

ICF CONVERGE

OCTOBER 23-25, 2025 • SAN DIEGO





The Power & Practice of Internal Coaching:

Fresh Research, Real Insights, and What's Next



Tolu Akande, EdD, MCC



I conducted this study because, as a career internal executive coach, I always get questions about how internal coaching works, how I got into this work, and what keeps me and internal coaching working.

The Power & Practice of Internal Coaching:

Panel:

Kneisha Sanders, PCC

Abhijit Bhattacharya, PCC

Joan Cook, MCC

Timmie Wang, PCC



Fresh
Research

Internal Coaching Practices:

Identifying Differences in HR Strategies, Staffing Models & Executive Perception

Trevecca Nazarene University

Internal Coaching

**Coaching relationships, conducted by trained coaches taking place in an organization as part of an organizational strategy to develop employees, (Machin, 2010).*

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research was to **investigate the key factors contributing to the implementation, effectiveness, and perception of *internal coaching practices** within varying types of organizations, including public, private, non-profit, government, and educational settings.

Review of the Literature

- Coaching in organizations **increases employee satisfaction, retention, engagement and leadership skills** (Jody, 2022)
- Critical thought needs to be given to the organizational and internal coaching **practice structure** (Grajfoner, 2020)
- A more systematic **review of the long-term impact of coaching on leaders** in organizations is necessary (McInerney, 2021)
- The **purpose and outcomes** of coaching, **relative to organizational goals** is of utmost importance (Tompkins, 2018)

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

1. What differences existed in the **human resource practice strategies** of organizations implementing the following **coaching practice staffing models**: internal, external, managers as coaches, and hybrid?
2. What are the differences in **coaching experiences from employees** who were coached by **(type of coach)** an internal coach, external coach, manager as coach or a hybrid of coaches?
3. How do **executives perceive** their organization's **internal coaching practice** impacted the execution of human resource practice strategies?

DV

IV

RQ 1

RESEARCH DESIGN: CAUSAL
COMPARATIVE

PARTICIPANTS: PROGRAM
MANAGERS / INTERNAL COACHES

INSTRUMENTS: INNOVATIVE HR
PRACTICE SCALE, FOCUS GROUP

DATA COLLECTION: SURVEY,
FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

DATA PRODUCED: HR STRATEGIES
AND COACHING STAFFING
MODELS USED TO SUPPORT

DATA ANALYSIS: ONE-WAY
ANOVA &
CONTENT ANALYSIS & THEMATIC
CODING

RQ 2

RESEARCH DESIGN: CAUSAL
COMPARATIVE

PARTICIPANTS: EMPLOYEES OF
ORGANIZATION

INSTRUMENTS: EXECUTIVE
COACHING MEASURE, COACHING
IN THE WORKPLACE SURVEY,
FOCUS GROUP

DATA COLLECTION: SURVEY,
FOCUS GROUP QUESTIONS

DATA PRODUCED: COACHING
EFFICACY & IMPACT BASED ON
STAFFING MODELS USED

DATA ANALYSIS: ONE-WAY -
ANOVA & CONTENT ANALYSIS &
THEMATIC CODING

RQ 3

RESEARCH DESIGN: QUALITATIVE

PARTICIPANTS: DIRECTOR LEVEL
LEADERS & ABOVE

INSTRUMENTS: EXECUTIVE
PERCEPTION OF INTERNAL
COACHING SURVEY

DATA COLLECTION: SURVEY

DATA PRODUCED: PERCEPTION OF
EFFICACY OF INTERNAL COACHING
PRACTICE TO SUPPORT
ORGANIZATIONAL HR STRATEGIES

DATA ANALYSIS: CONTENT
ANALYSIS & THEMATIC CODING

Findings & Conclusions

Research Question #1

What differences existed in the human resource practice strategies of organizations implementing the following coaching practice staffing models: internal, external, managers as coaches, and hybrid?



