Learning from Experience Through the Executive Coaching Competencies of Listening and Questioning: Reviewing Literature to Inform Practice and Future Research

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Abstract

We review selected literature in the areas of listening, questioning, and learning from experience to expand what is known about the use of listening and questioning as executive coaching competencies in this emergent field of professional practice; and importantly to inform a future research agenda. For each area of literature the origins, definitions, descriptions of key components (or taxonomies), and sampling of existing research are presented and discussed. The paper concludes with a discussion of insights combined with implications for human resource development (HRD) practice and future research.

Keywords: listening, questioning, learning from experience, executive coaching

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and Questioning: Reviewing Literature to Inform Practice and Future Research

The explosive growth in the field of coaching over the past decade has been driven, in part, by a need to provide assistance to leaders charged with responding to major shifts occurring in the world of work (Hamel, 2000; Pietersen, 2002). Coaching is, in essence, a form of supported learning from experience, often accelerated in pace and depth due to rapid change. Wan Veer & Ruthman (2008) provide support for the growth of the practice of coaching in organizations by placing it among the top five leadership development best practices (behind experience/field assignments, smart content, action learning, and simulations/pilots).

In response to this rapid growth, academic scholars have called for more empirical coaching-specific research (Bennett, 2006). For example, Feldman and Lankau (2005) note "there have been fewer than 20 studies that have investigated executive coaching with systematic qualitative and/or quantitative methods" (p. 830). The good news is that there is evidence of growing interest in coaching amongst various scholars. In an extensive annotated bibliography of the behavioral sciences literature Grant (2007) presents an analysis of 69 outcomes studies conducted since 1980 (of these only 8 are randomized controlled studies) while tracing the first published peer-reviewed paper on coaching to 1937.

Yet the growth of executive and organizational coaching *practice* seems to outpace available systemic, empirical *research* (e.g., Kilburg, 1996; Sherman & Freas, 2004). This paper is written to help ground core coaching competencies espoused as critical by various professional coaching associations—some providing accreditation to "coach training schools"—in theory and empirical research. Core coaching competencies are aggregates of capabilities that, when applied across the entire coaching process, create synergy, and add value to clients. This description

aligns with the concept of "self-as-instrument" found in the organizational development (OD) literature.

We focus in this paper on whether and how *listening*, *questioning*, and *learning from experience* might support the professional practice of executive coaches working in and for organizations. We draw on The Graduate School Alliance of Executive Coaching Programs' (2007) definition of executive and organizational coaching:

> *development process that builds a leader's capabilities to achieve professional and organizational goals*

This form of coaching focuses on leaders in a position to make a significant contribution to the mission and purpose of their organization; is conducted through one-on-one and group interactions; is driven by evidence and the inclusion of data from multiple perspectives; and is built on a solid foundation of mutual trust and respect. Table 1 lists competencies that various professional coaching associations suggest are critical to success with highlighted references to *listening, questioning,* and ways that we understand the frameworks to include *learning from experience* (Note: indicators for "learning from experience" [or LFE] found in various coach-specific competency models are identified in paraphrases).

Problem Statement, Purpose, Research Questions and Conceptual Framework

The problem this paper addresses grows out of a lack of a clearly documented theory and research to support the use of two commonly-espoused, core coaching competencies of listening and questioning. Claims are made about the centrality of *listening* and *questioning* as conversational competencies used by coaches to help clients learn from, and through their experience, in order to achieve desired results. Learning from experience occurs, primarily, by debriefing and discussing client experiences. There is also support in the literature for the

Table 1

Core Coaching Competencies

Association	Coaching Competencies
International Coach Federation (ICF)	Since the early 1990s ICF has developed, refined, and promoted the use of 11 core coaching competencies: 1. meeting ethical guidelines and profession standards 2. establishing the coaching agreement 3.establishing trust and intimacy with the client 4. coaching presence, 5. *active listening*, 6. *powerful questioning* 7. direct communication 8. *creating awareness* (LFE) 9. designing actions 10. planning and goal setting 11. managing progress and accountability.
Worldwide Association of Business Coaches (WABC)	Since 1997 WABC has worked to define the emerging practice of business coaching and distinguish it from other forms of coaching—WABC promotes an elaborate competency structure where coaching skills is one of the 3 major clusters—the skills include: working within established ethical guidelines and professional standards; agreeing on a clear and effective contract for the coaching relationship; establishing trust and respect; establishing rapport; *listening* to understand; *questioning* effectively; communicating clearly; *facilitating depth of understanding* (LFE); promoting action; focusing on goals; building resiliency; managing termination of coaching; maintaining and improving professional skills.
International Coaching Community (ICC)	ICC has identified 9 key competencies coaches need to demonstrate as part of the certification process including: 1. general (i.e., ethics, distinctions between process and content, and client choice) 2. knowledge (i.e., background/ history of coaching, distinctions between coaching and other helping practices such as counseling and therapy, and criteria for testing process and outcomes) 3. relationship 4. *listening* 5. self-management 6. *enquiry and questioning* 7. *feedback* (LFE) 8. goals, values and behaviors 9. design actions and task.
Graduate School Alliance of Executive Coaching Programs (GSAEC)	In 2007 GSAEC identified the following coaching skills as part of a broader, more comprehensive set of 20 academic standards targeted for university based coaching programs: 1. research and assessment skills 2. *questioning* 3. *listening* 4. *feedback* (LFE) 5. challenging and constructive confrontation 6. encouraging 7. process and facilitation skills and 8. education and change management skills.

