

THE PERCEIVED APPLICABILITY OF COACHING SKILLS AMONG HUMAN RESOURCE BUSINESS PARTNERS OF SOUTH AFRICAN STATE-OWNED ENTITIES

Thato Mmaditla¹, Elona N. Ndlovu-Hlatshwayo^{2*}

¹Wits Business School, University of Witwatersrand, South Africa

²Tshwane University of Technology, Pretoria, South Africa

e-mails: ¹thatommaditla@gmail.com; ²hlatshwayoe@tut.ac.za

Received November 4, 2022; accepted January 20, 2023; published January 21, 2023.

ABSTRACT

Objective: HRBPs working in the State-owned entity (SOE) industry face a few challenges that inhibit them from being true partners to senior management teams. This research concentrated on whether coaching skills could be included in the Human Resource Business Partner (HRBP) competency model and assist HRBPs in their engagement with senior managers. **Research Design & Methods:** A qualitative research design was selected to gain insights from the perspectives of HRBPs employed in SOEs in Gauteng, South Africa. All participants had over two years of relevant HRBP experience and participated in a semi-structured interview to solicit their perspectives. The data was consequently analysed using thematic analysis. **Findings:** The key findings are that the SOE industry is complex to navigate due to the high levels of red tape and capacity constraints. The benefits of coaching, which include enhanced levels of organisational performance and leadership self-awareness, will be achieved in the engagement between HRBPs and senior managers. Furthermore, additional training of all HRBPs on the proposed coaching skills was supported as it was found to be a probable solution to re-position HRBPs as strategic business partners. **Contribution & Value Added:** This paper positions coaching as a central skill for HRBPs, specifically in the SOE environment in South Africa, by combining two leading competency frameworks, the Ulrich and GSAEC competency frameworks. Although HR is an established field, coaching is relatively emerging with limited frameworks for the profession. This paper addresses the need for guiding frameworks where the two professions intersect.

Keywords: business partner; coaching; coaching skills; competency model; developing managers; human resource.

JEL codes: M12, J45, J24, J20

Article type: research paper

INTRODUCTION

The study is conducted within the context of South African State-Owned Entities in the Gauteng, South Africa, area. According to Schutte (2019), the State-Owned Entities industry is seeing an increase in the popularity of coaching. The National Treasury website, which is a South African public sector platform where all service provider tenders are advertised, often has coaching tenders which are advertised to the public (Sugudhav-Sewpersadh & Mubangizi, 2019). This points to the increasing demand for coaching support within State-Owned Entities as a new additional intervention delivered by HRBPs. Naidoo (2020) claims that the public sector, including State-Owned Entities, continues to encounter governance lapses and financial sustainability constraints, thereby presenting new

challenges around managing human capital and leadership development. This view is shared by Jacobson & Sowa (2015), who found that other challenges faced by the public sector include limited financial resources, escalating working capital costs and growing demands for services which put pressure on State-Owned Entities to rethink how they prioritise their finances and human capital. These challenges have resulted in poor service delivery, contributing to the country's declining state Todes & Houghton (2021) and Bolden et al. (2020).

The Human Resource Business Partner role has not been traditionally positioned as an internal support role and introducing coaching skills is a new phenomenon. The main problem is that very little coaching theory exists that has been developed, based on the perspectives of Human Resource professionals and the coaching skills required in positioning them as effective partners to senior managers. The theoretical background in Human Resource Competencies does however point to the impact that Human Resource Business Partners have in helping senior managers formulate and implement strategy (Claudia, 2021; Ulrich & Dulebohn, 2015).

Researchers have long contributed to the Human Resource profession by recommending a multitude of ways the profession can transition into adding more value and being a source of competitive value. Nonetheless, recent findings by Sakka et al. (2022) point to a need for more skills among Human Resource professionals that address the volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous business landscape. This view was supported by earlier findings by Laine et al. (2017), who concluded that there is a pressing need for new skills to be introduced to enable Human Resource professionals to be effective. These researchers supported further research in this area of study. Despite the research highlighted above, there remains a practical knowledge gap in addressing how coaching can be added as a skill in the HRBP framework (Miles, 2017).

To this end, this research seeks to contribute to the research gap on how applicable coaching skills are in this specific environment that has been riddled with leadership crises for recent years. These views can be deduced from these views that strong leadership is required in State Owned-Entities; moreover, coaching skills can reform the value that Human Resource business partners bring to organisations (Heathfield, 2019). Thus, it is plausible that coaching skills can be insourced or acquired by Human Resource Business Partners to support senior managers in navigating a difficult SOE landscape. With this context, this study aims to illuminate Human Resource Business Partners' perceptions of coaching benefits and coaching skills. Therefore, the research objectives explore the perceived benefits of the application of coaching skills by HRBPs in their engagement with senior managers and the perceptions of HRBPs on including coaching as a skill in their engagement with senior management.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Benefits of Coaching Skills for HRBPs

Many scholars and studies have recommended that a good relationship is important for the success of the process of coaching (Osatuke et al., 2017; Pandolfi, 2020). The coach and coachee are important ingredients in sustaining the relationship (Ennis et al., 2015). This view is supported by Schaap & Dippenaar (2017) and Scholl et al. (2022) who pose that the coaching relationship is a powerful driver for change. Myriad studies have concluded that the coach–coachee relationship is mediating between the coaching received and the development of the coachees' self-efficacy (Baldwin & Cherry, 2019). Findings also indicate four crucial connections to the coach–coachee relationship: the self-efficacy of the coach about facilitating growth and outcomes, the motivation of the coachee to be able to transfer his or her perception of the support received from the coach, including the number of coaching sessions received during the coaching process (Baron & Morin, 2010). Based on that, the coach–coachee relationship can be described as a partnership in which both sides work together to reach an agreed-upon objective (Heathfield, 2019). The coach's experience and skillsets will enable and empower the coaching process (Weiss, 2003). van Coller-Peter & Manzini (2020) set out five crucial steps for creating and enhancing a more effective and productive coaching relationship: commitment, time, coachability, chemistry and trust. Gyllensten & Palmer (2007) argue that transparency and trust

form an important relationship between the coachee and the coach. Furthermore, Gan et al. (2021) posit that coaching skills are critical for organisational and leadership development.

The Inclusion of Coaching Skills in HRBP Competencies

Coaching Skills

For this research, the most relevant definition of coaching is by Baldwin & Cherry (2019), who define coaching as a development-focused intervention utilising varying tactics to achieve the desired goals. These tactics can include various coaching competencies the coach may adopt that can be borrowed from GSAEC and ICF. Some frameworks support the coaching field; amongst these is the Graduate School Alliance for Executive Coaching (GSAEC), which has established the curriculum for graduate schools that offer to coach to standardise executive and coaching training (Ennis et al., 2015). A notable coaching body famous for standardising coaching competencies is the International Coaching Federation (ICF), a professional coaching body that guides the coaching competencies that support a competent coach. The coaching engagement extends beyond the relationship between the coach and coachee and includes the sponsoring organisation (Ennis et al., 2015; Stokes & Jolly, 2010; van Collier-Peter & Burger, 2019). Stokes & Jolly (2010) pose that the biggest impact of coaching is felt by leaders with the biggest influence and span of control within their organisations. Stokes & Jolly (2010) and Ballesteros-Sánchez et al. (2019) further provide that coaching was developed to support leadership development and drive the organisation's success. This study focuses on both GSAEC and ICF competencies.