<i>Internal Coaching Survey: Coaching Practices</i>			
Variable	<i>n</i>		<i>% of Participants</i>
Internal Coach	46		44.2
External Coach	0		0
My Manager	0		0
Hybrid	58		55.8

14 Variables: Human Resource Practice Strategies

Employee Acquisition	Employee Retention	Compensation & Retention	Benefits & Services
Rewards & Recognition	Technical Training	Leadership Development	Career Planning & Development
Performance Appraisals	Talent (Potential) Development	Succession Planning: Filling of Specific Positions	Employee Relations with a Human Face
Employee Exit & Separation Management	Adopting Responsibility For Socially Relevant Issues		

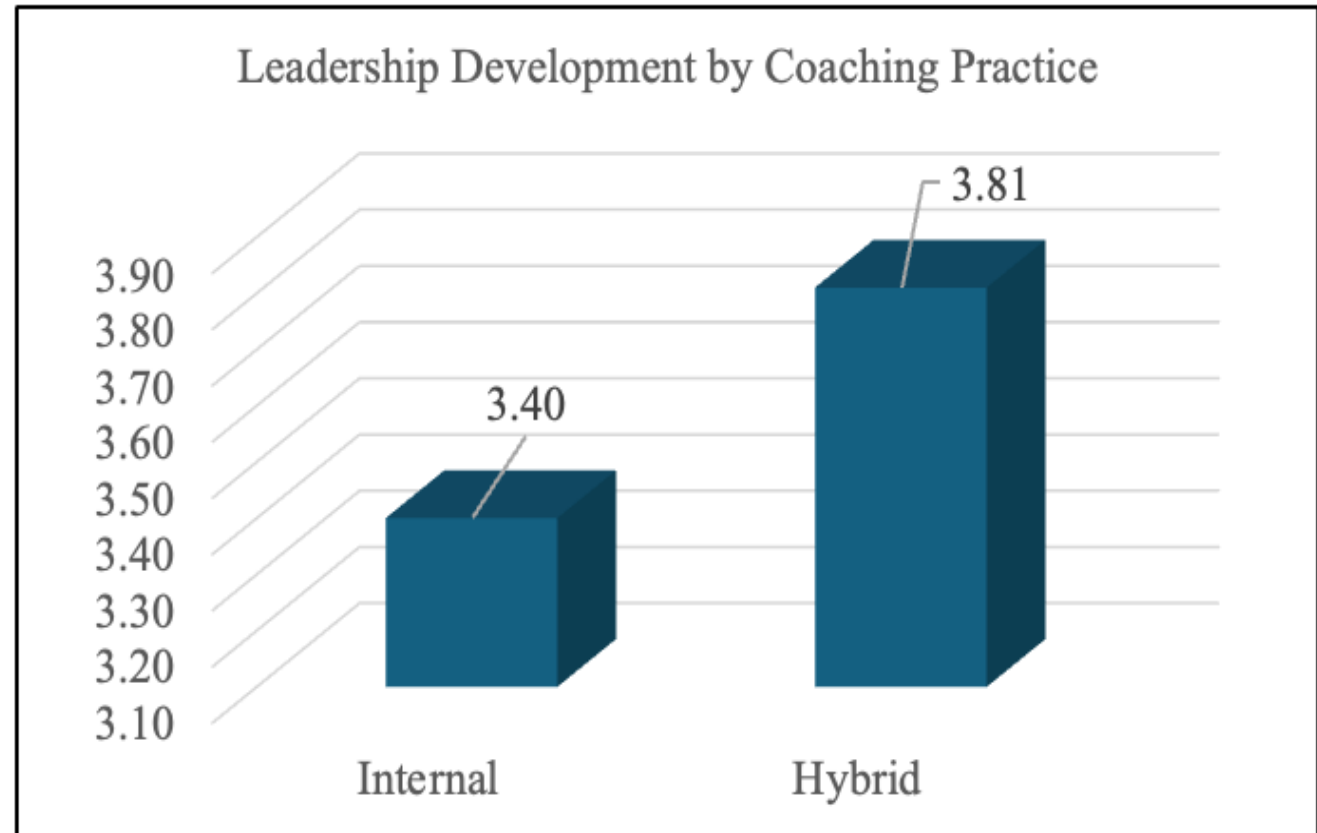
Leadership Development

**INTERNAL
COACHES &
HYBRID
STAFFING
APPROACH**

Research Question #1

There was **a significant difference** found between the two groups for Initiative/Strategies #7, **Leadership Development**.