Sources: http://www.coachfederation.org/research-education/icf-credentials/core-competencies/; http://www.wabccoaches.com/includes/popups/definition_and_competencies.html; http://www.internationalcoachingcommunity.com/default.asp?mode=page&ID=29; and http://www.gsaec.org/curriculum.html (retrieved 9/1/2009).

importance of inquiry (which includes question thinking and deep listening) to facilitate learning and take informed action (Boud, Cressey, & Docherty, 2006). *What evidence can be identified to support these claims?*

We are guided by two research questions focused on enhancing the skill-development of practitioners:

- *In what ways are the concepts of listening, questioning, and learning from experience defined in selected literature*?

- *In what ways might the available literature: (a) inform the practice of executive coaching* (with an emphasis on developing the core competencies of listening and questioning) *and (b) suggest implications for further competency research in the area of executive coaching in organizations?*

Figure 1 displays the conceptual framework used to integrate selected literature applied to the executive coaching process. Specifically, this framework presents our exploration of the role of conversational competencies of listening and questioning (along with others not addressed here) as enablers to help clients learn from their experience to achieve their intended outcomes. The conversational competencies are used by coaches, per this framework, to navigate the *beginning*, *middle* and *end* of the executive coaching process.

The process begins by clarifying the topic for the coaching engagement and/or sessions through inquiring about the client's goals (i.e., desired state), the current reality with relation to the goal, various options employed to date or potential future courses of action; and determining the way forward by identifying priorities, next steps, and supporting structures needed for goal attainment (Roberts & Jarrett, 2006, pp.14-17). Listening and questioning competencies help coaches to hear the client's story and focus on what is important in the beginning of the process, whereas in the middle, these competencies help expand client awareness by guiding clients through Kolb's (1984) learning cycle.

The learning cycle can be used to help clients make sense of various actions strategies employed between sessions (the middle of the process). And finally, at the end of the cycle in this conceptual framework, listening and questioning competencies help coaches make the learning from experience explicit by pulling out insights as to what did or did not work, how the

client leveraged supports and addressed barriers, and other lessons learned. The framework should enable insight about how coaches employ these capabilities to help clients monitor their progress toward goal attainment.
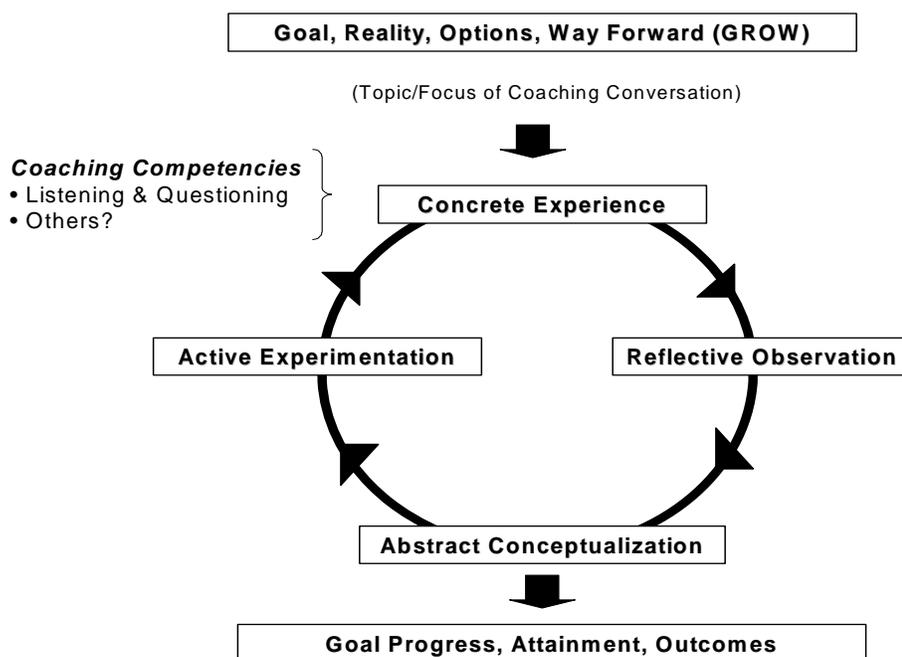
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┌─────────────────────────────────────────────────┐
│   Goal, Reality, Options, Way Forward (GROW)      │
└─────────────────────────────────────────────────┘