The Graduate School Alliance for Executive Coaching (GSAEC) Competencies

The rise in coaching programme offerings by institutions of higher learning has prompted the introduction of the Graduate School for Executive Coaching (GSAEC) competencies which have been created to align and standardise the curriculum of graduate schools that offer to coach. The academic standard which is the most relevant for this study is Standard 8.0, which outlines the core competencies and behaviours that make a successful coach (GSAEC, 2014). The Graduate School Alliance for Executive Coaching (GSAEC) competencies include co-creating the coaching relationship through relationship building and coaching presence, making meaning with others by listening and questioning skills, helping others succeed by reframing the mindset and contributing to a way that encourages the coachee to move forward.

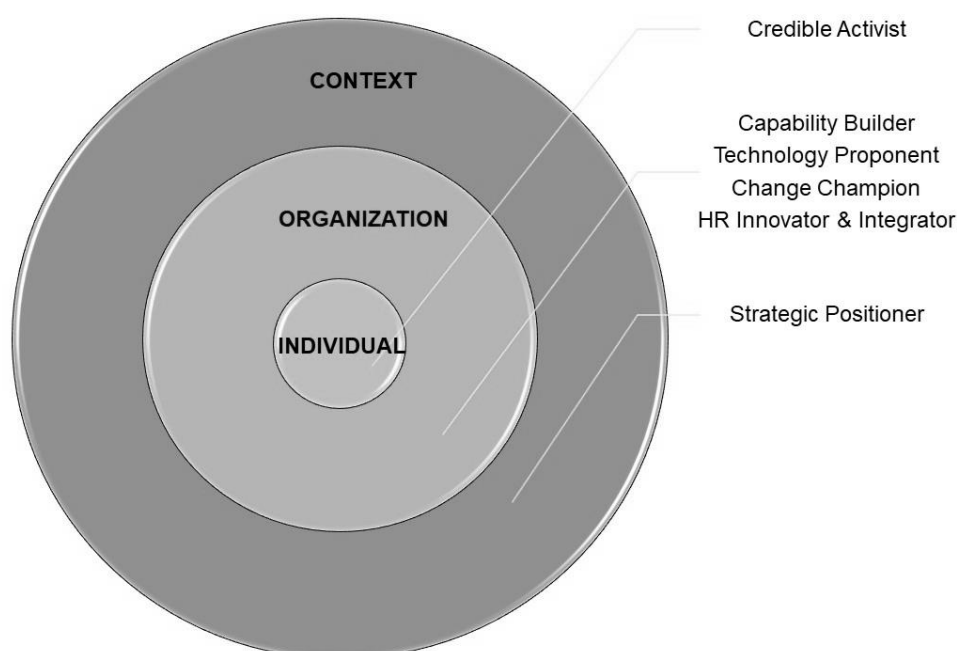


Figure 1. Human Resource Business Partner Competencies

Source: Adapted from Ulrich & Grochowski, 2018

International Coach Federation Competencies

The International Coaching Federation (ICF) aims to progress the profession of coaching by standardising and certifying world-trained coaching professionals. After careful job analysis, which included over 1,300 coaches over 24 months, the ICF has decided to revise the list of competencies from 11 to eight. The revised golden standard for coaching drives the professionalisation of over 20 000 coaches worldwide who have been certified by the body (International Coach Federation, 2017). The ICF has categorised the eight core competencies into four groups: setting the foundation, co-creating the relationship, coaching presence, and facilitating learning and results. Setting the foundation refers to demonstrating ethical practice by continuously applying coaching ethics, maintaining a high standard for coaching, and embodying a coaching mindset fostered by openness, curiosity, flexibility and client-centricity. Co-creating the relationship refers to establishing mutual trust and intimacy with the client by creating clear contractual guidelines about the coaching relationship, encouraging trust and safety by enabling an environment which is comfortable and supportive and maintaining a presence in engagements with the coachee. Furthermore, communicating effectively refers to applying active listening by focusing on what the client is saying between the lines to fully aid the coachee in connecting the dots and enable awareness and client insight using tools and techniques that include skilful questioning, silence, analogy, and metaphors. Lastly, cultivating learning and growth refers to facilitating the coachee's growth by transforming learning and insight into actionable steps.

Ulrich HR Model

Ulrich (1997) has been instrumental in shaping the HRBP competency topic. According to Karasek (2020), Ulrich's biggest contribution to the topic of Human Resource Partnering is offering a model to transition HR from administrative to strategic. Wach et al. (2021) posit that this makes his model more relevant in the current context than other HR models in the field. For this study, the HRBP competency model offered by Ulrich (1997) is relevant and underpins this study. Ulrich (1997) originally introduced a list of four roles ranging from strategic/operational dimensions to people/processes. More specifically, the roles of employee champion and administrative expert focused mainly on operational tasks. In contrast, the roles of change agent and Human Resource Business Partner were positioned as being more strategically inclined in their focus (Wach et al., 2021). A study which took place in 2012 was facilitated by Ulrich and his team and covered countries and areas such as South Africa, Northern Europe, Latin America, Australia, the Middle East, India and China (Vu, 2017). The six competencies are Strategic Positioner, Capability Builder, Change Champion, HR Innovator and Integrator, Credible Activist and Technology Proponent. Figure 1 below depicts the competencies.

The first competency in the HRBP model is the strategic positioner, which is the ability to participate and co-create a strategy (Shakil et al., 2019). This competency is articulated through skilful questioning and understanding of how small parts make up the whole (Geimer et al., 2017; Kuipers & Gurge, 2017; Mitchell et al., 2013). Ulrich & Dulebohn (2015), advancing this thought, state that competency is complemented by an in-depth understanding of the business, which includes knowledge of how the external environment impacts the market within which the organisation operates. Within coaching literature, three competencies can enable the strategic positioner competency: active listening, powerful communication, and coaching presence.

The second competency in Ulrich's model is the credible activist, which Ahmad et al. (2019) describe as having the ability to build trusting relationships with business leaders. Credible activists can persuade and influence their clients positively (Matuska & Niedzielski, 2018). Additionally, Ahmad et al. (2019) argue that Human Resource professionals must be reliable and showcase credibility in their work. The authors further emphasise that Human Resource Business Partners, who are credible activists, can influence by being well-versed in business issues and therefore position themselves as credible partners. Within coaching competencies, the literature closely linked to the credible activist is one of building and maintaining a relationship. Pandolfi (2020) states that a sound coaching relationship is founded on trust. Therefore, rapport is the foundation of any coaching relationship.