Organizations focused on Leadership Development deployed a hybrid or combination approach to supporting their employees instead of just internal coaches.



Research Question #1, Focus Groups

1

Emphasized **three dominant HR Strategies** for IC. These strategies were **Leadership Development, Career Development and Planning and Talent (Potential Development)**.

2

Leaders in the organization are important, and there are sometimes **specific needs that may or may not exist in the training, experience, or specialties of the internal coach population**; therefore, a multi-pronged approach is used.

3

Internal coaches were preferred by organizations to support **Leadership Development** efforts because of their **organizational and contextual knowledge**. However, a **hybrid approach** was highlighted during focus groups **to support Career Development and Planning and Talent (Potential) Development**.

Research Question #2

What are the differences in coaching experiences from employees who were coached by (type of coach) an internal coach, external coach, manager as coach or a hybrid of coaches?

Experience of Company Sponsored Coaching: Coaching Provided

Variable	<i>n</i>		% of Total
Internal Coach	51		44.7
External Coach	26		22.8
My Manager	16		14
Hybrid	21		18.4

Engagement and
Productivity

People Management

Dialogue and
Communication

Goal-setting and
Prioritization

Relationships with
Managers

Research Question #2

What are the differences in coaching experiences from employees who were coached by (type of coach) an internal coach, external coach, manager as coach or a hybrid of coaches?

Experience of Company Sponsored Coaching: Coaching Provided

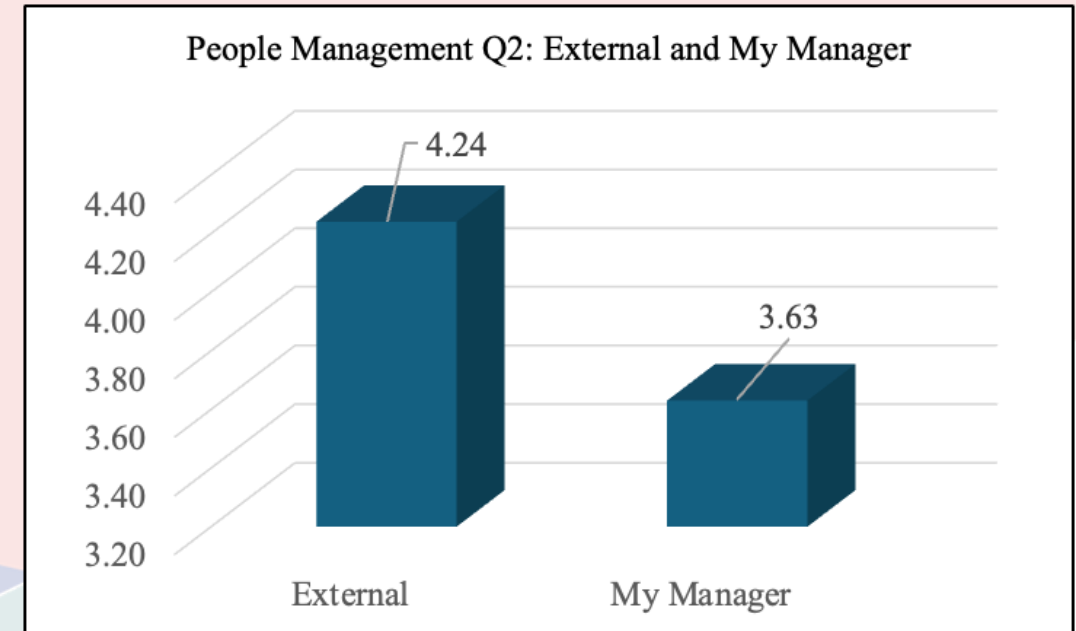
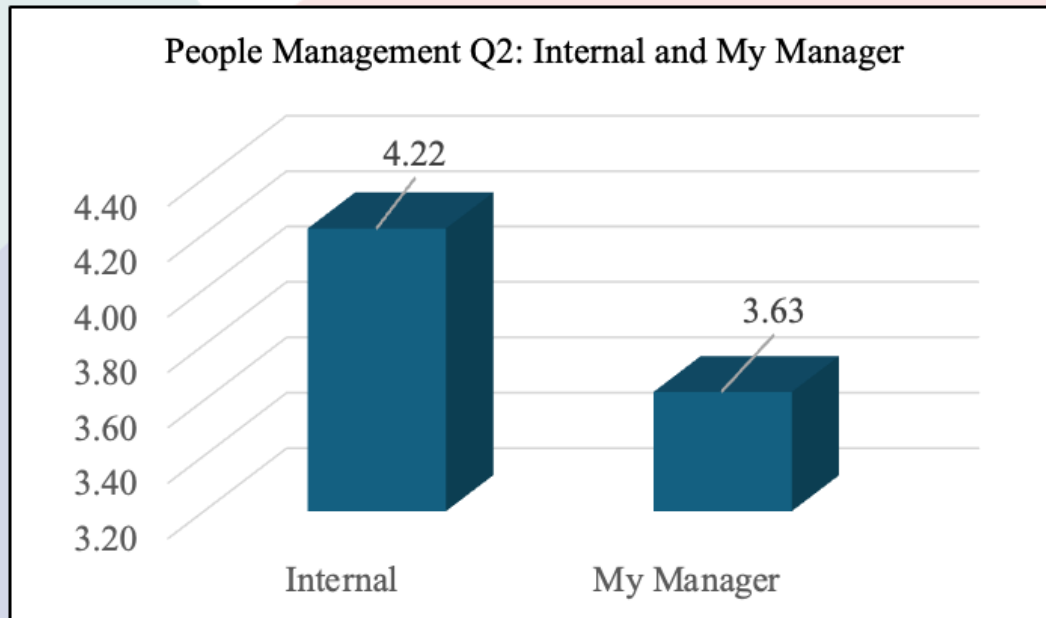
Variable	<i>n</i>		<i>% of Total</i>
Internal Coach	51		44.7
External Coach	26		22.8
My Manager	16		14
Hybrid	21		18.4