              (Topic/Focus of Coaching Conversation)

                            ▼

Coaching Competencies        ┌─────────────────────┐
• Listening & Questioning    │ Concrete Experience │
• Others?                    └─────────────────────┘

┌──────────────────────┐            ┌──────────────────────┐
│ Active Experimentation│            │ Reflective Observation│
└──────────────────────┘            └──────────────────────┘

              ┌────────────────────────────┐
              │  Abstract Conceptualization │
              └────────────────────────────┘

                            ▼

        ┌────────────────────────────────────────┐
        │   Goal Progress, Attainment, Outcomes    │
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Figure 1. Conceptual framework

Methodology

An integrative literature review was selected by the co-authors as the method of choice to ground future research on this topic in "what is known." A selective integrative literature review is a "form of research that reviews, critiques, and synthesizes representative literature on a topic in an integrated way such that new frameworks and perspectives on the topic are generated" (Torraco, 2005, p. 356). The co-authors conducted a preliminary review of empirical and research-based articles published in academic, refereed journals, as well as books authored by "key thinkers" based on searches in major citation indices (e.g.., EBSCO, ERIC, ProQuest, PsycARTICLES, PsycLIT, JSTOR, Sociological Abstracts, Business Source). Google Scholar

was used to identify sources in peer-review journals and the popular press (Pan, 2004). The analysis procedures for this review were largely inductive (Miles & Huberman, 1994).

Review of conceptual and empirical research on listening and questioning covered an approximate 35 year time span (1974-2009). Keywords and phrases included: *definitions of listening and questioning, organizational listening, listening competency, questioning skill, listening styles, levels of questions, taxonomy of listening, question hierarchies,* and *cross-cultural listening.* Only peer-reviewed articles pertinent to these areas guided the chronological review of the literature on listening and questioning in the paper. The primary sources of the learning from experience section of the literature review were two edited books by Boud et al. (1993, 2006), along with referenced work from Kolb et al. (2005a, b), and Yorks and Kasl (2002).

Selected Literature

We summarize our major findings by: (1) providing a brief synopsis of the various ways listening, questioning and learning from experience have been defined, (2) listing the major components of each, (3) making connections between these concepts including sample research related to each, and (4) outlining insights gained from this inquiry.

Listening and Questioning Competencies

In this section we provide a brief overview of how listening and questioning have been defined and conceptualized by a sample of authors in the extant literature as a basis for comparing these literatures, and informing these two proposed core coaching competencies. We then discuss commonalities between the conceptualizations of listening and questioning to emphasize how executive coaching can benefit from integrating these skills as complementary coaching competencies.

Sample literature and research on listening. Over the years, researchers have attempted to define listening and develop taxonomies of listening functions by exploring various components and types of listening. A chronological overview uncovers core themes that help explain the construct of listening as it has evolved. A review of the early literature indicates two schools of thought that conceptualize listening as either an *intrapersonal* or as a *relational* process. For instance, researchers belonging to the former (e.g., Goss, 1982; Wolvin & Coakley, 1988) define listening as a cognitive process that involves skills such as selectively perceiving, remembering, attending to, interpreting, understanding, assigning meaning, and analyzing what is heard. These researchers consider listening as isomorphic with cognitive skills, so that listening is viewed as an aspect of human intelligence. In this vein, an exploratory study by Bostrom and Waldhardt (1988) focused on the cognitive skill of retention and examined listening as primarily a function of short-term and long-term memory. However, this uni-dimensional cognitive view fails to explain times when intelligent individuals are poor listeners.

An alternative explanation is the relational perspective (Rhodes, 1993), that conceptualizes listening as a continual process involving both intrapersonal and interpersonal functions necessary to initiate and sustain two-way communication between the listener and the speaker. Researchers who advocated the relational perspective were particular about including the interpersonal skill of responding as an important function of listening (e.g., Brownell, 1986; Mills, 1974; Ridge, 1993; Steil, Barker, & Watson, 1983; Witkin & Trochim, 1997). Steil et al. (1983) noted that "the response stage of listening is especially crucial for judging the success of the listening act as a whole" (p. 22). Brownell (1986) included responding as the last and most important component of the HURIER model where the intrapersonal functions of hearing (e.g., focusing and attending to the message), understanding (e.g., obtaining a literal message

meaning), remembering (e.g., recalling the message for future action), interpreting (e.g., expressing sensitivity to non-verbal and contextual message aspects), and evaluating (e.g., logic applied to the assessment of the message value) precede the function of responding (e.g., choosing an appropriate response to what is heard).

In a content analysis of 50 definitions of listening, Glen (1989) identified *responding* to be a key term in 16 definitions. Responding behaviors can include asking questions to clarify the speaker's point of view, giving appropriate feedback commensurate with the speaker's purpose, responding in consonance with the speaker's mood, withholding response until the speaker has finished, and checking back with the speaker to understand meaning (Ridge, 1993). As noted by these researchers, the function of responding transforms listening from an intrapersonal phenomenon to an interactive transaction of communication.