Communication is enhanced when two people have a rapport (Yanchus et al., 2020). It is, therefore, plausible that the credible activist, when equipped with the skills of building and maintaining relationships within the HRBP, is positioned as an effective partner.

The third competency in the model is the change champion. This competency is defined as the know-how to facilitate end-to-end change management programmes. Baran et al. (2019) claim that HRBPs ought to align the pace of changes taking place in the external environment with the organisation's internal capacity through three levels, namely, changing patterns and ways of seeing things, driving the organisation forward, and enabling change at personal levels. More specifically, this competency is required to enable employees to participate and perceive any changes in positive regard (Conner & Ulrich, 1996; Kuipers & Giurge, 2017; Metz et al., 2017). Creating self-awareness can be associated with change agent competency.

The fourth competency is that of Human Resource Innovator and Integrator. This competency is described as the ability to innovate and assimilate practices in Human Resources to resolve upcoming business problems (Laine et al., 2017). Amarakoon et al. (2018) posit that skilled HRBPs keep abreast of the latest trends in recruitment and selection, onboarding and induction, workforce planning, performance management, talent development and management, employee experience and organisational design. Ulrich & Grochowski (2018) add that HRBPs must translate these insights into integrated solutions aligned with organisational requirements. The fifth competency is that of a technology proponent, described as the ability to use technology to perform day-to-day administrative functions (Karasek, 2020). The sixth and final competency is the capability builder, which is the ability to facilitate audits that determine capacity gaps within the organisation (Ulrich & Dulebohn, 2015).

METHODS

The study adopted an interpretivist philosophy and an exploratory research design. A qualitative research method was chosen to glean insights into the lived experiences of the HRBPs. The researchers collected and presented the data in words to gain more insights into the lived experiences of the HRBPs in alignment with qualitative research standards (Gray et al., 2011; Tomaszewski et al., 2020). The study utilised semi-structured interviews for the eight participants employed as Human Resource Business Partners within State-Owned Entities in the Gauteng area. Table 1 below details the demographic information collected from the participants in alignment with the study's objectives. The gender, age and race of the participants were not linked to the study objectives and were therefore not recorded to improve anonymity, given the size of the population of this small sector in the Gauteng province. The interviews were conducted online on MS Teams and Zoom and were recorded on a secure server for transcription and analysis. Thematic analysis was used to move from an overview to generating initial codes to searching for themes (Leedy & Ormrod, 2014). This analysis was conducted on Atlasti software following Braun & Clarke (2006)'s six-step techniques for data analysis. The findings of two broad themes and with two sub-themes each are discussed in the findings section.

Table 1. Profile of the Participants

Name	Years of experience as an HRBP
Participant 1 (P1)	4
Participant 2 (P2)	16
Participant 3 (P3)	10
Participant 4 (P4)	26
Participant 5 (P5)	15
Participant 6 (P6)	10
Participant 7 (P7)	15
Participant 8 (P8)	20

The study participants were HRBPs with experience in the HR field, ranging from four to twenty-six years, who are employed in the public sector. The inclusion criterion for the study was that the participant should be an experienced HRBP working in the SOE industry. Due to the high-security nature of the sector selected (public sector) and the region's specificity, there were no further

demographics recorded on the participants as they were not required for the study's objectives. Table 1 provides the profile of the participants.

FINDINGS

During the literature review and data analysis processes, the researcher identified themes which have been elaborated on.

Theme 1: Benefits of coaching skills for HRBPs

Subtheme 1: Human Resource Business Partner Challenges

Subtheme 2: Coaching skills benefits

Theme 2: Inclusion of coaching skills in HRBP competencies

Subtheme 1: Existing Human Resource Business Partner skills

Subtheme 2: Applicable Coaching Skills

Benefits of Coaching Skills for HRBPs

This theme is conceptualised within the frame of seeking further clarity on the responses of the HRBPs on the perceived benefits of coaching skills in their engagement with senior managers. All participants agreed that coaching skills would benefit their existing engagements and relationships with senior managers. More specifically, most participants spoke about senior manager accountability, which they believed coaching skills would enhance. It was important to establish the presenting challenges faced by HRBPs in their dealings with senior managers. This resulted in the following subtheme, whose findings have been elaborated on.

