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### Research Questions 7

Why do you think people follow you?

(Goleman (1995) has a perspective that people follow leaders because of their style, energy level and their emotional approach)

<b>Followership</b>		
<b>Competencies</b>	<b>Organizational Culture</b>	<b>Personal Attributes</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Communicates</b></li> <li>• <b>Follows Up and Follows Through</b></li> <li>• <b>Takes Charge</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Provides Reward and Recognition</li> <li>• Role Models Behaviors</li> <li>• Way Leader Shows Up for Others</li> <li>• Interested and Supportive of Employee Improvement and Career</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Energy Level</li> <li>• Vulnerable</li> <li>• Authentic</li> <li>• Transparent</li> <li>• Trustworthy</li> <li>• Supportive</li> <li>• Cares for Others</li> <li>• Approachable</li> <li>• Genuine</li> <li>• Is Human</li> <li>• Listens to Others</li> <li>• Positive</li> <li>• Connects with People at the Individual Level</li> </ul>

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## Appendix E: Examples of Analytic Memos Used in Study

The screenshot shows a 'Memo Properties' dialog box with the following details:

Field	Value
Name	Decision Participant Recruitment August 28 2023
Description	Discussed challenges of participant recruitment - obtaining participants has been challenging to date; have sent ~13 letters to large companies - working on 3 responses: FI - working with Law Group/Compliance to meet their criteria prior to invitation; Ag - interviewed 1 participant August 18; Utility (F) - sent internal email - no
Location	Memos
Size	1 KB
Color	None
Created on	2023-09-01 4:48 PM
by	BK
Modified on	2024-03-16 9:02 PM
by	BK

Full Memo: Discussed challenges of participant recruitment - obtaining participants has been challenging to date; have sent ~13 letters to large companies - working on 3 responses: FI - working with Law Group/Compliance to meet their criteria prior to invitation; Ag - interviewed 1 participant August 18; Utility (F) - sent internal email - no response; all other emails inquiries via LinkedIn - no response back. Discussed with Committee to change scope to varying size orgs to increase recruitment outcomes

The screenshot shows a 'Memo Properties' dialog box with the following details:

Field	Value
Name	aw on having EI, Cultural Intelligence and Mental Health skills in coaching
Description	Use this snippet to reinforce the voice of participant that these skills are needed in coaching within today's disrupted environment. Participant 1 was very passionate about this, "I think that's something that we have to have, intelligence, emotional intelligence, cultural intelligence and mental health. I think that they going to make us better
Location	Memos
Size	1 KB
Color	None
Created on	2023-11-25 7:40 PM
by	BK
Modified on	2023-11-25 7:40 PM
by	BK

Full Memo: Use this snippet to reinforce the voice of participant that these skills are needed in coaching within today's disrupted environment. Participant #01 was very passionate about this, "I think that is something that we have to have, intelligence, emotional intelligence, cultural intelligence and mental health. I think that they going to make us better in the way we are, we going to be as a coach"

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**Appendix F: NVivo Code Book**



NVivo Code Book -  
See Attachments