This two-way interaction can be further classified into different types serving different functions of listening as described by the HURIER model proffered by Brownell (1986). For instance, *responsive listening* serves the function of responding, *critical listening* serves the function of evaluating, *discriminative listening* serves the function of interpreting, *composite listening* serves the function of remembering, *comprehensive listening* serves the function of understanding, and *therapeutic listening* serves the function of hearing and acting as a sounding board (Mills, 1974; Witkin & Trochim, 1997; Wolvin & Coakley, 1982). The interactive act of listening and its various functions are increasingly acknowledged as a critical part of organizational communication. Cooper (1997) describes the construct of organizational listening by developing a two-factor model: (1) *listening to show support* by showing involvement with verbal and non-verbal behaviors and by making the other person comfortable and undistracted

while communicating, and (2) *listening with accuracy* by discriminating facts from opinions, analyzing facts to understand messages, and remembering significant details from conversations.

Watson, Barker, and Weaver (1995) further developed a *listening style profile* (LSP) instrument to measure four primary listening styles that are prevalent in organizations: (1) *people-oriented listening style* characterized by showing interest in others and receiving information in terms of feelings and emotions about the speaker; (2) *action-oriented listening style* characterized by a preference for concise, error-free presentations; (3) *content-oriented listening style* characterized by a preference for detail and thoroughness in reviewing information; and (4) *time-oriented listening style* characterized by a preference for brief or hurried interactions and direct or nonverbal communication about the amount of time one is willing to invest into listening. More recent literature has explored cultural differences in perceptions and listening styles (Bentley, 2000; Kiewitz, Weaver, Brosius, & Wimann, 1997). For example, Imhof and Janusik (2006) reported findings that identify culture as an important factor in defining listening. Consideration of such cultural differences grows in importance in global, diverse workforces.

Sample literature and research on questioning. Three major fields have explored questioning as a research construct: (1) linguistics analysis that includes subfields of philosophy, logic, grammar, and linguistics; (2) education that views questioning as a teaching technique; and (3) practical pursuits that include opinion polling, cross-examination, personnel interviewing, and psychotherapy (Dillon, 1982). Although relative focus in these three fields is different, some factors commonly associated with questioning are thinking skills, learning outcomes and problem solving (Andre, 1979; Ashmore, Frazer, & Casey, 1979). Researchers have explored the level of thinking necessary for answering different questions and have rank

ordered questions according to the level of thought required. The most commonly cited hierarchy is Bloom's taxonomy: knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and evaluation (Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill, & Krathwohl, 1956). Later, other question hierarchies were suggested; however, the only two widely-agreed levels appear to be lower-order and higher-order questions.

This categorization of lower-order and higher-order questions is dependent on the context and is influenced by the objectives of the lesson in which questions are asked (Barden, 1995). This hierarchy appears to be applicable to coaching practices in organizational settings where context plays a crucial role and questioning becomes a social mode of communication (Heritage, 2002). Following this line of thought, Dillon (1990) defined the skill of questioning as an attribute of behavior in context. Depending on the context or circumstances, the cognitive level of questions might also vary. Shepardson and Pizzini (1991) have defined three such cognitive levels of questions: (1) input-level questions that require recalling information; (2) processing-level questions that require drawing relationships among data that have been recalled; and (3) output-level questions that require going beyond the data in new ways to hypothesize, speculate, generalize, create, and evaluate a problem.

Summary of insights: Integrating the literature on listening and questioning. This review revealed commonalities between the skills of listening and questioning. Both are context dependent. Both require recalling or remembering information, drawing connections or interpreting the information, and evaluating a situation that can represent a problem, challenge and/or opportunity (or content). Listening and questioning can be viewed as complementary functions enacted by the same individual who uses questioning skills to respond to the speaker and uses listening skills to understand the speaker's answer. A guided dialogue framework from

the field of facilitation can be used to integrate components found in our review of listening and

questioning into one process that captures both the inner world (i.e., mind and spirit) and outer

world (i.e., action and outcomes) of individuals, groups, and larger systems (Watts, Miller, &

Kloepfer, 1999). This approach has its origins in the "Art Form Method" developed by the

Ecumenical Institute in the 1950s. A popular version of this discussion method is referred as

ORID (i.e., Objective, Reflective, Interpretive, and Decisional) taught by the Institute of Cultural

Affairs (ICA) as part of their Technologies and Participation (ToP) method (Spencer, 1989).