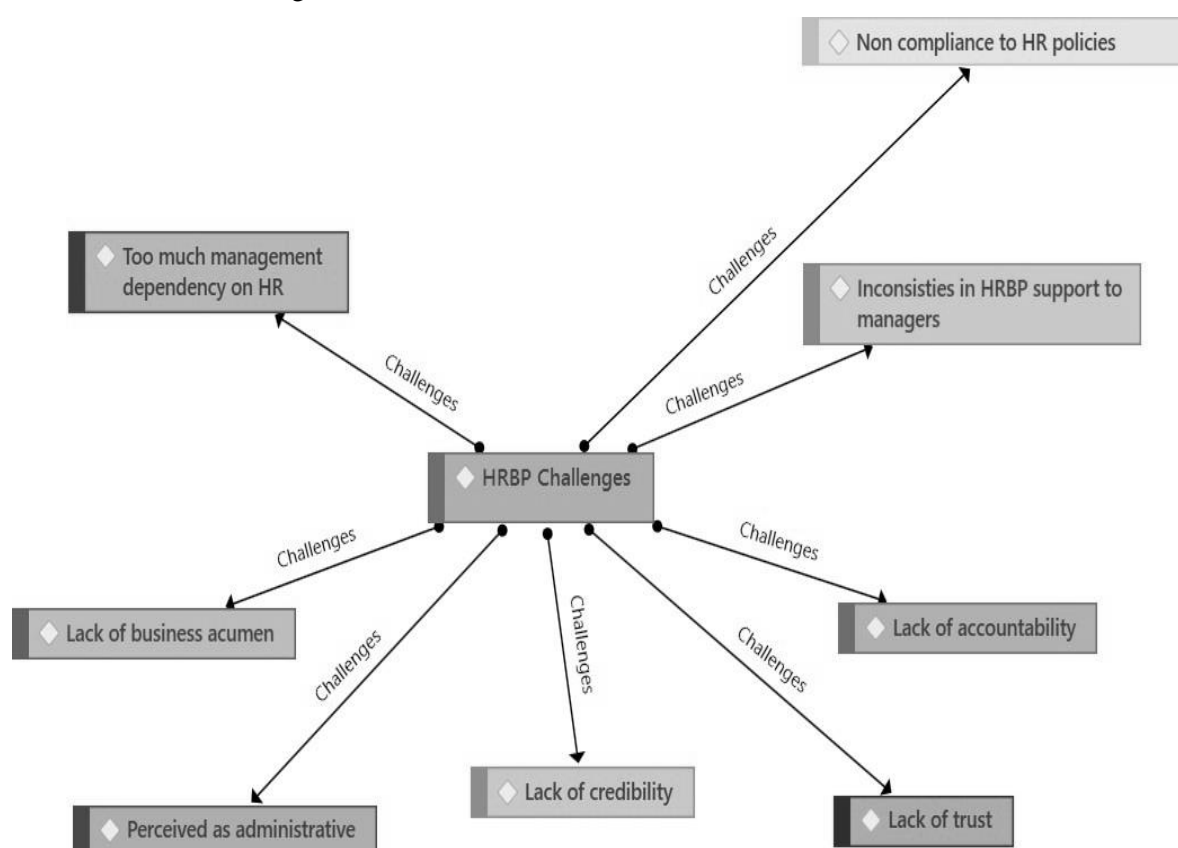


Figure 2. Challenges Faced by HRBPs

Source: Researcher's Atlasti output

Human Resource Business Partner Challenges

The question on the challenges faced by HRBPs provided insights into whether coaching skills were a probable solution for some of the challenges being faced by the participants. Figure 2 below presents

an overview of the challenges the study participants presented. A scrutiny of the interviews highlights the shared perspectives by some of the HRBPs who expressed their challenges with the perceptions of senior managers on their added value: *“HR is reduced to just an administration function; I think it’s not seen or perceived as a strategic business partner”* P3. The participating HRBPs acknowledged that the engagement with senior management is not where it needs to be. *“There is just a view that management is not so involved in people issues and HR should be the one handling or dealing with people issues.”* P3.

A common challenge, which most participants communicated as a major obstacle in their role, was getting senior managers to take full accountability for the people issues in their respective divisions. A few participants mentioned non-compliance with HR policies as another identified challenge. The data indicated that HRBPs perceived the reason behind non-compliance with HR policies as the need for more interest in HR processes that senior managers have. Additional comments from the participants included observations around inconsistencies from HRBPs in how they support and advise the business. P7 explained that they perceived this as a challenge due to the lack of business acumen from HRBPs – he noted that if one is not confident in their skills, including having an intimate understanding of the business, they are likely to do what the managers tell them to do without questioning. Further to this is a challenge of trust and credibility. In particular, the perspectives shared by five of the participants was that senior managers perceived them as administrators and not true partners. The participants shared that they aspired to be partners with the senior managers. However, this aspiration was often not achieved as the demands of the role and organisational cultures require that they focus mainly on the administrative requirements of the job, which include recruitment and employee relations. These perspectives align with the theoretical background, highlighting some of the challenges that HRBPs often face, which inhibit them from being true partners to senior managers.

Coaching skills benefits

The data reflected positive results regarding the benefits of coaching skills in the HRBP engagement with senior management. All eight participants positively perceived that coaching skills could benefit them in their day-to-day job. P5 expressed the view that coaching skills enable a thinking environment for the senior manager to think through answers to his presenting challenges. He confirmed that if used appropriately, it had the power to help build credibility with the senior manager. This view was supported by P4, who noted that ownership of people issues is a big challenge for them and that coaching empowered senior managers to take accountability. P5 corroborated this view and shared that coaching can drive up ownership in senior management. P3 touched on the performance issue and elaborated that coaching could aid in driving a high-performance culture. P3 clarified this point by offering that they utilise coaching skills to challenge senior managers to think beyond what they are doing to achieve their objectives. P2 expanded on the coaching benefits for employee morale and noted that HRBPs could coach senior managers to navigate climate issues. An interesting perspective was shared by P5, who mentioned the benefit of coaching encouraging communities of practice amongst senior managers. The participant expanded that where they work, they had observed a practice of leaders taking the learnings from being coached by the HRBP and empowering other peers to solve the same issues, therefore employing the same coaching skills that they observed being applied by the HRBP.

Inclusion of Coaching Skills in HRBP Competencies

This study borrows from the theoretical contributions of Ulrich (1997), who argued for the evolution of HR from administrative to strategic. Sarvadi et al. (2020) report that the current situation in Human Resource Business Partnering signals the complete removal of the administrative function and recommend that HR professionals devote their efforts to acquiring strategically inclined skills. These perspectives have sparked an interest for the researcher to establish the existing skills of the HRBPs to ascertain if there is a need for further coaching skills that can support their engagement with senior managers.

Existing Human Resource Business Partner Skills

The participating HRBPs contributed from their experience in human resource business partnering and engagement with senior management. This background positioned them well to provide insights and introspections into the competencies and skills required in HRBPs within SOEs. Eight HRBPs, referred to in this paper as P1-P8, relayed their experiences in the HRBP field, including beneficial competencies in their day-to-day work.

The Human Resource Business Partner role is interrogated by Light (2016), who has developed a list of four core job responsibilities which make up the role. This entails the execution of HR administration tasks, development of talent, influencing culture and influencing direction. In unpacking their roles, the participants expanded that under the HR administration tasks, their function comprised day-to-day operations: developing job descriptions, recruitment and selection, onboarding and induction, performance management coordination and compliance, employee relations facilitation and workforce planning. The second core responsibility pertains to talent development. The participants elaborated that tasks involved in this responsibility included facilitating talent management and talent development processes to ensure that the right people with the right skills are placed in the right roles. The third core responsibility involves the ability to influence culture, and some of the HRBPs reported being responsible for the engagement and facilitation of change management programmes to drive the organisation's culture, mission, and values. One participant (P2) mentioned this responsibility as a critical responsibility for HRBPs in their organisation but highlighted that this was one of the responsibilities which needed some improvement. P2 made the following comments, *"The issues or climate issues that I would think that any business partner should be able to pick out and provide solutions to, those things have not been happening, but I would think that with the requisite ... with proper training, they would be able to reach that, but currently I would think that it's a work in progress."*

The final responsibility encompasses influencing direction through a partnership with the senior management team. This is done through applying coaching skills to support the delivery and direction of organisational goals. P3 noted this responsibility, *"I think it would be a case of developing a strategic plan on people issues, developing and designing a strategic plan to address people issues and long term, and it shouldn't be an issue of as and when things happen. I think having a long-term plan like that will, I think, assist the organisation or even the division that I work with or the managers that I partner with. In the past, I've worked with managers, and we've developed such a plan, but there has not been a commitment to see that plan through to the end, so it becomes a tick-box exercise, the plan is in place, but there isn't a commitment to adhere to the plan."*