People Management

Relationships with
Managers

PEOPLE MANAGEMENT

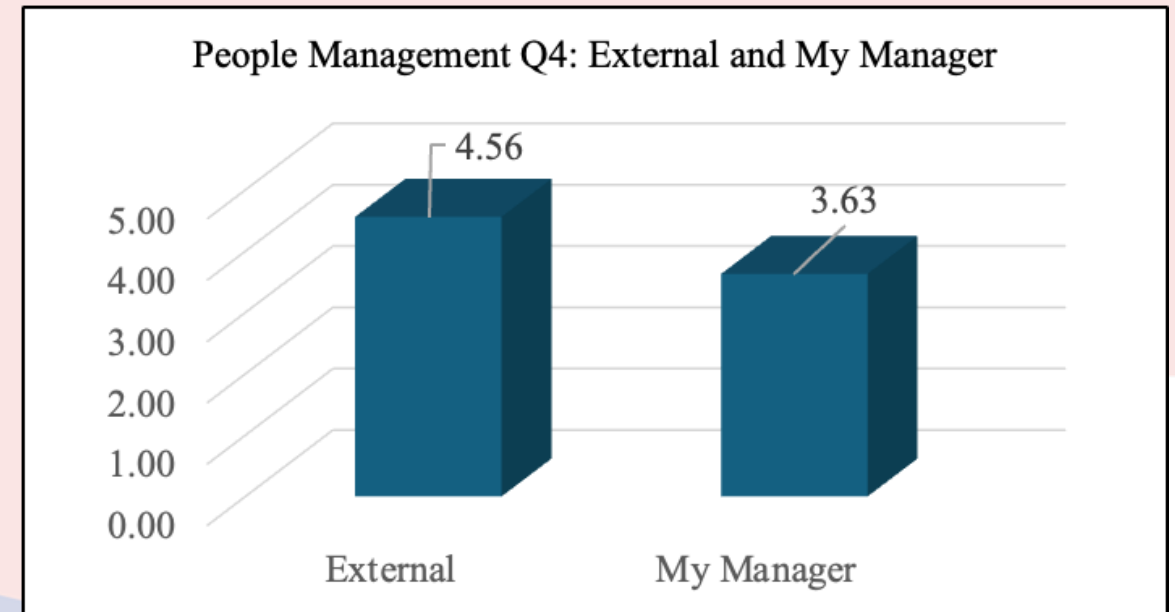
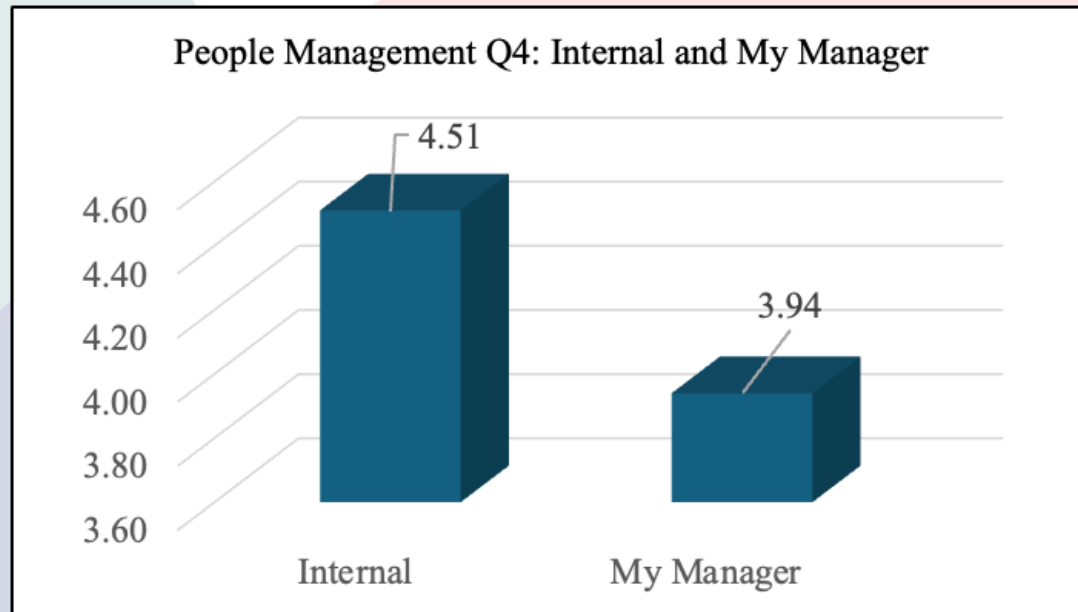
“Coaching produced better results with customers or internal stakeholders,” there was a significant difference between the “Internal Coach” and “My Manager” groups & the “External” and “My Manager” groups.



Qualitative Explanation: Internal coaches provided important contextual understanding but risked bias.

PEOPLE MANAGEMENT

“Coaching increased self-awareness and understanding of my strengths,” there was a significant difference between groups



Qualitative insight from focus groups:

External coaches were perceived as offering the most objectivity and growth.

Takeaways

- External coaches were perceived as offering the most objectivity and growth.
- Internal coaches provided important contextual understanding but risked bias.
- Managers as coaches led to mixed outcomes due to role conflict.
- Hybrid models (using both internal and external coaches) were highly valued when coordination was effective.

Research Question #3

RQ 3 How did executives perceive their organization's coaching practice staffing models impacted the execution of HR practice strategies?

5 Executive Participants

Industry

Healthcare (1)

Non-Profit (1)

Professional Services (1)

Retail (2)

Level

Director (3)

VP+ (2)