Proponents of this approach believe it works because "it is a natural human process"

bringing forth rational and emotional responses embedded in the lived experiences of people"

(Watt et al., 1999, p. 23). It also aligns with various components described in the learning from

experience literature outlined in the next section. The four levels of the guided dialogue process

include:

(1) *Objective Data*, i.e., using the senses to gather the "facts" of a given situation based on relatively directly observable data from multiple perspectives for the purpose of creating a shared pool of information—externally focused;

(2) *Reflective Data*, i.e., eliciting the imagination and emotional responses of people to surface how each is experiencing the "external data"—internally focused and inclusive of reactions, feelings and associations;

(3) *Interpretative Data*, i.e., catalyzing the sharing of lived experiences through the identification of patterns, themes, and lessons learned from the experience—meaning making focused to highlight explore the significance and/or impact of the situation; and

(4) *Decisional Data*, i.e., pulling insights gained to generate options, examine potential benefits and consequences, determine priorities and make decisions—action focused and includes experimentation, pilots and full implementation.

Understanding these four levels of guided dialogue positions listening and questioning as

"two sides of the same coin," both essential to effectively combining inquiry (i.e., creating a

shared pool of knowledge) with advocacy (i.e., presenting a point-of-view). One can

intentionally use questioning skills to surface objective, reflective, interpretative and/or

decisional data from others, yet others may provide data at various levels of the process that might not always align with the intentions of the inquirer. In such cases, the inquirer requires focused and attentive listening skills to discern the meaning of the data and achieve alignment. Our review of select listening and questioning literature makes clear that effective organizational communication, including executive coaching, requires an integrated process of listening and questioning and awareness of cross-cultural influences on effective use of skills in various organizational contexts.

<div align="center">**Learning from Experience (LFE)**</div>

In this section we briefly summarize how *learning from experience* has been defined and conceptualized by a sample of authors and present various experiential learning models. We then make connections to the conversational competencies of listening and questioning in the context of helping leaders learn from their experience to inform future action.

LFE—Definitions and Key Concepts

Daudelin (2000) cites research conducted by the Center for Creative Leadership (CCL) based on 600 descriptions of the experiences that 191 successful executives perceived as having a lasting developmental difference as evidence of the criticality of experience as a major resource for learning. Specifically, the researchers organized these experiences into 16 types of critical events that seem to be important in the attainment of managerial competencies.

Boud, Cohen, and Walker (1993) believe it important for authors to "acknowledge the significant experiences which had led them to their present positions" (p. 3). They do so by outlining five propositions highlighting what these authors regard as most significant in understanding the phenomenon of learning from experience:

- *Proposition 1:* Experience is the foundation of, and the stimulus for, learning (i.e., past, present and anticipated);

- *Proposition 2:* Learners actively construct their experience (i.e., mind-set, mental models and/or worldview)
- *Proposition 3:* Learning is a holistic process (i.e., affective, cognitive, and behavioral);
- *Proposition 4:* Learning is socially and culturally constructed; and
- *Proposition 5:* Learning is influenced by the socio-emotional context in which it occurs (pp. 8-17).

How do these propositions help us to understand ways that this learning theory informs the practice of listening and questioning in executive coaching?

The first proposition suggests that questioning competencies could serve as a vital vehicle for surfacing and exploring the relevance of past and present experiences to client intentions. Listening competencies might help coaches work with clients to make connections to personal history and how it influences the way the present and future are viewed. Reflection plays a key role in drawing out meaning by recapturing, noticing, and reevaluating experiences.

The second proposition suggests that listening and questioning competencies can help to unearth and work with client's mental models, or the frames through which they make sense of the world as a prerequisite for deep learning and sustainable change, two common goals of executive coaching engagements. The coach should work to be clear about the client's initial way of framing a given situation, and through the use of listening and questioning competencies, help clients, where appropriate, to reframe situations in ways that open up more expansive possibilities for themselves and others.

The third proposition places an emphasis on the need to ask questions and listen in a holistic manner that meets the client as a "whole person" as thoughts, feelings and behavioral tendencies that must be considered as resources for helping clients achieve the results they truly desire.

Proposition four outlines the need to place the client and the situation in a broader, social and cultural context. Questioning to surface—and listening to identify—taken-for-granted assumptions that the client has acquired through socialization can present an opening to attend to expectations and conceptual baggage that may be getting in the way of real progress toward objectives.

Finally, proposition five highlights the relational nature of the coaching engagement as a process of helping clients learn from and through experience in both an social and emotional context. Executive coaches can use listening and questioning to examine past, present and/or anticipated experiences; the role of others as supportive (i.e., learning resources); and/or the need to address barriers that potential impact goal attainment.

Targeted questioning combined with powerful listening responses (e.g., paraphrasing, confirming, and encouraging) can help clients name expectations, created in the past, and determine those that are in service of their coaching goals vs. those that, perhaps unintentionally, act as barriers to progress. Part of the work here is to use coaching competencies to overcome negative influences and thus help people act and think differently than in the past. Coaches may also need to challenge clients by confronting sources of threat or lack of confidence often antithetical to new initiatives.