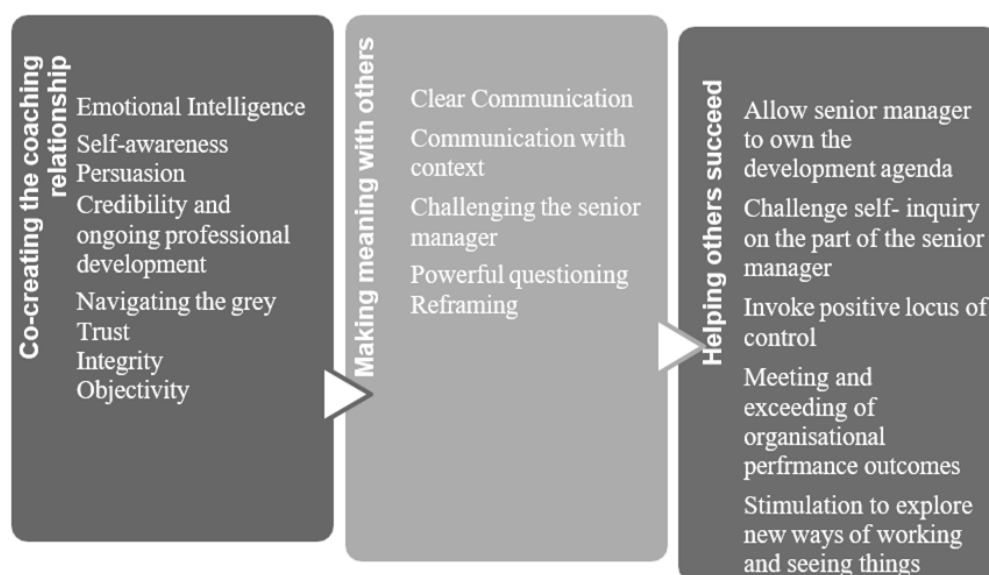


Figure 3. Coaching Skills Applied in the Engagement between HRBP's and Senior Managers
Source: Researcher's own from data analysis

Coaching Skills

This subtheme considers the coaching skills positioned by the participating HRBPs as having a positive impact on their engagement with senior managers. The skills that fall under Co-creating the coaching relationship serve the purpose of building rapport between the HRBP and the senior manager. It has been established through the theoretical background that rapport is one of the key ingredients of a good relationship between a coach and a coachee. Thus, the participants explained that interpersonal skills, which include emotional intelligence, self-awareness, persuasion, credibility, ongoing professional development, navigating the grey areas, trust, integrity, and objectivity, were critical in their engagement with senior managers (see Figure 3).

In terms of Making meaning with others, the skills under this category facilitate transformation for senior managers. Communication skills enjoyed the most support, with all participants expressing that they were utilising some form of communication skills in their everyday engagement with senior managers. One participant – P2 - differentiated that *HRBPs needed to communicate with context*. Other skills that the participants felt would make meaning with senior managers included challenging the senior manager, asking powerful questions, and reframing. P8 noted that *“an ability to understand broader business such that ... some holistic view and alignment in terms of your engagement because as you partner you engage, you need to have this holistic view of the business.”*

The skills that fall under ‘Helping others succeed’ are important as they help increase the likelihood of the coaching process being successful. When coachees believe that the coach is interested in their success, they show engagement and openness to the process, enabling true transformation. Participants mentioned the skill to be able to allow senior managers to own the development agenda, challenge self-inquiry on the part of the senior manager, the ability to invoke a positive locus of control on the part of the senior manager, the skill to support the senior manager to meet and exceed organisational performance outcomes and the skill to stimulate the senior manager to explore new ways of working and seeing things.

DISCUSSION

The participants provided insights into existing gaps which disempower them in their engagement with line management. All participants agreed that the engagement and relationship with senior managers need to be enhanced. These findings corroborate those of Gerpott (2015), whose research posed questions to senior managers on their perception of the added value of HRBPs, which found that senior managers experienced negative perceptions of the phenomenon. In addition, the data showcases that HRBPs focused their efforts on administrative tasks over strategically inclined tasks, which enables true partnership with senior management. This supports the findings of Botter et al. (2018), who assert that HR still needs to transition into true business partnering with managers. Research reveals that HR has yet to evolve to the point where it contributes to the strategic discussions of improving and enabling business decisions regarding the perceived benefits of applying coaching skills by HRBPs in their engagement with senior managers. A deeper analysis of the data highlighted findings whose benefits of coaching for HRBPs can be separated into skill-based benefits, senior management accountability enhancement benefits and contextual benefits. Under the skills-based benefits, the participants indicated that there were skills that they perceived as being important to elevate the conversations with senior management. The findings reveal that the participating HRBPs lacked the requisite skills, which consequently affected their ability to add value when engaging with line managers. The main benefit was the ability to co-establish a strategy with senior management. One particularly noteworthy comment from one participant on this theme was that they believed coaching skills would unlock essential skills which enhance business acumen. Business acumen creates an understanding of the business, including internal and external drivers, influencing the organisation’s direction (Fahim, 2018). Junita (2021) has proposed that business acumen, as a skill, allows HRBPs to engage with managers, with the organisational mandate being the most important.

Sun (2019) argues that credibility in the HRBP and senior manager engagement is built by the HRBP's ability to illustrate an in-depth understanding of how the business units operate, particularly in a

volatile information age which necessitates them being on top of trends. Another closely linked benefit of coaching skills, which another participant mentioned, is the skill to probe and challenge managers to explore how to remain competitive more deeply. The summary of the benefits, based on the perspectives of HRBPs, aligns with the envisaged outcomes proposed by Ulrich & Grochowski (2018), who support the ongoing efforts to upskill HRBPs with the aim of re-positioning them as true partners. These are summarised as follows: First, HRBPs will better grasp the business language, which concentrates on financial issues. This understanding will provide context for the HRBP to ask powerful questions invoking ideation and inner resourcefulness and is the essence of building a strong rapport with senior management. Second, they will be equipped with the skills to participate in creating an organisation's strategy. This ability will re-position them as credible value-adding partners to senior managers. Finally, they will serve as a soundboard and collaborators for senior managers.

Under the senior management accountability enhancement benefits category, the data shows challenges faced by HRBPs in driving up senior management accountability. These findings corroborate those by Laine et al. (2017), who found that leaders lacked the ownership required in a leadership role to own the people's agenda. Conversely, Sergeeva (2021) has provided an interesting distinction between accountability and responsibility; responsibility enables the leader to take psychological ownership of the people's responsibilities, while accountability can often feel like coercion. The difference between the two is that responsibility emanates from the heart, while accountability emanates from the head. Sergeeva (2021) cites that a lack of accountability often results from a lack of support or resources. Research by Shi (2021), who interviewed eighteen participants in HRBP roles, found that the participants felt that if senior managers continued to relinquish responsibilities for their people responsibilities to HR, HRBPs would continue with their administrative role. Most of the participants agreed that coaching skills would enhance the level of senior management accountability. One participant offered that leaders are often promoted because of their technical competence and those crucial leadership qualities are often overlooked. He noted that HRBPs who adopt coaching skills would enable leaders to bridge this gap and aid in their journey of fully owning their leadership roles.