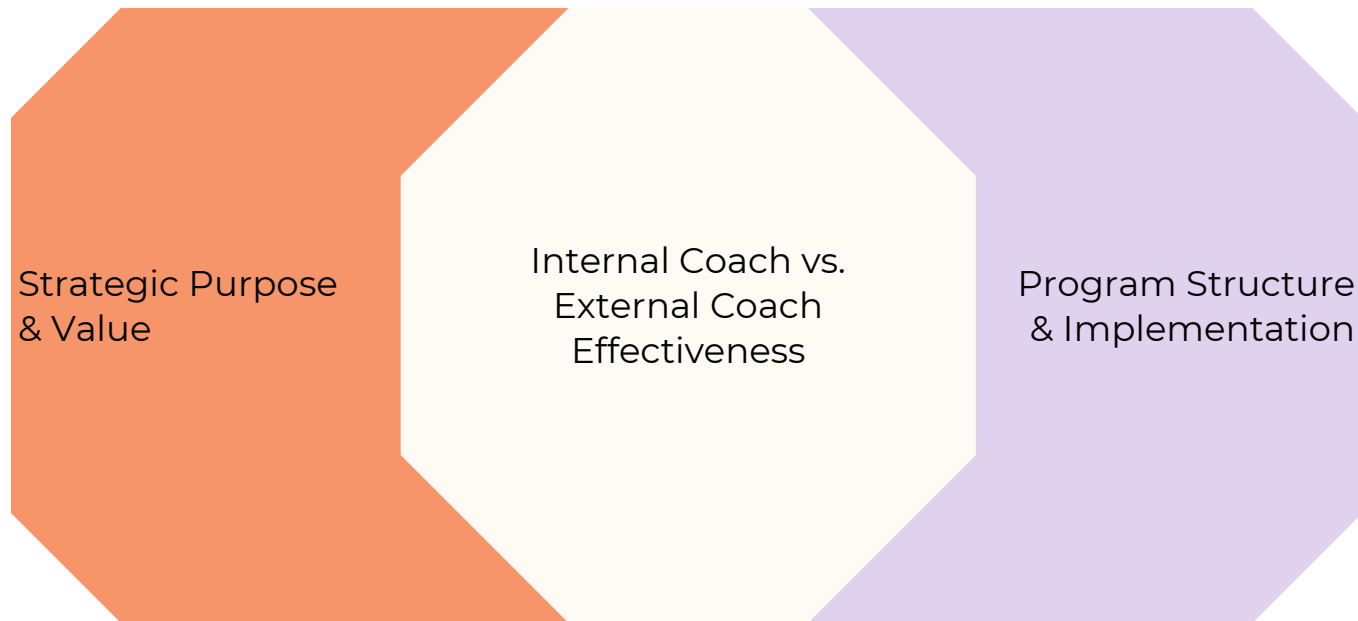
Received Internal Coaching

Yes (2)

No (3)

FINDINGS, RESEARCH QUESTION 3

Participant responses in 3 Categories



Participants have identified 3 categories that they believe impact on how the internal coaching practice impacts HR strategies.

However, executives still feel unclear on impact and value of internal coaching in their organizations.

Strategic Purpose
& Value

Internal Coach vs. External
Coach Effectiveness

Program Structure
& Implementation

Strategic Purpose & Value

Leadership Development and Career Planning and Development Practices were the most frequently cited HR practice strategies leveraged in their organizations.

Internal Coach vs. External Coach Effectiveness

The majority of executives were unsure which coaching staffing model (Internal, External, Manager as Coach, and Hybrid) was the most effective. But had a preference for internal and/or external coaches and not managers as coach.

Program Structure & Implementation

IC was more effective when it was integrated into broader development initiatives and programs