Experiential learning theory (ELT) draws on the work of prominent twentieth century scholars who gave experience a central role in their theories of human learning and development-notably John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, Jean Piaget, William James, Carl Jung, Paulo Freire, Carl Rogers, and others, to develop a holistic model of the experiential learning process and a multi-linear model of adult development (Kolb & Kolb, 2005b). ELT proposes a constructivist theory of learning whereby social knowledge is created and recreated in the personal knowledge of the

learner. This stands in contrast to the "transmission" model on which much current educational practice is based, where pre-existing fixed ideas are transmitted to the learner." Table 2 summarizes the various ways the idea of learning from experience has been conceptualized and defined in selected literature.

LFE—Components and Models

The descriptions in Table 3 help to identify components authors have identified as essential for learning from experience to occur. Here we discuss some of these components and models. First, Kolb and Kolb (2005a) posit that "learning is the major determinant of human development and that how individuals learn shapes the course of their personal development" (p. 2). Previous research (Kolb, 1984) has shown that learning styles are influenced by personality type, educational specialization, career choice, and current job role and tasks. The ELT developmental model (Kolb, 1984) defines three stages: (1) acquisition (from birth to adolescence, where basic abilities and cognitive structures develop); (2) specialization (from formal schooling through the early work and personal experiences of adulthood, where social, educational, and organizational socialization forces shape the development of a particular, specialized learning style); and (3) integration (from mid-career and later in life, where non-dominant modes of learning are expressed in work and personal life).

Ellstrom (2006), in discussing evidence in support of the significance of informal learning in the workplace, presents a theory of "four levels of action" that may occur before, during, or even after an experience. They include: (1) *skill-based action* (i.e., routinized, performed without much conscious attention or control), what Ellstrom calls Level I; (2) *rule-based action* (i.e., learning to interpretation and application of rules and procedures), or Level II;

Table 2

Experiential Learning/Learning from Experience—Definitions and Key Concepts

Source	Description
Boud, Cohen, & Walker (1993)	*Experience* "as a verb, it is either a particular instance or a process of observing, undergoing or encountering… as a noun, it is all that is known, the knowledge or practical wisdom gained from the observing, undergoing or encountering… includes judgment, thought and connectedness with experience—it is not isolated sensing" pp. 6-7.
	Learning "involves much more than an interaction with an extant body of knowledge… learning shapes and helps create our lives—who we are, what we do… learning requires interaction, either directly or symbolically, with elements outside the learner" (pp. 1-3).
Boud, Cressey & Docherty (2006)	*Sustainable Development* for "organizations demands that management balance the needs and ambitions of key stakeholders…effective learning at the individual, group and organizational levels is achieved not through conventional programs but through acknowledging the learning potential of work and integrating learning activities in the workplace" (p. 4).
	Productive Reflection "brings changes in work practice to enhanced productivity together with changes to enhance personal engagement and meaning in work" (p. 5)… is "contextualized and embedded in everyday work within organizations" (p. 18).
Daudelin (2000)	"The word *'experience'* derives from the Latin word experiential, meaning trial, proof, or experiment. Thus challenging work experiences may be described as *trial-and-error experiments that produce learning*… reflection [on experience] as a way of learning has ancient roots…" Socrates focused his discovery by asking questions of others (p. 298).
	"Reflection is a highly personal cognitive process" where a person "takes an experience from the outside world, brings it inside the mind, turns it over, makes connections to other experiences, and filters it through personal biases," or mental models (p. 301).
Kolb & Kolb (2005a)	*Experiential Learning Theory* (**ELT**): "defines learning as the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience. Knowledge results from the combination of grasping and transforming experience" (p. 2 – Kolb 1984: 41).
Yorks & Kasl (2002)	*Pragmatism and Learning from Experience* (or learning as a noun): frames experience as a "resource that can be catalogued, objectified, and reflected on as indicated in the writing of Dewey, James, Caffarella, Merriam, Jarvis, Meziow and others" p. 180
	A Phenomenological Perspective of Learning from Experience (or learning as a verb): building on the work of Peter Heron (1992) this perspective "treats experience as a process, an encounter with the world… a felt encounter… perceptual… an integrated theory of the human psyche" p. 182.