On contextual benefits, the participants provided context about the issues related to the SOE industry being difficult to navigate, especially on people issues. According to the participants, the context of the SOE industry is that there is much red tape which translates to a lot of paperwork and memoranda needing to be signed by several people before any HR processes can be initiated. One participant advised that a process like recruitment can take over six months to conclude because of paperwork. In essence, the HRBPs get bogged down in administrative tasks because of the systemic functioning of SOEs. These findings align with Mashamaite & Raseala (2019), who concluded that SOEs are involved in much red tape, which is the nemesis of innovation and problem-solving. Two of the HRBPs provided perspectives that the role of the HRBP and possible re-positioning as an internal coach had wider benefits in South Africa. The participant advised that if they enable leaders to be effective in their roles through effective coaching outcomes and business partners, they would be able to lead teams successfully, which translates to a country that also runs successfully. The participating HRBPs suggested that coaching competencies would help senior leaders navigate this often political and challenging business landscape.

The researchers reflected on a common thread in what most participants mentioned as a major consideration for them to evolve beyond their current duties, which related to the dynamic of capacity constraints. The participants implied they knew what was needed to evolve their engagements with senior managers. However, they often fell short of applying themselves beyond their duties due to too many administrative tasks, which contributed to the ineffectiveness of the value offered to senior managers. This finding is supported by Botter et al. (2018), who reason that capacity constraints often themselves beyond the mundane requirements of the job. The structure of the overall HR function also influences the ability of HRBPs to elevate their role in the engagement with senior managers. The main outcome of the interview data is that coaching skills will benefit the engagement and relationship between HRBPs and senior management.

The role of the HRBP is multifaceted. The most critical function is to serve as a strategic collaborator to the senior manager (MacDougall, 2019). The role fulfils an important function which can challenge managers to be more innovative and apply new ways of thinking to solve people and business challenges (Amos et al., 2017). Investing in additional HR skills is key to the evolution and re-positioning of Human Resources (Fahim, 2018). Consequently, this requires reimagining HRBP skillsets that can be adopted to improve the current challenges. As Yusliza et al. (2019) emphasised, HRBPs must progressively challenge themselves and ensure ongoing professional and skill development to stay relevant. This was revealed by the participating HRBPs, who admitted to further competencies needing to be adopted to ensure that they add value to the senior managers they support. The participating HRBPs were keen on positioning themselves as internal coaches and proposed coaching skills, including co-creating the coaching relationship, making meaning with others, and helping others succeed.

Co-creating the coaching relationship skills, which the participants identified as important, including emotional intelligence, self-awareness, persuasion, credibility, ongoing professional development, navigating the grey areas, trust, integrity, and objectivity. This correlates with academic standard 8.1 of the GSAEC competencies, which describes the foundations for a strong relationship between the coach and the coachee (GSAEC, 2014). Coaches need to regulate their emotions constructively and positively to help alleviate stress. In addition, they are likely to meet their clients and engage and communicate effectively if they have higher levels of self-awareness (Bachkirova, 2016). DiGirolamo & Tkach (2019) advise that coaches must continuously practice self-inquiry to identify any bias or stereotypes that may prohibit them from showing up in the coaching session more fully. Rapport is built through the foundations of a trust relationship and the showcasing of credibility on the part of the coach (Dixey, 2015). The data reveals that HRBPs believe that if they showcase credibility and gain confidence through ongoing professional development, they will likely gain the skills to create a powerful coaching relationship.

Additional skills that the participants perceived to be effective include making meaning with others, skills to communicate clearly and within context, the skill to challenge the senior manager, asking powerful questions and reframing. Bachkirova (2016) proposes that effective and active listening skills contribute to successful coaching outcomes. This encapsulates the GSAEC Academic Standard 8.2. of making meaning with others which uses active listening and powerful questioning to progress the coaching process (GSAEC, 2014). Bachkirova & Smith (2015) advance that coaching creates awareness and connections using incisive questioning and active listening skills to invoke change on the part of the senior manager. A change in mindset translates into a change in behaviour (Boysen-Rotelli, 2020). The participants shared that they engage with senior managers regularly. This presents an opportunity to informally coach the senior manager to realise their ability to arrive at solutions instead of seeking advice from HRBPs regularly.

Skills under the 'helping others succeed' category form part of GSAEC Academic Standard 8.3. The coaching process facilitates a learning process for the coachee to be supported in their growth trajectory (GSAEC, 2014). Participants mentioned the following skills which enable senior managers to succeed: the ability to allow the senior manager to own the development agenda, the ability to challenge self-inquiry on the part of the senior manager, the ability to invoke a positive locus of control on the part of the senior manager, the ability to support the senior manager to meet and exceed organisational performance outcomes and the skill to stimulate the senior manager to explore new ways of working and seeing things.

CONCLUSION

Recommendations have been put forward on the future competencies of HRBPs. The data showed concern about capacity on the part of HRBPs, who noted that they knew what was required to evolve beyond their current duties. However, they often needed to catch up due to capacity constraints. A recommendation is for HR functions to reconsider their current structures and find ways to improve inefficiencies. Participating HRBPs showed a keen interest in a coaching training initiative which would enhance their engagement with senior managers. Thus, coaching training is proposed as part of

HRBP's continuous development. Furthermore, it is recommended that coaching skills be included in HR training programmes offered by higher learning institutions.

Human Resource Business Partners provided insights into their experiences of the skills required to improve the effectiveness of their engagement with senior managers. These insights aligned with the aims of this study which were to ascertain the applicability of coaching skills in the engagement between HRBPs and senior managers. The literature review highlighted opportunities to explore additional skills that can be added to the HRBP competency model. The results of this study shed some light on the applicability of coaching skills to enhance the engagement between HRBPs and senior managers. HRBPs shared their perspectives that they currently need to effectively engage with line managers but offered viewpoints that their roles needed to evolve beyond their current administrative focus. The SOE industry is a challenging landscape riddled with much red tape and paper-based HR processes which disempower HRBPs. At the same time, SOE leaders require support and coaching to help them navigate a volatile business landscape. These perspectives emphasise that HRBPs in SOEs must reimagine their roles and transition from administration to strategy. It can be concluded that coaching skills will benefit and enhance the engagement between HRBPs and senior managers. Participating HRBPs showed a keen interest in a coaching training initiative which would enhance their engagement with senior managers. Coaching training should be provided as part of HRBPs' continuous development. Further, it is recommended that coaching skills be included in HR training programmes offered by higher learning institutions. Finally, there is a requirement for a future study to be initiated to explore the benefits and applicability of coaching skills beyond the bounds of SOEs and the Gauteng area. The study illuminated the gap in the literature on coaching skills applicability for HRBPs. This offers an opportunity for further studies to be instituted into additional coaching skills which can be adopted into the HRBP competency model. Furthermore, the population and sample size were limited to Gauteng's SOEs. An opportunity exists to explore the study at a national and even international level to gain more insights into the applicability of coaching skills for HRBPs.