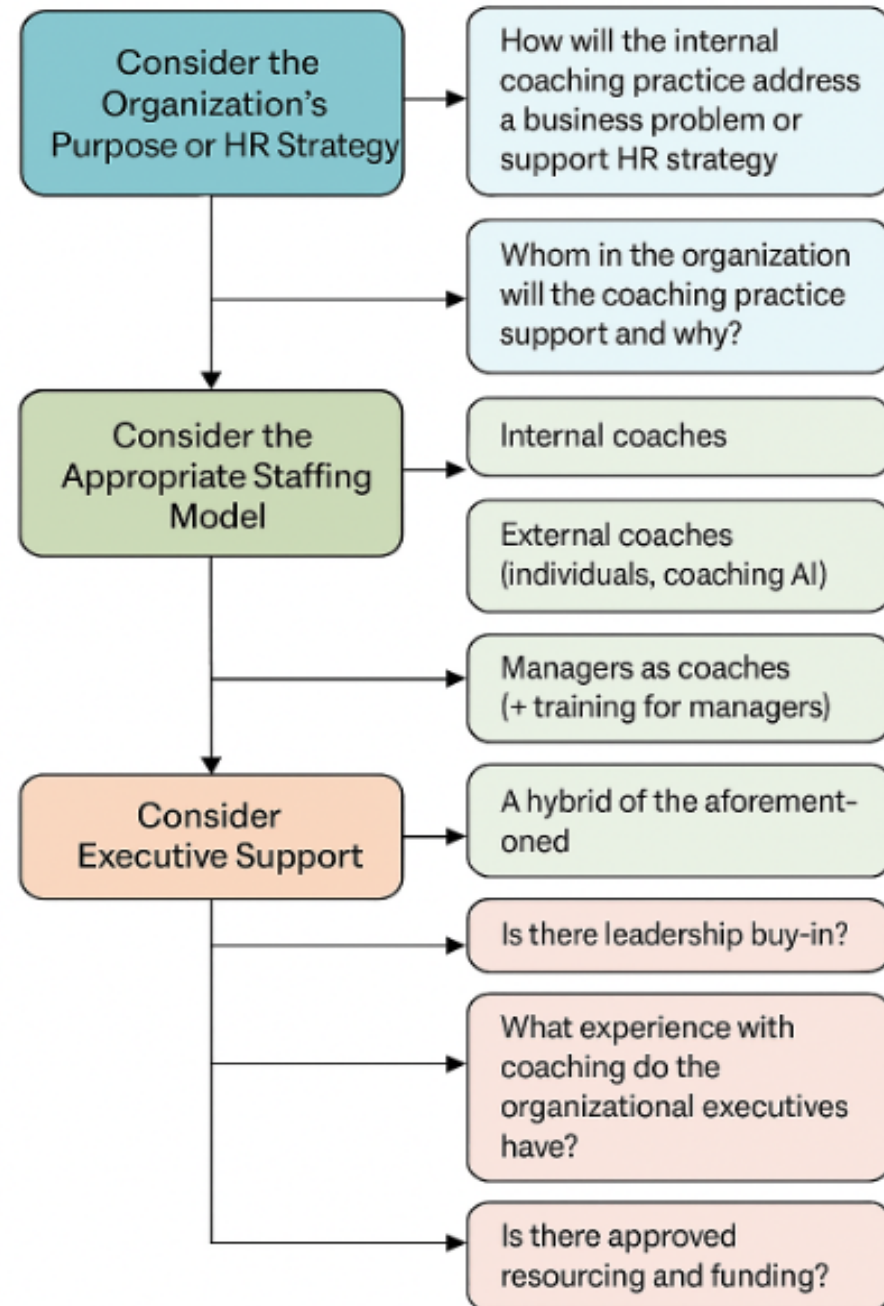
Participant executives also noted that they expected IC to support in enabling leaders to apply coaching outcomes in the day-to-day

IMPLICATIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

- The researcher recommends that future studies provide **longer timeframes for participants to engage in the research.** This approach could potentially enable a broader global reach, as more participants were excluded from participating once the research concluded.
- The researcher also found that a very **small percentage of internal coaches were fulfilling coaching as the majority (> 50%) of their role within the organization.** Only 32.6% of participants engaged in coaching as more than half of their role within their organization, while 62.5% spent time coaching at 50% or less.
- Furthermore, **AI coaching is a viable staffing model that should be considered for future initiatives involving HR strategy and coaching staffing models.** Future researchers should examine the implications of AI coaching on HR interventions within organizations, the experiences employees might encounter (comparing human coaches to AI coaches), and how leaders might perceive or leverage AI coaches for their organizations.

Conclusion

Establishing an IC practice takes **thoughtfulness and skill**. As organizations consider how coaching can be deployed, the researcher recommends employing an approach that aligns with the flow of the three research questions addressed in this study.



Internal Coaching Panel



Kneisha Sanders, PCC



Joan Cook, MCC



Abhijit Bhattacharya, PCC



Timmie Wang, PCC



International
Coaching
Federation

coachingfederation.org