Table 3

Experiential Learning/Learning from Experience—Components and Models

Source	Description
Boud, Cohen, & Walker (1993)	Boud & Walker present a 3-phase model of ***reflective processes in learning from experience***: (1) preparation (with a focus on the learner, milieu—or context, and relevant skills/strategies), (2) experience (i.e., noticing and intervening, and (3) return to experience (i.e., attending to feelings and the reevaluation of the experience in light of what has happened… integrating new experiences with older ones, testing it's validity, and making the experience one's own), pp. 73-85.
Boud, Cressey & Docherty (2006)	***Key Elements of Productive Reflection*** – the authors present six factors that differentiate this form of learning from earlier conceptions of learning (pp. 19-22): 1. An organizational rather than an individual intent; 2. reflection is necessarily contextualized within work, it connects learning and work; 3. it involves multiple stakeholders and connects players; 4. it has a generative rather than instrumental focus; 5. it has a developmental character; and 6. reflection is an open, unpredictable process; it is dynamic and changes over time.
Daudelin (2000)	***Four Distinct Stages of Reflection:*** (1) articulation of a problem, (2) analysis of that problem, challenge or opportunity, (3) formulation and testing of a tentative theory to explain the situation, and (4) action that includes deciding whether and/or how to act (i.e., learning is the creation of meaning from past or current events that serve as a guide for future behavior, pp. 302-303).
Kolb & Kolb (2005a, b)	***Experiential learning*** "is the process of constructing knowledge that involves a creative tension among the four learning modes: (1) *Concrete Experience* [i.e., here-and-now focused, sensing—pragmatists]; (2) *Reflective Observation* [i.e., thinking about the experience to understand how "things work"—observer]; (3) *Abstract Conceptualization* [i.e., examining components, patterns, and themes—theorists]; and (4) *Active Experimentation* [i.e., trying new insights and/or practices out – determining what works—activist] that is responsive to contextual demands" (p. 2).
Yorks & Kasl (2002)	Heron's conceptualization of learning from experience integrates the ideas of four "modes of psyche" with four "ways of knowing" (1992, p. 174)—(A) the human psyche as ***four primary modes of functioning***: (1) *affective* functioning (including feeling and emotion), (2) *imaginal* (intuition and imagery), (3) *conceptual* (reflection and discrimination), and (4) *practical* (intention and action)" p. 182 & (B) ***four ways of knowing*** including: (1) *experiential knowing* (building on the affective and imaginal functions of the psyche), (2) *presentational knowing* (the imaginal and conceptual functions), (3) *propositional knowing* (conceptual and practical), and (4) *practical knowing* (practical and affective)" pp. 182-184.

(3) *knowledge-based action* (i.e., learning occurring as a result of the analysis of tasks and goals, previous experiences, and contextual conditions—can include both factual knowledge and more general theoretical and explanatory forms of knowledge), or Level III; and (4) *reflective action* (i.e., the type of action generally triggered when novel or unfamiliar situations are encountered, in which procedural, existing knowledge is either unavailable or assessed as ineffective), or Level IV (pp. 45-48). Ellstrom notes that the above "typology is based on theory and research within the field of cognitive action theory (Ibid., p. 45)." Building on these ideas, Ellstrom describes an adaptive learning process that moves from a reflective or knowledge-based level of action to those that are more indicative of experience-based, implicit knowledge (Ibid., p. 48).

Cressey (2006) describes learning as a collective, reflective engagement process that entails the construction of four different forms of learning: (1) *identity* (or learning as becoming); (2) *meaning* (or learning as experience); (3) *community* (or learning as belonging); and (4) *practice* (or learning as doing). An important contribution of Cressey's work is his emphasis on framing learning from experience at the collective level of analysis in contrast to the more common individualistic perspective found in much of the research.

Argyris, Putnam, & Smith (1985) present what Argyris calls an action science tool to guide reflection, the ladder of inference. Moving up the ladder, at the base of the ladder is the directly observable data (i.e., what we observe), interpretations made from the data (2nd rung), attributions based on interpretations (3rd rung), and generations that guide decision making and actions (4th rung), all occurring in seconds. Taken together, Argyris', Ellstrom's, and Cressey's (2006) work focus on the importance and nature of what Kolb (2000a) calls the reflective observation stage of the learning cycle (a stage that has been critiqued, i.e., in Boud, 2006).

Daudelin's (2000) research explored how three forms of reflection (i.e., solitary reflection, reflection with a helper and/or with a small group) were used in helping managers enhance the learning often embedded in challenging experiences based on a study of 48 managers representing a range of functional roles in a Fortune 500 Corporation. This work resulted in the four stages of reflection that promote learning from experience outlined in Table 3. Participants were randomly divided into four groups. Each group participated in a one-hour, video-taped reflection session (i.e., the individual group, helper group/coached, peer groups with 3 or 4 study participants, and a control group of managing who did not participant in a reflection session). Participants then completed a questionnaire to record insights or lessons and indicate implications for future action. The focus of the analysis was on the interaction between the independent variable (i.e., type of reflection) and the dependent variable (i.e., amount of learning measured by number of lessons or insights reported by treatment group).

A notable finding was the effectiveness of various types of questioning at different stages. Specifically, Daudelin (2000) found that "what" questions were most useful during the "articulation" stage of the reflective process contributing to a thorough understanding of the problem to be solved and situation to be addressed. In the "analysis" stage, questions that take the form of "why" were most helpful to people in formulating the reasoning behind a given experience. During the "hypothesis generation" stage, "how" questions allowed individuals to clarify or make explicit their personal theories about the inner workings of the problem, challenge or opportunity, and ways to address the situation. And finally, "what" type questions were most useful during the "action" stage of the process to confirm or reframe intentions.