REFERENCES

- Ahmad, A., Zafar, J., Hafeez, M. H., & Aamir, M. (2019). Measuring the Influence of HR Professionals' Competencies and Effectiveness. *Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences*, 39(2), 603–613.
- Amarakoon, U., Weerawardena, J., & Verreynne, M.-L. (2018). Learning capabilities, human resource management innovation and competitive advantage. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 29(10), 1736–1766. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2016.1209228>
- Amos, T., Pearse, N., Ristow, A., & Ristow, L. (2017). *Human Resources Management*. Juta & Co.
- Bachkirova, T. (2016). The self of the coach: Conceptualization, issues, and opportunities for practitioner development. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 68(2). <https://doi.org/10.1037/cpb0000055>
- Bachkirova, T., & Smith, C. L. (2015). From competencies to capabilities in the assessment and accreditation of coaches. *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*, 13(2), 123–140. <https://doi.org/10.3316/informit.386228358655701>
- Baldwin, D. R., & Cherry, M. (2019). Exploring the Use of Internal Coaches. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 71(3), 2–10.
- Ballesteros-Sánchez, Luis, I. O.-M., & Rodríguez-Rivero, R. (2019). The impact of executive coaching on project managers' personal competencies. *Project Management Journal*, 50(3), 306–321. <https://doi.org/10.1177/8756972819832191>
- Baran, B. E., Filipkowski, J. N., & Stockwell, R. A. (2019). Organizational change: Perspectives from human resource management. *Journal of Change Management*, 19(3), 201–219. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14697017.2018.1502800>
- Baron, L., & Morin, L. (2010). The impact of executive coaching on self-efficacy related to management soft-skills. *Leadership & Organization Development Journal*, 31(1), 18–38. <https://doi.org/10.1108/01437731011010362>
- Bolden, R., Gulati, A., & Edwards, G. (2020). Mobilizing change in public services: insights from a

- systems leadership development intervention. *International Journal of Public Administration*, 43(1), 26–36. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01900692.2019.1604748>
- Botter, J., Rosa, D. G., & Lima, L. C. (2018). The differences between the model and competencies of the strategic partnership between human resource management and line managers in national and multinational companies. *Review of International Business*, 13(3), 28–41. <https://ssrn.com/abstract=3264069>
- Boysen-Rotelli, S. (2020). Executive coaching history: Growing out of organisational development. *The Coaching Psychologist*, 16(2), 26–34. <https://psycnet.apa.org/record/2020-89290-003>
- Braun, V., & Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3(2), 77–101. <https://doi.org/10.1191/1478088706QP063OA>
- Claudia, M. (2021). The Influence of HR Competencies and Entrepreneurs' Skills on Sasirangan MSMEs' Business Performance in Banjarmasin Municipality. *International Conference on Management, Business, and Technology (ICOMBEST 2021)*. <https://doi.org/10.2991/aebmr.k.211117.016>
- Conner, J., & Ulrich, D. (1996). Human resource roles: Creating value, not rhetoric. *People and Strategy*, 19(3), 38–49.
- DiGirolamo, J. A., & Tkach, J. T. (2019). An exploration of managers and leaders using coaching skills. *Consulting Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 71(3), 195–218. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cpb0000138>
- Dixey, A. (2015). Managerial coaching: a formal process or a daily conversation? *International Journal of Evidence Based Coaching and Mentoring*, 9(1), 77–89. <https://doi.org/10.3316/informit.217562702826474>
- Ennis, S., Goodman, R., Hodgetts, W., Hunt, J., Mansfield, R., Otto, J., & Stern, L. (2015). *The Executive Coaching Handbook: Principles and Guidelines for a Successful Coaching Partnership* (6th ed.). The Coaching Forum.
- Fahim, M. G. A. (2018). Strategic human resource management and public employee retention. *Review of Economics and Political Science*, 3(2), 20–39. <https://doi.org/10.1108/REPS-07-2018-002>
- Gan, G. C., Chong, C. W., Yuen, Y. Y., Teoh, W. M. Y., & Rahman, M. S. (2021). Executive coaching effectiveness: towards sustainable business excellence. *Total Quality Management & Business Excellence*, 32(13–14), 1405–1423. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14783363.2020.1724507>
- Geimer, J. L., Zolner, M., & Allen, K. S. (2017). Beyond HR Competencies: Removing Organizational Barriers to Maximize the Strategic Effectiveness of HR Professionals. *Industrial and Organizational Psychology*, 10(1), 42–50. <https://doi.org/10.1017/iop.2016.103>
- Gerpott, F. H. (2015). The right strategy? Examining the business partner model's functionality for resolving Human Resource Management tensions and discussing alternative directions. *German Journal of Human Resource Management*, 29(3–4), 214–234. <https://doi.org/10.1177/239700221502900304>
- Graduate School Alliance for Education in Coaching (GSAEC). (2014). *Academic Standards for Graduate Programs in Executive*. <https://gsaec.org/Sys/Error/404>
- Gray, D. E., Ekinci, Y., & Goregaokar, H. (2011). Coaching SME managers: business development or personal therapy? A mixed methods study. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 22(04), 863–882. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2011.555129>
- Gyllensten, K., & Palmer, S. (2007). The coaching relationship: An interpretative phenomenological analysis. *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 2(2), 168–177.
- Heathfield, S. M. (2019). *HR Professionals as Coaches for Managers*. The Balance Careers. <https://www.thebalancecareers.com/what-s-the-new-coaching-role-for-hr-staff-1917841>
- International Coach Federation. (2017). *International Coaching Federation*. ICF Website. <https://coachingfederation.org/>
- Jacobson, W. S., & Sowa, J. E. (2015). Strategic human capital management in municipal government: An assessment of implementation practices. *Public Personnel Management*, 44(3), 317–339. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0091026015591283>
- Junita, A. (2021). The Creative Hub: HR Strategic Function in The Digital Age. *Proceedings of the 4th International Conference on Sustainable Innovation 2020-Accounting and Management*

- (ICoSIAMS 2020). <https://doi.org/10.2991/aer.k.210121.031>
- Karasek, A. (2020). HR roles - the state of the art and challenges. *Zeszyty Naukowe. Organizacja i Zarządzanie/Politechnika Śląska*, 149, 315–325. <https://doi.org/10.29119/1641-3466.2020.149.27>
- Kuipers, B. S., & Giurge, L. M. (2017). Does alignment matter? The performance implications of HR roles connected to organizational strategy. *The International Journal of Human Resource Management*, 28(22), 3179–3201. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09585192.2016.1155162>
- Laine, P., Stenvall, J., & Tuominen, H. (2017). A strategic role for HR: Is it a competence issue. *Nordic Journal of Business*, 66(1), 29–48.
- Leedy, P. D., & Ormrod, J. E. (2014). *Practical Research: Planning and Design* (10th ed.). Pearson Education.
- Light, A. (2016). Human resources as a strategic partner for health and human services. *Policy & Practice*, 74(3), 20–24.
- MacDougall, M. (2019). Productive Employees: Two Crucial Ingredients. *Nonprofit World*, 37, 22–23.
- Mashamaite, K. A., & Raseala, P. (2019). Transgression of Corporate Governance in South Africa's State-Owned Enterprises. *Bangladesh E-Journal of Sociology*, 16(1), 124–134. <http://hdl.handle.net/10386/2846>
- Matuska, E., & Niedzielski, P. (2018). HR business partner—the range of roles and services. *European Journal of Service Management*, 28, 191–197.
- Metz, I., Kulik, C. T., Cregan, C., & Brown, M. (2017). The manager as employer agent: The role of manager personality and organizational context in psychological contracts. *Personnel Review*, 46(1), 136–153. <https://doi.org/10.1108/PR-04-2015-0087>
- Miles, S. (2017). Stakeholder theory classification: A theoretical and empirical evaluation of definitions. *Journal of Business Ethics*, 142(3), 437–459. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s10551-015-2741-y>
- Mitchell, R., Obeidat, S., & Bray, M. (2013). The effect of strategic human resource management on organizational performance: The mediating role of high-performance human resource practices. *Human Resource Management*, 52(6), 899–921. <https://doi.org/10.1002/hrm.21587>
- Naidoo, C. P. (2020). Relating financial systems to sustainability transitions: challenges, demands and design features. *Environmental Innovation and Societal Transitions*, 36, 270–290. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eist.2019.10.004>
- Osatuke, K., Yanovsky, B., & Ramsel, D. (2017). Executive coaching: New framework for evaluation. *Psychology Journal: Practice and Research*, 69(3), 172–186. <https://doi.org/10.1037/cpb0000073>
- Pandolfi, C. (2020). Active ingredients in executive coaching: A systematic literature review. *International Coaching Psychology Review*, 15(2), 6–30.
- Sakka, F., Maknouzi, M. E. H. El, & Sadok, H. (2022). Human Resource Management in The Era of Artificial Intelligence: Future HR Work Practices, Anticipated Skill Set, Financial and Legal Implications. *Academy of Strategic Management Journal*, 21, 1–14.
- Sarvadi, P., Hammond, T., & Pellman, P. (2020). *The Real Workforce Impact of HR Technology*. 42(1), 30–34.
- Schaap, P., & Dippenaar, M. (2017). The impact of coaching on the emotional and social intelligence competencies of leaders. *South African Journal of Economic and Management Sciences*, 20(1), 1–16. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajems.v20i1.1460>
- Scholl, W., Lackner, K., & Grieger, K. (2022). Communication as a method and as a topic in coaching. In *International Handbook of Evidence-Based Coaching*. Springer. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-81938-5_16
- Schutte, F. (2019). Business coaching: A hen with ducklings. *South African Journal of Business Management*, 50(1), 1–7. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajbm.v50i1.398>
- Sergeeva, I. (2021). *Accountability vs. responsibility for leaders: back to the basics*. BetterUp. <https://www.betterup.com/blog/accountability-vs-responsibility-for-leaders-going-back-to-the-basics>
- Shakil, M. H., Mahmood, N., Tasnia, M., & Munim, Z. H. (2019). Do environmental, social and

- governance performance affect the financial performance of banks? A cross-country study of emerging market banks. *Management of Environmental Quality: An International Journal*, 30(6), 1331–1344. <https://doi.org/10.1108/MEQ-08-2018-0155>
- Shi, F. (2021). Analysis on the Challenges of the HRBP Application in Organizations. *Proceedings of the 2021 5th International Seminar on Education, Management and Social Sciences (ISEMSS 2021)*, 419–425. <https://doi.org/10.2991/assehr.k.210806.079>
- Stokes, J., & Jolly, R. (2010). Executive and leadership coaching. In *The complete handbook of coaching* (pp. 245–256). Sage Publication Ltd.
- Sugudhav-Sewpersadh, P., & Mubangizi, J. C. (2019). Public Procurement and Corruption: The Litmus Test for South Africa's transformative outlook. *Journal of Social Sciences*, 33(2), 71–91.
- Sun, M. (2019). Application Status and Problems of HRBP Mode in China. *2019 International Conference on Economic Management and Cultural Industry (ICEMCI 2019)*. <https://doi.org/10.2991/aebmr.k.191217.119>
- Todes, A., & Houghton, J. (2021). Economies and employment in growing and declining urban peripheries in South Africa. *Local Economy: The Journal of the Local Economy Policy Unit*, 36(5), 391–410. <https://doi.org/10.1177/026909422110556>
- Tomaszewski, L. E., Zarestky, J., & Gonzalez, E. (2020). Planning qualitative research: Design and decision making for new researchers. *International Journal of Qualitative Methods*, 19, 1609406920967174. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1609406920967>
- Ulrich, D. (1997). *Human Resource Champions: The Next Agenda for Adding Value and Delivering Results*. Harvard Business School Press.
- Ulrich, D., & Dulebohn, J. H. (2015). Are we there yet? What's next for HR? *Human Resource Management Review*, 25(2), 188–204. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.hrmr.2015.01.004>
- Ulrich, D., & Grochowski, J. (2018). Building a world class HR department. *Strategic HR Review*, 17(4), 181–185. <https://doi.org/10.1108/SHR-05-2018-0046>
- van Collier-Peter, S., & Burger, Z. (2019). A guiding framework for multi-stakeholder contracting in executive coaching. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management*, 17(1), 1–11. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v17i0.1114>
- van Collier-Peter, S., & Manzini, L. (2020). Strategies to establish rapport during online management coaching. *SA Journal of Human Resource Management*, 18, 1–9. <https://doi.org/10.4102/sajhrm.v18i0.1298>
- Vu, G. T. H. (2017). A critical review of human resource competency model: Evolvment in required competencies for human resource professionals. *Journal of Economics, Business and Management*, 5(12), 357–365.
- Wach, B. A., Wehner, M. C., Weißenberger, B. E., & Kabst, R. (2021). United we stand: HR and line managers' shared views on HR strategic integration. *European Management Journal*, 39(4), 410–422. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.emj.2020.09.012>
- Weiss, T. (2003). *Coaching Competencies and Corporate Leadership*. St. Lucie Press.
- Yanchus, N. J., Muhs, S., & Osatuke, K. (2020). Academic background and executive coach training. *Professional Psychology: Research and Practice*, 51(4), 390–399. <https://doi.org/10.1037/pro0000297>
- Yusliza, M.-Y., Choo, P. W., Jayaraman, K., Rimi, N. N., & Muhammad, Z. (2019). HR line manager's reflections on HRM effectiveness through HR roles and roles stressors. *South East European Journal of Economics and Business*, 14(1), 34–48. <https://doi.org/10.2478/jeb-2019-0002>