Daudelin (2000) reported a statistically significant greater number of "learnings" for both the individual and the helper groups (i.e., those that worked with a coach) compared to the

control group, but not the peer groups. The researcher noted three potential explanations for the reported difference: (1) peers tended to focus on similarities among experiences giving less emphasis to what was unique to themselves; (2) providing time for each person to share experiences resulted in less detailed probing; and (3) the members of the peer groups were less likely to follow the instructions to take notes and use the reflection questions in their discussion. These findings reinforce the value of using formal reflective tools at each stage of the process.

Synthesis of Insights: Integrating the Literature on Learning from Experience with the Literature on Listening and Questioning

The above discussion suggests links between the literature of listening and questioning, the ORID guided dialogue process, and Kolb's (1984) experiential learning stages: concrete experience aligns with the generation of objective forms of data; reflective observation with more reflective, internally-generated forms of data; abstract conceptualization aligns with interpretative data; active experimentation aligns with decisional data. Further, we see connections between this integration and Jackson's (1991) work on the science of human performance, which states that understanding any form of human performance, and related interactions, is a function of the *context* (i.e., a structuralism and constructivism philosophical orientation—or the "where, when, who and why" of a situation), *content* (i.e., phenomenology—or the "what"), and *conduct* (i.e., behaviorism—or the "how")—each posing an essential question.

Linked to learning from experience, objective data and reflective data are two dimensions of a given *context* (both external and internal to an individual, group, and/or organization (i.e., the self exists in relationships and the self experiences the relationships). Interpretative data highlight the essential meaning people make of the experience including critical values, beliefs

and principles (in short what really matters or *content* (i.e., the self attaches meaning to the context). And lastly decisional data align with *conduct* (i.e., the self connects relations, experiences, interpretations, and decisions to transcendent to take informed action).

Conclusions, Contribution to HRD Practice and Implications for Further Research

In this review we sought to examine selected literature to help ground two core coaching competencies espoused as critical by various professional coaching associations which guide to practice of executive coaching in organizations. As a result of this work we developed some preliminary conclusions to inform the practice of training executive coaches to work in and for organizations:

- There is both theoretical support and empirical support (i.e., definitions, taxonomies, types, levels and types) for the inclusion of listening and questioning as core coaching competencies in coach preparation programs;

- We were able to document important connections between the listening and questioning literature and learning from experience (i.e., listening and questioning skills as enablers to question thinking, insight, and helping clients take informed action);

- Listening and questioning skills are both interactive and relational in ways that, taken together in an integrative way, provide executive coaches with a foundation for using dialogue to help their clients construct productive responses to the changing demands of the world of work (including a cultural dimension); and,

- The ORID framework serves as a useful integrating heuristic for informing coaching and dialogue sessions in that it parallels Kolbs' (1984) experiential learning cycle, Argryis et al.'s (1985) ladder of inference stages to test assumptions, and Jackson's (1991) 3C's

(context, content, and conduct) used to guide the coaching process (Maltbia & Marsick,

2009).

These all appear to be areas that have been addressed separately in existing HRD literature. Building on the above noted contributions to HRD, future research is suggested:

- To devise a more complete picture of how different listening styles might influence the effectiveness of dialogue in organizational coaching, Watson, Barker, and Weaver's (1995) listening style profile (LSP) can be included in the battery of participant assessment in coach preparation programs. Prior knowledge about participants' dominant listening styles will help HRD professionals to effectively address the development of listening as a core coaching competency. Moreover, as listening and questioning can be considered as complementary functions, information about an individual's preference towards a particular listening style as indicated by the LSP might guide an HRD professional to understand what kind of questions that individual might ask the client to elicit further information that is relevant.

- To explore the data collected through instruments such as Learning Style Inventory (LSI), Neethling Brain Inventory (NBI-thinking style), and Listening Style Profile (LSP) to analyze the potential relationships (or interactions) among these constructs (i.e., learning from experience, listening and questioning) by creating a profile for each program participant in coach preparation programs, given our establishment of important connections between the listening, questioning competencies and learning from experience in this paper.

- To expand understanding of the ORID framework by integrating a number of the listening and questioning taxonomies presented in this review using content analysis procedures (i.e., integrated into the 7 themes that emerged from our review including:

attending, being a sounding board, understanding, remembering, interpreting, evaluating and *responding*); and

- To collect and examine data about the coach's and the client's observable learning, thinking, and listening styles at the start, during, and at the end of coach preparation programs through video recordings of the conversations between a coach and the client, based on the listening and questioning taxonomies. This information, organized in observation guides according to the different listening and questioning taxonomies, can guide HRD professionals to tailor coaching interventions in organizations.

In addition to these areas for further inquiry for general HRD practices in organizational coaching, another aim for conducting this literature review was to inform our plans to establish an on-going research agenda designed to learn from the growing data collected during the first two years of implementing a graduate-level coach certification program. The insights obtained from the synthesis of listening, questioning and learning from experience literature in this paper will certainly make the foundation of the program stronger, as well as, inform the broader academic standards work underway at the Graduate School Alliance for Executive Coaching Programs.

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